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Culture in Military Operations

A Case Study: Operation Provide Comfort

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Abstract: Operation Provide Comfort was a humanitarian mission that took place in 1991 in northern Iraq following the end of the Gulf War. Important cultural issues, most of which were unforeseen, greatly impacted the execution of the mission. The Kurdish region of Iraq was a generally unknown operational environment to Coalition forces. This article breaks the situation there down into physical environment, economy, social structures, political structures, and belief systems. This discussion is followed by a description of the humanitarian situation, the assigned Coalition mission, and execution of the mission, focusing primarily on a U.S.

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Marine Corps perspective. Finally, the article illustrates the cultural impacts affecting the mission and concludes by outlining the cultural lessons learned.

Keywords: culture, Kurds, Iraq, Turkey, Iran, food, tribe, clan, leadership

Possessing a coherent understanding of a region's cultures and societies is critical to achieving sustainable operational success. Regardless of mission type, operational planning must consider cultural considerations of a region. This article frames these considerations as they apply to Operation Provide Comfort in northern Iraq in 1991, based on the 2011 Marine Corps University Press publication *Operational Culture for the Warfighter: Principles and Applications*.[1] This book links social science paradigms to the needs of the U.S. Marine Corps (as well as other military Services and organizations) using an applied anthropological approach. It explains how fundamental features of culture can present challenges for military operations in different regions. As a result, this article presents actual cross-cultural problems to illustrate the application of cultural domains and principles in an expeditionary arena, focusing primarily on the efforts and experiences of Marines. Drawn directly from the noted book, the identified operational domains examined in this article are as follows: physical environment; economy; social structures; political structures; and belief systems. Because none of these operational domains ever "operate" in isolation but instead always interact with one another, efforts to identify lessons learned can be difficult, which often leads post-operation analysts to incorrectly conclude that the experiences in question were a "one-time thing." While history and

cultural experiences may not repeat themselves, they certainly do rhyme quite frequently.

Introduction to Operation Provide Comfort

Operation Provide Comfort, a humanitarian mission that took place in northern Iraq following the end of the Gulf War (1990–91), serves as an excellent case study of the impact of cultural concepts and values on military operations that aim to provide humanitarian relief. While the targets of assistance in this operation were the Kurdish refugees of northern Iraq, the culture of the Kurds was not the only culture that had to be considered during the operational planning stage. To provide extensive cultural context about the factors that impacted the success of Operation Provide Comfort, this case study focuses on the culture of Iraqi Kurds and does not speak at length about Kurds of other nationalities.

After the United States-led international Coalition successfully defeated Iraq's military under President Saddam Hussein and halted Iraqi aggression against the neighboring state of Kuwait in February 1991, the confidence of ethnic Kurds in northern Iraq was bolstered by the apparent weakness that they observed in the elite Iraqi Republican Guard. The Kurds consequently launched an uprising against the Iraqi government in northern Iraq. (At the same time, many Iraqi Shi'a also rose in revolt in southern Iraq.) Despite its recent defeat by Coalition forces, the Iraqi Republican Guard, after quickly crushing the Shi'a in the south, was able to easily quell the Kurdish rebellion and threatened to repeat the chemical attacks that had been carried out against Kurds in northern Iraq in the late 1980s (a.k.a. the Anfal campaign), which killed an estimated 100,000–180,000 Kurds.[2]

In response to threats made by Saddam and the actions of Iraq's military forces, as many as 1 million Kurds fled northern Iraq to seek refuge in Iran and Turkey. The Iranian government did not hinder those who fled east into Iran; they were supported primarily by the Iranian Kurdish population in areas inhabited by Iranian Kurds. Contrariwise, Turkey, which had not yet managed to return nearly 20,000 Iraqi-Kurdish refugees from the Anfal campaign (of the 65,000 Kurdish refugees from that time, more than 45,000 had returned to Iraq by March 1991), closed its border to the new refugees.[3] Turkey's closed border, combined with a lack of food, clean water, shelter, and medical supplies, made the Kurdish refugees exceptionally vulnerable to the harsh winter climate of northern Iraq. As a result, the Kurds suffered tremendous mortality rates.

In April 1991, in response to the humanitarian crisis arising on the Iraq-Turkey border, the United Nations (UN) Security Council passed Resolution 688, demanding that Saddam's government cease its repression of the Kurdish civilian population in northern Iraq and that UN member states organize a sustained humanitarian relief effort for the Kurds.[4] Despite initial reluctance by the United States to intervene in the ongoing crisis, it ultimately took the lead in responding to Resolution 688 by organizing a multinational, multiservice task force in what became known as Operation Provide Comfort. Prior to the intervention, as many as 10,000 Kurdish refugees are estimated to have died. The task force was organized under the command of U.S. Air Force major general James L. Jamerson. Jamerson was then commanding Joint Task Force (JTF) Proven Force, the northern aerial component of Operation Desert Storm, and transitioned seamlessly into this next expeditionary tasking.[5] Once JTF Provide Comfort was

redesignated Combined Task Force (CTF) Provide Comfort, U.S. Army lieutenant general John M. D. Shalikashvili assumed command.

The first Operation Provide Comfort was carried out between 7 April and 24 July 1991, lasting 108 days. Following completion of its mission, Operation Provide Comfort II ran from 24 July 1991 to 31 December 1996, with the mission of preventing further Iraqi aggression toward the Kurds. The first Operation Provide Comfort is regarded as one of the U.S. Defense Department's most successful humanitarian relief missions. By providing security throughout northern Iraq, both operations helped ensure that the Kurds were able to safely relocate back to their communities and that international relief agencies were able to provide them the food and medical supplies necessary for their survival.

Background for Operation Provide Comfort

Numerous historical events highlight the tensions between various Kurdish factions and the successive governments of Iraq. The Kurdish people have an identifiable history dating back to 401 BCE, when the Greeks encountered a people called the *Corduchoi* (Kurds).[6] The Greeks described them as living in well-provisioned villages and fertile mountains with rich pasturage as well as being hostile and excelling as light infantry.[7] The Kurds of northern Iraq desired autonomy within Iraq vice independence, despite a long history of oppression, repression, and genocide. Yet, it must be understood that the Kurds suffered from the limitations of a culture (actually, multiple subcultures within a larger generic Kurdish culture) making an accelerated advance into the modern era unassisted by anything like a renaissance, a reformation, or any of the incremental achievements in

technology that temper and mature political and social institutions. The very remoteness that isolated the Kurds from more developed societies also divided them and placed them on the contentious boundaries of great empires, enforcing enmity even against other Kurds yet sustaining the Kurdish martial traits.[8]

Moving across more than 2 millennia of history to look at the Kurds of northern Iraq, in the wake of World War I, the British occupied what would become modern Iraq after driving out the Ottomans and being assigned the "Mandate for Mesopotamia" by the brand-new League of Nations in early 1920.[9] While British rule was necessarily light due to the United Kingdom's global commitments, many locals began to organize into secret societies (as had been the norm under the Ottomans), as there was widespread fear that Iraq would become another imperial province of the British Empire. In June 1920, Shi'a Arabs rose in revolt; they were joined within weeks by Sunni Arabs and in August by Kurds. Although these groups were defeated by British and Imperial (Indian) military forces with help from local Assyrian Christian levies, this uprising is considered the foundation of Iraqi nationalism and demonstrated, however briefly, that Arab Sunni and Shi'a and Kurds could cooperate. Concurrently, in August 1920, the Treaty of Sevres was signed in France between the Allies of World War I and the Ottoman Empire, which among other items (such as dissolving the Ottoman Empire) proposed the creation of the first independent Kurdish state (Kurdistan). This proposed state was to be divided into two "spheres of influence," one British and the other French. However, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Turks ultimately rejected the Treaty of Sevres, aided by many Kurds who did not want to trade a Turkish overlord for a

British or French one.[10] After the creation of an independent Turkey in 1923, the British were able to negotiate with the new Turkish government the Treaty of Lausanne, which did not make allowances for a Kurdistan.[11]

However, in 1922, before the Treaty of Lausanne had even been drawn up, Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji, the British-appointed governor of Kurdish northern Iraq (and a notable Sufi sheikh of the Qadiriyya order), led a number of Kurds in and around the city of Sulaymaniyah in rebellion against British rule, establishing the Kingdom of Kurdistan with himself as king. The British and new Iraqi government retook control of the region by July 1924, ending this first modern effort at Iraqi Kurdish independence. From 1923 to 1931, the Iraqi Kurds carried out a series of attacks against British security forces as a demonstration of their resistance to Arab-Sunni domination in government and their desire to establish autonomy throughout the Kurdish region. Mustafa Barzani, born in the town of Barzan and a member of the Barzani clan (and also a notable Sufi sheikh of the Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiya order, rival to the Qadiriyya order), then assumed leadership of the Iraqi Kurds. Sociologist Hadi Elis writes that from 1932 to 1946, Barzani "continued the armed struggle of the Kurds against the Iraqi government, with support from the Soviet Union which was interested in using the Kurds to challenge the influence of the Western powers in the oil-rich Middle East, especially because oil-rich Mosul province was a part of the historic Kurdish homeland."[12] Having established himself as a Kurdish nationalist leader, Barzani was chosen to lead the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) in Iraq in 1946, even though he was then in Iran trying to help establish the independent Kurdish Republic of Mahabad (also instigated by the Soviet Union).[13] After his desire to establish the new Kurdish republic

was destroyed that same year, Barzani was forced to take refuge in the Soviet Union.[14] Kurdish uprisings in Iraq continued until 1958, when the Iraqi monarchy was overthrown in a coup d'état led by Iraqi Army officers.[15] This event saw the return of Barzani from exile.

With new leadership in Baghdad under Prime Minister ʿAbd al-Karīm Qāsim and a new Iraqi constitution that recognized the Kurds as a unique ethnic group and granted them equal rights as with the Arabs, the Kurds hoped that they were on track to a political solution with the central government of Iraq. Unfortunately, the improvement in relations between the Kurds and this new government was short-lived. In 1961, recognizing that the Baghdad government would not realize their demands for autonomous rule, Kurds led by Barzani and the KDP occupied most of mountainous Kurdistan and advanced on the cities of Erbil, Mosul, and Kirkuk. Qāsim sent numerous reinforcements to northern Iraq, ultimately deploying three-quarters of the Iraqi Army's infantry formations against the Kurds. Despite the Iraqi Army's overwhelming manpower superiority and intermittent support from Syrian Ba'athists, the Kurds under Barzani forced a stalemate that resulted in an accord to suspend fighting in June 1966 and granted autonomy to the Kurds. This unresolved conflict was called the Barzani Rebellion (a phase in the long-running Iraqi-Kurdish Civil War), which initiated three decades of violent conflict. One of the initiatives of the Iraqi government during the conflict was to unilaterally dissolve the KDP, which the Kurds ignored. As part of the 1966 accord, the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party officially recognized the Kurdish language, and steps were taken to amend the Iraqi constitution to recognize that "the people of Iraq belong to two nationalities, both Arab and Kurdish."[16]

Despite the agreement between the Kurds and the central government in Baghdad, the terms of the peace accord were never implemented, leading to additional conflict. At the center of this conflict between the Ba'athist government of Iraq and the Iraqi Kurds was the city of Kirkuk, an area highly valued by both groups due to its oil fields. During the 1967 Six-Day War between Israel and a coalition of Arab states, the Iraqi Army managed to negotiate an agreement with the Kurds in which the latter would not conduct any attacks in Iraq while the army was engaged in battle against Israel, unofficially nicknaming Kurdistan "the second Israel."[17] The following year, to force the Iraqis out of Kirkuk, Barzani began a campaign of hit-and-run attacks against oil installations in the region. In January 1969, the Iraqi Army launched a winter offensive with four infantry divisions against the Kurdish insurgents, now called the *Peshmerga* (in Kurdish, "those who confront death"), but the Kurds, with massive covert aid from Iran, first halted the Iraqi Army's offensive and then drove it back with significant losses. As a result, a treaty ending the fighting was signed by Barzani and the young new vice president of Iraq, Saddam Hussein.[18]

From 1970 to well into 1975, the Kurds under Barzani ran much of Iraqi Kurdistan autonomously, building up the Peshmerga for an expected future attack by the Iraqi Army. They received aid from Iran, and after the 1972 Soviet-Iraq Treaty of Friendship, from the United States and Israel. In early 1974, the Iraqi government drafted an autonomy agreement in an attempt to ease tensions with the KDP, but Mustafa Barzani rejected the agreement on the grounds that it kept the oil fields of Kirkuk out of KDP control. As a result, the Iraqi Army conducted several limited attacks against Kurdish forces. In March 1974, the Kurds unexpectedly launched a major

offensive, surprising and destroying several Iraqi battalions. After a year of hard fighting, several defeats, and some unexpected success by the Iraq Army (albeit with heavy losses), the fighting came to an end when Iraq and Iran signed the Treaty of Algiers on 13 June 1975. One stipulation of the treaty was an immediate cessation of Iranian support (and, as a consequence, U.S. and Israeli aid) to the Iraqi Kurds. The Kurds subsequently collapsed, with Barzani and many of his Peshmerga fleeing to Iran alongside more than 100,000 Kurdish refugees, most of whom were supporters of the KDP.[19] The Treaty of Algiers primarily resolved Iranian-Iraqi disputes about borders, water, and navigation rights. However, the cessation of Iranian aid to the Iraqi Kurds and the subsequent flight of Barzani and many of his forces into Iran led to a split in the KDP.

In 1975, Jalal Talabani, a leading member of the KDP originally from Kirkuk (and also a Sufi sheikh of the Qadiriyya order, a rival organization of the Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiya), founded the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).[20] Talabani and his fellow PUK founders were the intellectuals and academics of the KDP who had a more left-leaning, democratic, and socialist political philosophy than the larger KDP constituency, which was generally more traditional, conservative, and tribal in its political philosophy. When the Barzani-led Peshmerga were defeated and went into exile in Iran, Talabani formed the PUK to fill the vacuum that existed and provide leadership for Iraqi Kurdistan. At its founding, the PUK was an umbrella group for various leftist organizations in Iraqi Kurdistan that were not accepted by the then-dominant KDP, such as the Komala (a Marxist-Leninist group) and the Kurdistan Socialist Movement. The PUK constituency came

primarily from the southern part of Iraqi Kurdistan, centered in Sulaymaniyah.[21]

Iraqi Kurdistan did not long remain quiet, as Kurdish insurgents reorganized in Syria and began to conduct attacks in the Dohuk area of Iraq via Turkey.[22] Despite significantly reinforcing Iraqi security and military forces throughout the Kurdish region, the Iraqis could not stop the incessant small attacks by the Kurds, who used the mountains as their refuge. The best the Iraqis could do in the mountains was to employ Kurdish *Jash* forces (collaborationist forces) and helicopters, but this brought only limited success. Another major limiting factor for the Iraqis was the mobilization of a major part of the Iraqi Army on the border with Syria, with the potential for conflict only easing in 1977.[23]

In Iran, meanwhile, antigovernment demonstrations broke out in the city of Qom in January 1978, gradually increasing until the Iranian Army had to be repeatedly employed to restore order in what became known as the Iranian Revolution. With an increasing death toll and social unrest, the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, departed the country on 16 January 1979, and the Islamic religious leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini arrived on 1 February to take his place as supreme leader of the new Islamic Republic of Iran. The Iranian monarchy was over; the apparatus of governance and the economy quickly collapsed, with Iranian military and security forces in disarray. The Arabs of Khuzestan Province and the Baloch of Sistan-Baluchistan Province, seeking increased autonomy for themselves, rose in rebellion only to be swiftly crushed. The Kurds of Iran also rose in rebellion in March, managing to establish an enclave around the cites of Mahabad and Saqqez by April.[24]

In mid-August, the newly formed and inexperienced Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) launched an attack against the Iranian Kurds and were ambushed, being driven back with heavy losses. While the bulk of Kurdish forces in Iran were Iranian, the PUK under the leadership of Jalal Talabani crossed into Iran to offer its military assistance. PUK forces would gain significant operational expertise in Iran. By September, the Iranian Army had replaced the IRGC and isolated most of Iranian Kurdistan. The bulk of the Iranian Peshmerga managed to escape into the mountains, counterattacking in November and destroying numerous Iranian armored vehicles with Molotov cocktails and rocket-propelled grenades. In May 1980, the Iranian Army began a strong offensive, but by the end of August it had failed to retake Mahabad (although it had significant success elsewhere). Before Iranian Army operations against the Kurds could resume, Iraqi military forces invaded Iran on 22 September, instantly transforming the Iranian Kurdistan area of operations into a much larger Iranian-Iraqi Kurdistan theater of operations in the Iran-Iraq War. The Iranians would only retake Mahabad in January 1981.[25]

The Iran-Iraq War (1980–88), initiated by Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, abrogated the Treaty of Algiers. One of Iraq's major goals was to occupy the ethnically Arab Khuzestan Province of Iran and its oil resources. While the initial focus of the war was on Khuzestan, the fighting rapidly spread northward, engulfing the entire Iranian-Iraqi frontier, to include Kurdistan. As noted above, Iran was already engaged in suppressing a Kurdish rebellion, one to which Iraqi Kurds were providing what support they could. This rapidly changed as Iran, now the enemy of the Arab Iraqi regime in Baghdad, became allies with the Kurds of the PUK and KDP. Even

as some elements of the PUK continued to fight against Iranian forces in support of Iranian Kurds into early 1981, most of the PUK and KDP received weapons and support from the Iranian government via an Iraqi Arab expatriate unit, the 9th Badr Brigade (known today as the Badr Organization), to support Iranian military action in Iraqi Kurdistan. Iraq, for its part, appealed to Iraqi Kurds to remain loyal to their government (prompting 25,000 Kurds to join the Iraqi Army) and offered infrastructure incentives if Kurds would form paramilitary units to provide local security and support Iraqi Army operations. These paramilitary units, still called *Jash* units by Kurds, were officially named National Defense Battalions (NDBs) with a smaller number of "special detachments."[26]

Both KDP and PUK units actively supported Iran well into 1988, with the number of Kurds in these units reaching the thousands during the war. Iraq, meanwhile, enjoyed even more success by managing to enlist more than 150,000 Kurdish men into more than 200 NDBs. Most of the Kurdish NDBs were actively employed against KDP and PUK units. Nevertheless, Iraqi Kurdistan remained restive and a potential powder keg, even with a large number of Kurds supporting the regime in Baghdad. In 1986, once it was able to free up enough military forces, the regime initiated the Anfal campaign, beginning with mass deportations and destruction of Kurdish villages to clear out KDP and PUK insurgents. The Kurdish *Jash* forces actively assisted Iraqi forces, often promising the targeted Kurds that they would be provided amnesty and could flee once moved, both of which were false. From 23 February to 6 September 1988, Iraqi forces employed artillery strikes, mass executions, and poison gas attacks on villages to kill Kurds with impunity. This was the heart of the Anfal campaign, which was

conducted in eight phases. The final phase was executed after the Iran-Iraq War had ended, when its justification to stop the Kurdish insurgency was no longer valid. While the ultimate death toll is unknown, it is estimated that somewhere between 50,000 and 182,000 Kurds were killed in the Anfal campaign. At least 200,000 Kurds lost their lives in the Iran-Iraq War, almost all in Iraq.[27]

Table 1. Events leading up to Operation Provide Comfort

February 1986	Iraqi minister of defense Ali Hassan al-Majid (Chemical Ali) initiates the Anfal campaign against the Iraqi Kurds in northern Iraq as retaliation for their support of Iran during the Iran-Iraq War.
16 March 1986	Al-Majid orders a chemical attack on the city of Halabja in Iraqi Kurdistan. In what has become known as "Bloody Friday," thousands of Iraqi Kurdish civilians are killed by exposure to mustard gas and nerve agents.
20 August 1988	The Iran-Iraq War ends.
2 August 1990	Under the order of Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, Iraq launches an invasion of Kuwait with four of its elite Iraqi Republican Guard divisions. Within hours, Kuwait City comes under Iraqi control. In response, the UN Security Council denounces the invasion and demands that Iraq withdraw from Kuwait immediately.
6 August 1990	The UN Security Council imposes a worldwide trade and financial ban on Iraq.
7 August 1990	U.S. president George H. W. Bush orders the establishment of Operation Desert Shield to defend the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from potential Iraqi aggression.
16 January 1991	President Bush announces the establishment of Operation Desert Storm, the mission to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait.
28 February 1991	President Bush announces the successful end of Operation Desert Storm.
3 March 1991	Iraqi Shi'a begin a rebellion in southern Iraq, followed by an Iraqi Kurdish rebellion in northern Iraq. Both rebellions are against the repression of Saddam Hussein. Within days, the Iraqi Republican Guard is able to put down the rebellion, and hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Kurds flee into Iran and Turkey, with many stuck along the Iraq-Turkey border.
5 April 1991	The UN Security Council passes Resolution 688.
6 April 1991	Joint Task Force Provide Comfort deploys to Incirlik Air Base in Adana, Turkey, to begin conducting humanitarian operations in northern Iraq.

Source: courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP.

The Operational Environment

After the U.S.-led Coalition defeated Iraqi forces by removing them from Kuwait in Operation Desert Storm (1991), Iraqi Kurds and Shi'a Arabs believed that they had a golden opportunity to topple the hated Saddam Hussein regime in Baghdad, as the battered retreating Iraqi Army bore no resemblance to the mighty, victorious one that had defeated Iran just two years earlier. The Iraqi Kurds and Shi'a Arabs would be aided by the infiltration of thousands of Badr forces from Iran into southern Iraq and the return of KDP and PUK Kurds to northern Iraq. Uprisings began in southern Iraq even before the Gulf War's ceasefire was called on 28 February 1991, with Shi'a Arabs launching insurrections in the Mesopotamian Marshes, which rapidly spread to encompass all of southern Iraq except for the city of Basra, which was under Iraqi military control. While initially surprised, Iraqi security services, surviving army units, and Iraqi Republican Guard divisions killed thousands of Iraqi citizens through the ruthless application of artillery and helicopter strikes, often delivering chemical munitions, and managed to restore order by 29 March.[28]

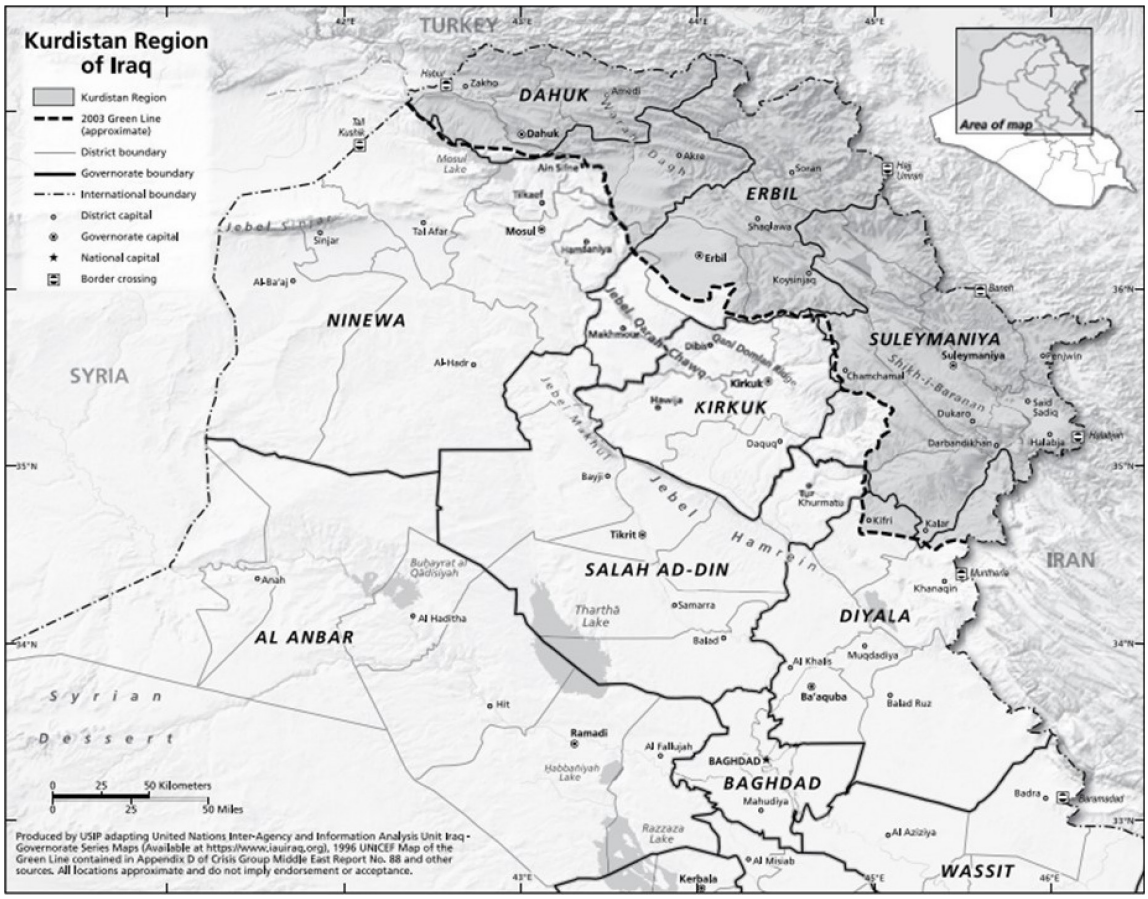
Meanwhile, the Kurds in northern Iraq, who hated Saddam's regime because of the Anfal campaign, were aided by the fact that Iraqi security forces there were thin on the ground, as most forces had been deployed south. Numerous Iraqi Army units dissolved, their members either deserting or joining the Kurds, while almost all NDB forces went over to the Kurdish insurgents. Sulaymaniyah was liberated by 7 March, with Erbil following on 13 March and Dohuk on 14 March.[29] The Iraqi Army 5th Corps headquarters was seized, and all government, Ba'ath Party, intelligence, general security, and police offices were captured with all documents intact (these records

exposed Kurdish collaborators). All existing Iraqi Army ammunition stocks were also seized. Remaining loyal Iraqi Army forces focused on retaining Kirkuk, deploying an infantry division outside the city. Kurdish forces attacked ferociously, driving Iraqi forces away from the city at the cost of 3,000 Kurdish dead.[30]

Following their defeat at Kirkuk, the Iraqi forces went on the defensive until operations against the Shi'a Arabs in southern Iraq could be completed and Iraqi Republican Guard forces transferred to Kurdistan. Six Republican Guard divisions arrived by 28 March, and within three days they retook Kirkuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah, supported by extensive artillery and helicopter assets.[31] On 31 March, Republican Guard forces drove on Dohuk and Zakho, both of which had already been hit by artillery the day before. The fighting was intense, with great loss of life on both sides and a mass exodus of Kurdish civilians toward Iran and Turkey. The Kurds feared not only the fighting but also the possibility of regime reprisals.[32] It is estimated that as many 1 million Kurds fled Iraq into Iran and Turkey during this time. When Turkey closed its borders to the Kurdish refugees, hundreds of thousands found themselves in a humanitarian crisis in which thousands were dying along the mountainous border due to lack of shelter, food, water, and medical supplies.

Physical Environment

Figure 1. Kurdistan region of Iraq



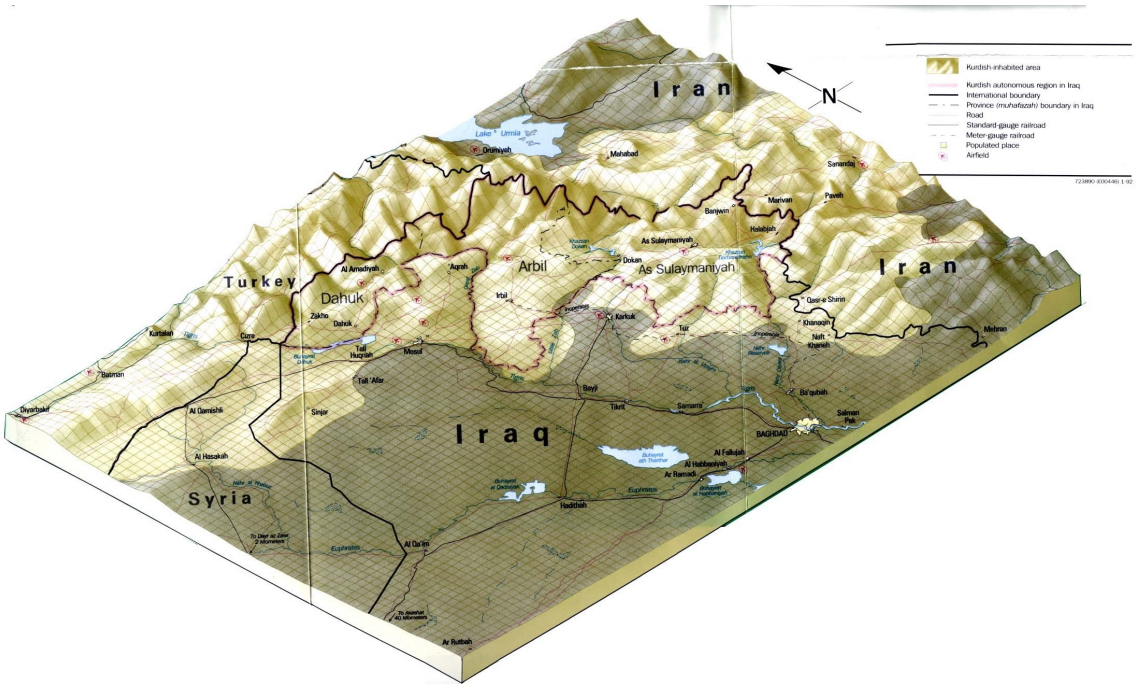
Source: Gordon W. Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention: Assisting the Iraqi Kurds in Operation Provide Comfort, 1991* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2004), 5.

Kurdistan, either as the larger Kurdistan region (including Kurdish-inhabited areas of Turkey, Iran, and Syria) or Iraqi Kurdistan alone, is not an existing country that can be found on any internationally recognized map. In 1991, Iraqi Kurdistan was composed of three governorates in northern Iraq: Dahuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah.[33] It bordered Syria to the west, Iran to the east, and Turkey to the north. It spans an area that was approximately

25,250 square kilometers and was home to an estimated 4 million people, approximately 17 percent of Iraq's total population.

Iraqi Kurdistan is mostly mountainous (referred to as the Kurdistan Highlands), which explains why Kurds are often called "people of the mountains." The region's highest elevation is Cheekha Dar mountain (11,847 ft), part of the Zagros Mountains, which are largely in Iran but edge into northeastern Iraq. Iraqi Kurdistan has few large bodies of water—the largest is Lake Dukan, approximately 100 square miles in surface size—but is drained by several rivers, including the Great Zab, the Little Zab, and the Diyala. This abundance of water and the higher elevation of the Tigris-Euphrates river valley has allowed agriculture to flourish in the region.[34]

Figure 2. Topography of the Kurdistan region of Iraq, 1992



Source: Perry-Casteñeda Library, University of Texas at Austin.

Iraqi Kurdistan encompasses rugged mountains, pleasant valleys, and fertile plains located roughly at the convergence of the Taurus, Elburz, and Zagros Mountains. As it contains some of Iraq's richest farmland and sits atop its most productive oil fields, it was clear that the Iraqi government in Baghdad would never surrender its proprietorship of this valuable region.

Climate

The climate of Iraqi Kurdistan is characterized by extreme conditions and follows two patterns: semiarid and mountainous. In the semiarid fringes, summertime temperatures can be as high as 95 degrees Fahrenheit, and in the mountainous regions during the winter, temperatures can be as low as -30 degrees Fahrenheit.[35] Operation Provide Comfort was conducted during the winter in northern Iraq, which is particularly harsh, given the cold and wet weather. Freezing temperatures made the plight of the Kurdish refugees even more dire, as many were ill-equipped to deal with the harsh winter climate in the mountains outside of their homes.

Figure 3. Countryside in Sulaymaniyah governorate

Source: Wikimedia Commons, Zirguezi

Transportation and Communication Networks

During Saddam Hussein's rule in Iraq (in fact, during the rule of all Iraqi regimes dating back to the 1930s), the transportation and communication networks throughout Iraqi Kurdistan reflected the regime's desire to keep the region underdeveloped and dependent on the central government in Baghdad, even as it provided a substantial influx of capital through oil revenues beginning in the 1980s and offered badly needed military assistance during the Iran-Iraq War. Despite state-led development efforts aimed at weakening the Kurdish region, many parts of Iraqi Kurdistan had modern transportation routes linking the various governorates, which helped strengthen commercial and economic ties throughout the region. However, the region's transportation networks were relatively underdeveloped when compared to major cities in Iraq such as Baghdad. The roads in the city of Mosul were considerably better than those in the rest of Iraqi Kurdistan, and many Kurds frequently travelled to Mosul from other Kurdish governorates in search of better economic opportunities and access to better health care and educational institutions. A significant transportation complication was the proliferation and presence of mines and unexploded ordnance in many parts of Kurdistan (including many on the roads outside the region's major urban areas), along with numerous wrecked vehicles.[36]

In 1991, Iraqi Kurdistan was far behind the rest of the country in terms of telecommunication infrastructure and the availability of wired telephone networks. During that time, according to the director general of the Iraqi Ministry of Transportation and Communications, "the Kurdistan communication system was seen as being far behind, with telephone

landlines in big cities such as Erbil totaling only 10,000 interior lines, and the connection between Erbil and other cities being non-functional after the withdrawal of Iraqi government institutions from Kurdistan. . . . There were no mobile communication networks, and no computers were available at government institutions."[37] Attacks led by the Iraqi Republican Guard in the region during the late 1980s and early 1990s had also damaged telecommunication infrastructure, further limiting communication capabilities in northern Iraq.

Economy

Like many economies throughout the Middle East, the economy of Iraqi Kurdistan is primarily dependent on oil revenue. In addition to the energy industries of petroleum, natural gas, and hydrocarbons, other major industries in the region include the production of light weapons and small arms, textiles, food, pharmaceuticals, and agricultural products, particularly citrus and dried fruits. Prior to the advent of petroleum-based industrialization, the economy of Kurdistan was primarily based on its agricultural sector. The high level of foreign investment in oil production was disruptive to local agricultural markets, as the central government in Baghdad initiated a policy of using petroleum revenues to assist in subsidizing the cost of food imports for its public food distribution system during the 1980s and 1990s. Denise Natali writes that in Iraqi Kurdistan, most industries "were family owned and based on personal services such as grain milling, baking, metal and shoe repair, textiles, carpentry, and jewelry."[38]

As previously mentioned, state-led development policies were designed to keep Iraqi Kurdistan weak. The central government extracted resources from the region and redistributed the revenue obtained to other regions throughout the country. Prime examples of the intentional underdevelopment of Iraqi Kurdistan are reflected in the central government's refusal to build an oil refinery in Kirkuk, despite an abundance of oil reserves and natural gas in the area. The government also channeled electricity from the two dams inside Iraqi Kurdistan through high-transmission lines to the southern grid to redistribute it throughout Iraq.[39] Due to Kirkuk's role as a center of Iraq's petroleum industry, the central government initiated a policy to repopulate the city by deporting the local Kurds and incentivizing Arabs to relocate there. All of these policies of the central government, combined with the state-backed Anfal campaign, led to the collapse of the agrarian economy of northern Iraq, making the Kurdish economy chronically weak at the onset of Operation Provide Comfort.

Social Structures

The Kurds are an indigenous people of the Kurdistan region in Western Asia. Their estimated population of 20–25 million places them as the fourth-largest ethnic group in the Middle East (following the Arabs, Turks, and Persians). One unique characteristic of the Kurds is that in spite of their significant population, they were in 1991 and remain today the world's largest ethnic group without a sovereign state. Due to extended conflict that dated back to the 1960s, by 1990 more than 100,000 Iraqi Kurds lived in Iran, and nearly 65,000 more were refugees in Turkey (primarily due to the Anfal campaign). There was also a growing Kurdish diaspora in Europe,

particularly in Germany, made up primarily of Turkish Kurds but including a number of Iraqi Kurds who had been deported or exiled by the Baghdad government. In early 1991, the Gulf War forced a greater number of Iraqi Kurds into exile, a precursor to the mass exodus that occurred leading up to Operation Provide Comfort.[40]

Age

The age of an individual and their place in their community plays into the social structure of Kurdish society. In general, seniority is the organizing principle within Kurdish households and communities. Within a family, there is a high expectation that children are to be obedient and submissive not only to their parents but also to respected elders in their extended families. Respecting elders and being generously hospitable toward them is a central aspect of Kurdish culture and is key to demonstrating honorable behavior. Young Kurds are also tasked with upholding the respectable image of their family by adhering to behavior deemed respectable, such as being generous with guests, dressing modestly, and maintaining traditional family values in large families, with the husband being the head of the household.

Sex

Iraqi Kurds value traditional family values and maintain close relationships between members of their families. While men are typically regarded as the head of the family, Kurdish women, whose literacy rates have continued to increase, have become more active in the social, economic, and political spheres of their life. While the social structure of Iraqi Kurdistan has many aspects in which it is regarded as being highly progressive in its sex

dynamics, it continues to experience varying levels of patriarchy, as men experience preferential treatment and play a central role in almost every facet of life.

The patriarchal mentality in Kurdish society hinders the progress of women by perpetuating a system of female obedience to a responsible male figure in her life, such as her father, husband, or brother. As women take a more active role in the public space, the patriarchal system has shifted to become more inclusive. Kurdistan is often regarded as a highly progressive region in the advancement of women's rights. This perception evolved in the 1990s as a result of women participating in Kurdish military operations against Turkish forces and continued during the conflict with the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS, also called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant–ISIL) from 2013 to 2018. Regarding the Iraqi Kurds in 1991, a split was observed between rural and urban family structures. The Kurds living in rural areas remained much more traditional in their patriarchal sex roles, while those who had moved to urban areas such as Erbil, Mosul, Kirkuk, and Sulaymaniyah significantly reduced traditional roles even while maintaining a reduced patriarchal dominance. This was most notable in the relaxed relationships among young people and the entrance of women into the workforce.[41]

Political Structures

At the very core of the Kurdish identity is the Kurdish national struggle for sovereignty, which has been underway since the late nineteenth century. In early 1991, Iraqi Kurdistan was ostensibly governed by the Iraqi-Kurdish Autonomy Agreement of 1970, which legislated that there would be a 12-

member executive council that had both legislative and executive powers, along with a legislative assembly that served as an advisor to the council. The legislative assembly was to have been responsible for all matters related to the administrative, economic, educational, and social policies of the region. While these Kurdish governmental institutions were capable of administrative oversight of Iraqi Kurdistan, the central government in Baghdad refused to allow self-rule to take place and continued to control all pertinent decisions related to justice, internal security, and administration of the region. This reflected a deep level of mistrust between the Iraqi Kurds and the central government, despite the Autonomy Agreement, and was enforced by an extensive Iraqi security and military presence. While some Kurds actively sought independence, most sought only a degree of autonomy within the borders where they were concentrated. However, even these relatively lesser aspirations were in direct conflict with the government in Baghdad.[42]

Iraqi Kurds are primarily divided into two political factions: the KDP and the PUK. As described earlier in this article, the KDP was founded in 1946 by Mustafa Barzani with a stated mission to "combine democratic values and social justice to form a system whereby everyone in Kurdistan can live on an equal basis with great emphasis given to rights of individuals and freedom of expression."[43] The PUK was established in 1975 in rejection of the direction that the KDP was going and in 1991 was being led by Jalal Talabani.[44] Distinguishing features of these two political parties are that KDP supporters primarily have tribal backgrounds from the northern Iraqi governorates of Dohuk and Erbil, whereas PUK supporters come from

mainly urban populations (and are therefore somewhat less tradition-bound), with the Sulaymaniyah area serving as the major power center.

Since the split of the KDP into what is now the modern-day KDP and the PUK in 1975, both groups have experienced frequent political and violent clashes. Political differences between the Barzani-dominated KDP and the Talabani-led PUK—combined with the Kurdish leadership's periodic shifts between pro- and antigovernment alliances—made them vulnerable to manipulation by the Ba'athist regime in Baghdad. During the Iran-Iraq War, the KDP opted to align with Iran, while the PUK initially did not support Iran, despite its opposition to the Iraqi central government, due to its support for the Iranian Kurd insurrection around Mahabad. In 1983, the KDP became the target of Iraqi military attacks because of its support for Iran; Iraqi troops killed an estimated 8,000 Kurdish men.

Despite the PUK's initial refusal to support Iran during the Iran-Iraq War, by 1986 both the PUK and KDP were actively supporting Iran in the war. In return, the PUK received military assistance from the Iranian central government in Tehran. Taking advantage of this moment of unification, the PUK and KDP established the Kurdistan Front. However, the central government in Iran was not the only government trying to woo an enemy of its chief adversary. Under Saddam Hussein's leadership, the Iraqi government established an alliance with the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) to undermine Iran's access to the Baghdad-Tehran highway. The KDPI had hoped to use the Iran-Iraq War as an opportunity to establish liberated zones within Iranian Kurdistan.[45] The war prompted many Kurds to align along national lines for the first time, with each Kurdish faction declaring their support for the opposing Iraqi or Iranian regimes.[46]

Tribes

Iraq has been a tribal society since the Mesopotamian era. While Iraqi Kurds seem to follow tribal systems similar to the rest of Iraq, Kurdish social organization is very different. In Iraq, rural Kurds retain stronger tribal ties, while urban Kurds have allowed their tribal ties to deteriorate. However, these tribal ties, while important as a mobilization means for warfare at the macro level, have little impact on most Kurds, whose basic foundational social organization is the family household and blood-tie lineages at the village (formerly the nomadic clan) level.

Whether rural or urban, the smallest functional social unit in Kurdish society is the family household. While blood relation is important at this low level, often described as “lineage links,” its importance changes as social groupings increase in size. Clusters of families into clans or villages form the lowest organizational level, where linked lineages are important but liable to change due to circumstances. Kurds will often switch allegiances from one clan to another, creating new lineages, when circumstances dictate that current lineage links will be costly or lead to destruction (Kurds tend to flock to winners and abandon those whose time is past). This is called “attachment” and is unique to the Kurds (unlike Arabs, where blood lineage is almost sacrosanct). Kurds can actually leave their family or village and, as free-floating individuals, attach themselves to other family lines or villages via this attachment mechanism. Once done, that individual is part of the new family or village. This has ensured genetic vitality despite the extremely endogenous nature of Kurdish society.[47]

Kurdish identity is based on lineage, further defined by the region in which one lives and the dialect one speaks, and is only loosely impacted by

tribe. The basic Kurdish kinship/action unit is the village, in which land ownership and inheritance (via lineages) reposes. Clusters of villages or families form clans, which are much more important and responsive than the tribe. Tribes and clans only become important in times of conflict, when larger political structures are required for mobilization of resources. Other than that, Kurdish families and villages rarely ever act in concert or coordination.[48]

Kurdish political leaders are called *aghas* and are often highly politicized clan or tribal leaders. Sheikhs are not tribal leaders but rather explicitly religious figures, usually called *mullahs*, who have acquired political influence. Among Iraqi Kurds, most tribes have assumed political loyalties, with the more urban Kurds adhering to the PUK and its socialist leanings and the more rural Kurds generally adhering to the ideas of the more traditional KDP. While most Iraqi Kurds are Sunni Muslims, the prevalence of Sufism among them is also a defining factor, with the PUK subscribing to the older and more hierarchical Qadiriyya order and the KDP generally following the newer and more decentralized Naqshbandi-Khalidiyya order.[49]

Kurdish terminology is different than that of Arabic or Turkish, with *fekhr* meaning "clan" and *qabile* meaning "tribe" (though both can be interchangeably termed *ashiret*, *tayfe*, *tire*, or *hoz*). Honor remains a critically important concept, with the blood feud an important part of Kurdish culture. This is practiced at the lineage level. Unlike almost all other ethnicities in the Middle East, extended family groups are rare among Kurds and are mainly found only among Kurdish nomads. Land ownership is nominally within the tribe, clan and/or lineage, while inheritance is retained at the family or village level. Again, uniquely to the Kurds, primogeniture,

ultimogeniture, partible inheritance, and even Sharia inheritance rules (two-to-one male versus female shares) do not dominate among the Kurds. Instead, inheritance is flexible and situationally dependent, which greatly complicates land ownership issues for non-Kurds (meaning non-Kurdish governments).[50]

Table 2 depicts generalized tribal presence around various urban areas in Iraq. It should be noted that Kurdish tribes do not imply unity like Arab tribes do but more often tend to identify political alignment.[51]

Table 2. Tribal presence in Iraq

City	**Tribes**
Erbil	Ako, Dizai, Surci, Gerdi, Herki, Barzan, Buli, Sirvan wa Baradust, Zarari, Kilani, Bervari, Bala, Bervari Ziri, Kosnav, Piran
Khanaqin	Bajalan, Zenda, Leylani, Kaka'i, Sayk-bazini, Bibani, Dawuda, Kakevar, Palani, Kaganlu
Kirkuk	Sarafbayani, Barzenji, Dilo, Talebani, Jabbari, Suhan, Zangana, Amarmel, Salehi
Mandali	Qara 'Alus
Mosul	Šeqqaq, Duski, Zibari, Misuri, Artus, Sendi
Sulaymaniyah	Jaf, Marivani, Pisdar, Hamavand, Avrami, and Esma'il Azizi

Source: courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP.

Iran

Iran has historically had a tumultuous relationship with Iraqi Kurds, given its shaky relationship with Iranian Kurds who have frequently called for autonomy in Iran. As previously discussed, Iran has supported rebellion efforts of Iraqi Kurds against the Iraqi government in Baghdad during periods of conflict between Iran and Iraq while simultaneously suppressing

rebellion efforts of Iranian Kurds. The events that unfolded during the Iran-Iraq War defined the relationship between the Iranian government and the Iraqi Kurds. The key turning point occurred in 1983, when Iraqi Kurds helped the Iranian military achieve a key victory in northern Iraq, to which the Iraqi military under Saddam Hussein responded by killing approximately 8,000 Kurdish men.[52] In 1991, Iran had a Kurdish population of approximately 5.5 million.[53]

Turkey

Turkey's relationship with the Kurds has been problematic, though less so with Iraqi Kurds than its own Turkish Kurds. It is estimated that Kurds comprise 15–20 percent of the Turkish population, an undeniably sizeable portion. Following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth century, a Turkish nationalism movement developed to solidify the Turkish identity. The Turkish government's response to Kurdish nationalism was tantamount to attempted cultural genocide. Ethnic Kurds were forcibly relocated from the eastern parts of the country, while European Turks were moved to the Kurdish region in southeastern Anatolia. Even speaking the Kurdish language was forbidden in schools, government offices, and public places until 1991. According to a *World Affairs Journal* article, "Simply saying 'I am a Kurd' in Kurdish was a crime, and [it is] still considered scandalous in official settings."[54] While the Turkish government's position regarding the Kurds is often promoted in ethnic rhetoric, its concerns are more political in nature, given its fear that if the local Kurdish population gained political autonomy it would threaten to centralize power.

The most pronounced political challenge to the Turkish government's hold on power has arisen in the form of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), established in 1984 with funding from the Soviet Union.[55] The PKK's political ideology is Marxist-Leninist. During the 1980s, it initiated an armed struggle against the Turkish government with the ultimate goal of establishing an independent Kurdish state within Turkey. The PKK threat to Turkey has caused the Turkish government to be wary of any attempts for Kurdish sovereignty in the region, believing that such a development would work in favor of the PKK cause.[56] In 1991, the Kurdish population in Turkey was approximately 11 million.[57]

Syria

Kurds in Syria have been discriminated against since Syrian independence in April 1946. Kurds are the largest non-Arab ethnic group in Syria, living mainly in northeastern Syria. The central government in the Syrian capital of Damascus has tried to systematically suppress Kurdish identity, forcing them to assume an Arab identity if possible. In 1962, a national census stripped some 120,000 Syrian Kurds—20 percent of the Syrian Kurdish population—of their Syrian citizenship, leaving them stateless and with no claim to another nationality. This impacted Syrian Kurdish children for more than 50 years by ensuring that the stateless children had no access to the government-mandated educational system. This only ended in 2014 with the rise of the Islamic State, when the Syrian Kurds established their own educational system since the Syrian government had no control over them at the time. In 1977, the Syrian government directed that all Kurdish-named villages and areas be renamed with Arabic names, and in 1986 the Kurdish

language was prohibited.[58] In 1991, the Kurdish population in Syria was approximately 1.3 million.[59]

Iraq

Having successfully crushed rebellion attempts by both the Shi'a Arabs in southern Iraq and the Kurds in northern Iraq following the end of the Gulf War in 1991, the Ba'athist regime in Baghdad threatened to repeat the chemical attacks of previous years (the Anfal campaign) against the Iraqi Kurds. This triggered a mass Kurdish exodus from Iraq, as the Iraqi military could not be underestimated in its ruthlessness. As the Kurds fled across international borders into Turkey or Iran, there was no indication that the Iraqi military would pursue them outside of Iraq. In 1991, the Kurdish population in Iraq was approximately 3.5 million.[60]

Belief Systems

Local religious beliefs, as well as local symbols and communication, inherently impact the success of humanitarian missions, as both greatly influence not only the behavior but also the preferences of local societies in ways that are discussed below.

Symbols and Communication

The Kurdish language belongs to the Indo-European family of languages, derived from the ancient Median or "Proto-Kurdish" language. It is an independent language that has its own historical development, continuity, grammatical system, and rich living vocabularies with dialectic divisions.

Kurdish dialects are members of the northwestern subdivision of the Indo-Iranic language and are divided into three primary groups:

- Northern Kurdish dialects, also called *Kurmanjí* and *Badínaní*
- Central Kurdish dialects, also called *Soraní*
- Southern Kurdish dialects, also called *Pehlewaní* or *Pahlawanik*

The two other major branches of Kurdish language are the *Dimílí* group (also called *Zaza*) and the *Hewramí* group (also called *Goraní* or *Gúraní)*. These are further divided into numerous dialects and subdialects.[61] No standard nomenclature exists for the divisions of Kurdish dialects, neither in the works of Western scholars nor among the Kurds. All the native designators for local language and dialects are based on the way the spoken language of one group sounds to the unfamiliar ears of another. Iraqi Kurds mainly speak the Sorani dialect (written in an Arabic script), but those around and west of Erbil speak the Kurmanji dialect (commonly written in a Latin script).[62]

Religious Beliefs

While Islam has extensively influenced the life of the Kurdish people, the modern Kurdish identity is built more around an emerging nationalist identity than a religious one. Since Ba'athist control of Iraq began in 1968, the central government has promoted a policy of secularism that has heavily influenced much of Iraqi society, including the Kurds, leaving many to identify as marginally religious. Nonetheless, the vast majority of Iraqi Kurds are Sunni Muslims, specifically of the Shafi'i madhhab, while the majority of Iraqi Arabs follow the Hanafi madhhab. Sufism, as mentioned

earlier, is pervasive amongst the Kurds, who are split between the older Qadiriyya order and the newer Naqshbandi-Khalidiyya order.

Kurds initially resisted conversion to Islam, having been followers of Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Mithraism, and paganism. However, as the Arab conquests expanded throughout the region, the Kurds accepted Islam and submitted to Muslim armies. While most Kurds are Sunni, long association with and occasional subjugation by Shi'a Turks (Qizilbash) or Persians has ensured that a minority of Iraqi Kurds are Shi'a, identified as *Faili Kurds* (an Arabic term meaning "Kurds from the Zagros Mountains"); there are also *Shabak Kurds*.

Among the Kurds, there is a religious minority called the *Yazidi*, who claim to not be Kurds but who are counted as such by the surrounding Arabs. In 1991, there were an estimated 500,000 Yazidi living in Iraq, located primarily in the desolate northwestern part of the country around the Sinjar Mountains, which they consider to be sacred. Due to their religious beliefs, the Yazidis have been marginalized and persecuted by the Ottoman Empire, other Kurds, and Saddam Hussein's regime. Due to this history of religious violence, the Yazidis isolated themselves geographically in the mountains of northwestern Iraq, forging an insular culture that rejects converts and does not intermarry with other groups. It is an ancient religious culture that is syncretically evolutionary in nature; contains elements of Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Sufism (Islam); and dates back to 1000 BC. In addition to the Yazidis, the Kaka'i, also called the Ahl-e Haqq (Ismaili Shi'a), are another religious minority group among the Kurds concentrated in the Kirkuk region.[63]

Case Study: Operation Provide Comfort

> *The refugee camps were scattered across some of the most inaccessible terrain in the world. Refugees were virtually clinging to cliffs. There was inadequate shelter, no potable water, little food, poor sanitation, and limited medical care. Hard-pressed Kurdish families often faced the difficult choice of saving either their aged parents or their young children because there was not enough food and water to go around. The relief needs were so massive that no single international agency had the resources to support an adequate effort. To make matters worse, all this misery existed in a politically complex, potentially hostile environment.*[64]
>
> ~ Lieutenant Colonel Ronald J. Brown, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve

After the U.S.-led Coalition victory against Saddam Hussein in Operation Desert Storm, Iraqi Kurds were optimistic that they were well-positioned to rise up against the Ba'athist government in Baghdad and lead a successful rebellion. This was partially driven by their assumption that they would receive support from the United States, as well as by the complete defeat of Iraq's security forces as they were forced to retreat from Kuwait. One of the primary motivators of the rebellion was the Halabja Massacre of 16 March 1988, an Anfal campaign operation that was conducted by Iraqi military forces in southern Kurdistan near the end of the Iran-Iraq War. Estimates place the death toll at upward of 5,000 Iraqi Kurds, with an additional 10,000 injured. These estimates do not take into consideration the thousands of Kurds who died in the following years from complications and birth defects. To maintain a united front against Saddam's security forces, Jalal Talabani,

head of the PUK, and Masoud Barzani, head of the KDP, agreed to establish an alliance between their two organizations. In March 1991, the Iraqi Kurds initiated their rebellion in northern Iraq, a week after a revolt occurred in the Shi'a-dominated area of southern Iraq. Their primary goal was to establish autonomy as a step toward their ultimate quest for territorial sovereignty. With Iraqi forces demoralized by their defeat in Kuwait and occupied by the Shi'a rebellion in southern Iraq, the Iraqi Kurds were able to seize the town of Ranya on 5 March 1991, and soon after they seized the city of Sulaymaniyah and the Iraqi Central Security headquarters. Inside the Central Security building, the Peshmerga found victims who had been tortured and murdered under the authority of Saddam. Two weeks later, the Iraqi Kurds captured the oil center of Kirkuk.[65]

Despite their initial successes, both the Shi'a rebellion in southern Iraq and the Kurdish rebellion in northern Iraq miscalculated on two counts. First, the United States refused to intervene on their behalf, taking the position that these were internal disputes. Second, Saddam's Republican Guard was determined to defeat both rebellions and began with the Shi'a rebellion in the south. According to Dave Johns at the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), "Saddam's Republican Guard fought the resistance in Karbala. Civilians and rebels fled the city. On the roads leading out, Iraqi army helicopter crews poured kerosene on the refugees, then set them on fire. American aircraft circled high overhead, watching. Saddam's forces began systematically crushing the uprising. Basra was the first city to fall, after just a week out of Saddam's control. Iraqi tanks captured a road above the city and pelted it with heavy machine guns."[66] With the Shi'a subdued in the south, Saddam turned his attention to the Kurdish rebellion in the north.

According to Dave Johns, "Kirkuk was bombarded with artillery, and hospitals were targeted. The Kurdish insurgents were in a topographical bind—most of the cities they held sat on a plain below the mountains and were impossible to defend. The rebel fighters retreated in the mountains with their families. As they backed away, Iraqi helicopters threw flour on them—a cruel reminder of the powdery chemical weapons that killed Kurds by the thousands during Saddam's Anfal campaign."[67]

The key turning point of the Kurdish rebellion occurred on 1 April 1991, when the city of Zakho, the last Kurdish stronghold near the border with Turkey, fell to Iraqi forces, who overwhelmed the Kurdish Peshmerga with artillery fire. Concern that the Iraqi forces would use chemical weapons against them, the Kurds were left with no other option than to flee Iraq and head into Turkey and Iran. The wealthy among them were able to leverage their resources and connections to secure refugee status in either Iran or Turkey, but the vast majority of the Iraqi Kurds were stranded along the mountainous border with Turkey. With the cold of northern Iraq's winter coming down on them, the Kurds faced a hopeless situation. Possibly as many as 700,000 faced starvation, dehydration, exhaustion, exposure, and disease. Subfreezing temperatures at night caused some of the refugees to freeze to death, and a lack of freshwater left them to rely on either melted snow or contaminated streams for water. Given the Turkish government's political sensitivities regarding Turkish Kurds who also were demanding an autonomous state, Turkey decided to respond to the influx of Iraqi Kurdish refugees by closing its border, leaving the refugees stranded in the mountains along the Iraq-Turkey border.[68]

The Situation

In April 1991, after the Kurdish uprising in northern Iraq was quelled by the Iraqi Republican Guard, as many as 1 million Iraqi Kurds fled Iraq. More than 200,000 of their number (many of whom were associated with the KDP) fled to Iran, where they were welcomed among the Iranian Kurds and helped by the aid of the Iranian government (as well as some international aid). The majority of the Iraqi Kurds, numbering somewhere between 500,000 and 750,000 (many of whom were associated with the PUK), were left stranded when Turkey closed its border to them. Many of these Kurds were from urban areas of Iraq and had little experience living in the mountains. Stranded along the mountainous border, and lacking adequate food, water, medical supplies, and shelter, the refugees began to die at an alarming rate.[69]

Environment

To carry out Operation Provide Comfort, the U.S.-led Coalition effort to defend and succor the Kurdish refugees in northern Iraq, the Coalition used military bases in Turkey (Incirlik Air Base, Adana, Antalya, Diyarbakir, Silopi, and Batman), Iraq (Sirsenk), and Germany (Rhein-Main). Although U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) had executed Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, U.S. European Command (EUCOM) served as the executing command for Operation Provide Comfort, since the humanitarian assistance effort was to be operated in and from Turkey, a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member nation that was part of the EUCOM area of operations. The operating environment for Operation Provide Comfort was in southeastern Turkey and northern Iraq along the Iraq-

Turkey border, an area encompassing 83,000 mi^2 (approximately 215,000 square kilometers), roughly the size of Kansas. Saddam Hussein's scorched-earth campaign of the 1980s, designed to cause a rift between the Iraqi Kurds and Kurdish guerillas, had left much of Iraqi Kurdistan in shambles. The Iraqi military had destroyed thousands of villages, bulldozing those not destroyed by artillery. The roads in Iraqi Kurdistan that led to the Iraq-Turkey border were extremely dangerous, as most were mined. Numerous Kurds were killed by land mines as they fled northern Iraq, and many others were killed by Iraqi Army helicopters that deliberately targeted civilians.[70]

Friendly Forces

The Iraqi Kurds fleeing northern Iraq were the primary focus of Operation Provide Comfort. U.S. special forces worked alongside Kurdish leaders to design refugee camps and the layout of latrines, paying special attention to the input of those leaders before acting. Identifying Kurdish leaders was far more difficult than anticipated, as the vast majority of the refugees were urban dwellers whose social cohesiveness at the clan level had been greatly reduced. As the flight into the mountains began, what cohesiveness and leadership evaporated, reducing Kurdish leadership to family elders. As a result, initial meetings with Kurdish leaders were often quite large, as each individual family was represented rather than neighborhoods, villages, clans, or tribes.

Additionally, there was a level of mistrust directed at the U.S. forces, since many of the Kurdish refugees felt betrayed by the United States due to their perception that the U.S. military should have protected them from the Iraqi military attacks but had instead abandoned them. The United States

persisted in its position that the conflict between the Iraqi Kurds and Iraq's central government was an internal conflict. It was only when the conflict reached a crisis level that the United States had decided to support the UN's intervention on humanitarian grounds.[71]

Turkey was a key player in the Coalition effort, having borne the initial brunt of the humanitarian effort and provided the operational base zone for Operation Provide Comfort. However, the Turks shared a history with the Kurds that was heavily colored by Turkey's ongoing counterinsurgency effort against Turkish Kurds of the PKK. Nevertheless, in late March 1991, Turkey instructed its military and border security forces on the Iraq-Turkey border to seal the border but provide what humanitarian assistance they could. The Turkish Red Crescent Society (an organization much like the American Red Cross) was quickly mobilized to assist the Turkish forces but was quickly overwhelmed by the magnitude of the disaster. As the refugee flow and crush against the border rapidly escalated in the first week of April, tensions inevitably rose, and there were an increasing number of incidents of Turkish troops firing on Kurdish refugees. With the arrival of U.S. forces by 7 April, the tensions began to ease, although the humanitarian disaster continued. Still, it was Turkish priorities that provided much of the initial guidance for the Coalition, which included the following: to consolidate the Kurds into several large camps for ease of relief; to stabilize their condition to obviate starvation and disease; and to return them to their homes in Iraq. For the Turks, the driving factor was to keep a massive influx of Kurds from entering Turkey, especially as there were still approximately 20,000 Iraqi Kurdish refugees in Turkey who had entered during the Iran-Iraq War (there had been more than 80,000 at one point).[72]

Because Turkish goals were as critical to Operation Provide Comfort as humanitarian aid was to the Kurds, and with potential for the PKK to violently complicate the situation, the Turkish military was sensitive to the security situation and how the U.S. and Coalition forces worked. The ever-present tension between the Turkish forces and Kurdish refugees had to be navigated and mitigated by U.S. and Coalition forces. This frequently created a sense of distrust and frustration, greatly compounded by inadequate ground transport infrastructure and dependence on Turkish commercial trucking companies that executed contracts but would often simply dump cargos, overwhelming those trying to stockpile and then distribute supplies in a rational manner.

In addition to Turkey, 12 other nations joined the Coalition, many of them NATO members.[73] The U.S. military forces had great familiarity with their British, Italian, and French counterparts, with many of the commanders having worked together on various missions. These previously established relationships contributed tremendously to successful cross-cultural communications between the various forces. The one exception to this was the Spanish forces, who had not deployed outside of Spain on a military operation since 1898 (when they fought against the United States in the Spanish-American War). In addition to the 13 nations that provided forces, more than 30 nations provided relief supplies.[74]

Coalition forces also worked closely with the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA). Despite having worked with the military for decades on natural disaster relief operations, Operation Provide Comfort marked the first time OFDA worked with the military on a complex humanitarian

emergency. OFDA deployed four Disaster Assistance Response Teams (DART) to support Operation Provide Comfort; these initially clashed with military leaders due to conflicting interpretations of the overarching goal of the operation. From OFDA's perspective, Operation Provide Comfort was not a logistical operation, as EUCOM viewed it, but rather a resettlement and protection operation. This point of tension was resolved by an order given by U.S. Army general Colin L. Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at the request of Andrew S. Natsios, director of OFDA, that shifted authority for Operation Provide Comfort policy making from the military to OFDA. Additionally, the chain of command was not clearly defined between the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), which remained a source of friction throughout the operation.[75]

Adversary Forces

The primary adversary of the U.S.-led Coalition was the Iraqi military, specifically the Iraqi Republican Guard and the Iraqi Secret Police. The Republican Guard was established in 1969 as a branch of the Iraqi military; however, it did not fall under the control of the Iraqi Ministry of Defence but instead answered directly to Saddam Hussein's son, Qusay Hussein. While the Republican Guard was initially designed to serve as a praetorian guard, its role expanded during the Iran-Iraq War. At the conclusion of the Gulf War in 1991, the Republican Guard was split into two factions: the Special Republican Guard, which provided protection to Saddam and other designated "VIPs" (very important persons), and the Republican Guard, which was primarily used to prevent the Iraqi Army from attempting any coups.

In addition to the Iraqi forces in Iraq, the Coalition also had to be aware, on the Turkish side of the border, of potential attacks from the "Dev Sol," or the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKP-C), a far-left Marxist-Leninist Communist group adamantly opposed to Western intervention in Turkey since its founding in 1978.[76] The Turkish government had outlawed the DHKP-C, as the government was the group's main target, though, on occasion, the DHKP-C also targeted Western military and civilian facilities or personnel in Turkey. In February 1991, John Gandy, regional manager for Vinnell-Brown & Root, a Halliburton subsidiary, was murdered in his Istanbul office by a DHKP-C hit team wearing Turkish National Police uniforms. It was assumed that the DHKP-C had links to the PKK, although the two groups had (and continue to have) differing ideological goals. While PKK forces were present during Operation Provide Comfort and Coalition elements did occasionally encounter them, both sides refrained from taking any action so as to not inhibit the flow of relief to the Iraqi Kurdish refugees.[77]

Civil Component

The crisis in the mountains of northern Iraq represented a breakdown of Kurdish civil society. While the Iraqi Kurds did not have a strong civil society presence during Operation Provide Comfort, many foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) played key roles in working with the Coalition forces to accomplish the operation's mission.

One of the most proactive organizations was the Turkish Red Crescent Society, which benefited from early planning for a possible

emergency operation. Gordon W. Rudd writes that in late 1990, "the buildup of forces in the Persian Gulf had led Turkish Red Crescent officials to anticipate a refugee crisis. In response, they positioned relief personnel and limited supplies along Turkey's southeastern border to support not only any Iraqi refugees but Turkish soldiers if Turkey became involved in the war effort."[78] Despite the Turkish Red Crescent's effort to get ahead of the emerging crisis, it was ill-prepared to handle the hundreds of thousands of Kurdish refugees that fled Iraq, initially having resources to handle only 10,000 refugees at a time. As the first organization on the ground to handle the refugee crisis, the Turkish Red Crescent was able to provide foreign civilian groups with a preliminary survey of the type of assistance that would be needed to handle the crisis.[79]

The success of Operation Provide Comfort relied heavily on the partnership that the DOD was able to develop with OFDA, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and key NGOs. To work collaboratively, OFDA and the DOD had to become familiar with the cultural inner workings of one another. According to Chris Seiple, a number of factors ultimately contributed to the operational success of Operation Provide Comfort:

> First, despite the fact that the American military was in charge of the coalition responsible for *Provide Comfort*, the [OFDA DART] was, in effect, managing the situation and establishing the strategy. Second, military commanders on the ground recognized and used the DART expertise. Third, the Special Forces . . . initially sent into the Turkish mountains were absolutely critical in stabilizing the situation (to include establishing an initial rapport with the NGOs). Fourth, the

> Army Civil Affairs . . . officers responsible for NGO interaction/coordination, particularly in Zakho, were exceptional people with a clear understanding of the situation at hand. Fifth, the NGOs had the same caliber of people leading their effort.[80]

The Mission

Operation Provide Comfort was a military response to UN Security Council Resolution 688. U.S. President George H. W. Bush outlined the political objectives of the operation:

> This is an interim measure designed to meet an immediate, penetrating humanitarian need. Our long-term objective remains the same for Iraqi Kurds, and indeed, for all Iraqi refugees, wherever they are, to return home and to live in peace, free from oppression, free to live their lives.[81]

Operation Provide Comfort was to be conducted in three phases outlined by Lieutenant General John Shalikashvili of CTF Provide Comfort. Phase one involved providing aid and stopping the dying and suffering of the Iraqi Kurds. Phase two involved relocating the Kurds from the mountains to relocation camps in the valley. Phase three involved returning the Kurds to their homes.[82]

Two subordinate JTFs were established to facilitate the mission. JTF Alpha (JTF-A), composed primarily of the U.S. Army's 10th Special Forces Group, was deployed in dispersed sites throughout the mountains of southeast Turkey and was responsible for alleviating the dying and suffering while stabilizing the situation. The second, JTF Bravo (JTF-B), built around the

24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) (Special Operations Capable [SOC]), was to prepare the town of Zakho in northern Iraq for the incoming Kurds and facilitate their eventual transfer back to their homes.[83]

To provide regional cultural expertise, a psychological operations task force (POTF), containing a small command and control element, a propaganda development center, and a liaison cell serving the various headquarters, was formed. The POTF was instrumental in providing Coalition forces with the cultural expertise needed to establish trust among the refugees. Unfortunately, there was a dearth of readily available cultural expertise on the Kurds, as most available expertise was instead focused on Arabs, and consequently many "Kurdish" cultural traits were in actuality Arab cultural traits. The POTF developed written material, including language cards with key phrases in Kurdish (almost always dialectically incorrect) and Arabic (fortunately, most Iraqi Kurds were bilingual in Arabic) to effectively communicate with the refugees, as well as leaflets, posters, and handbills. The POTF also used audio messages via loudspeakers and radio broadcasts to quickly inform the refugees of vital information pertaining to the assistance being provided to them. Psychological operations (PSYOP) teams also held meetings with Kurdish elders and contacted Christian and Muslim religious leaders at Zakho to solicit their assistance.[84] These teams sought to inspire Kurdish self-reliance, to inform Iraqi soldiers that the Coalition force possessed the capability and will to protect its humanitarian operation, to discourage the PKK, and to convince skeptical non-Kurdish civilians in the region that the humanitarian efforts were legally and morally correct.[85]

Concept of Operations

Accomplishing the mission of Operation Provide Comfort would not be easy. Kurdistan was far from existing military bases and located in some of the region's most forbidding terrain and weather. The political climate was uncertain. The Turks and Iranians had a long history of problems with the Kurds and were initially reluctant to provide assistance. Peshmerga guerrillas and the Iraqi Army were still fighting, so the United States and its Coalition partners had to avoid taking sides in a historical civil conflict.

CTF Provide Comfort was tasked with conducting multinational humanitarian relief operations in northern Iraq until international relief agencies and private voluntary organizations could assume overall supervision of such operations. The basic concept of operations included the following: to meet life-sustaining requirements immediately; to establish a manageable relief process that could be easily transferred to nonmilitary organizations; to promote the role of nonmilitary organizations and maximize participation of international agencies; to seek active refugee participation during site development operations; and to ensure the security of Coalition troops and dislocated civilians. The priorities established were to stop the dying and the suffering among the Iraqi Kurds; to resettle the population at temporary sites while establishing a stable, secure, and sustainable environment in northern Iraq; and to return the displaced civilians to their former homes.[86]

CTF Provide Comfort's concept of operations for the major subordinate task forces was as follows: JTF-A was to provide immediate relief to the Iraqi Kurds; to establish infrastructure in the camps; and to transfer refugees to transit camps in JTF-B's area of operations in northern

Iraq. JTF-B was to build transit camps; to receive and care for refugees; to secure the area; to return refugees to their homes; to turn relief operations over to civilian organizations; and to finally withdraw from Iraq.[87]

The 24th MEU (SOC) was the central force responsible for accomplishing JTF-B's tasks in northern Iraq. The MEU's logistics combat element, MEU Service Support Group 24 (MSSG 24), provided combat service support to the MEU while also conducting humanitarian relief and civic action operations, carrying most of the load for JTF-B until additional support arrived. The MEU's ground combat element (GCE) and aviation combat element (ACE) supported MSSG 24's logistical combat element (LCE) operations, establishing humanitarian service support bases and refugee camps. Nearly 3,600 Marines and sailors were involved in support of Operation Provide Comfort between April and July 1991, making it one of the largest humanitarian interventions of the era.[88]

Results

Operation Provide Comfort ultimately succeeded because it achieved its primary objectives: halting and reversing the mortality rates of the Iraqi Kurdish refugees along the Iraq-Turkey border and overseeing their repatriation back to Iraq.

Table 3. Timeline of key events

31 March 1991	After their failed uprising against the Iraqi central government, approximately 700,000 Iraqi Kurdish begin fleeing north to the mountains along Iraq's northern border.
5 April 1991	United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 688 is adopted. U.S. president George H. W. Bush directs the U.S. Department of Defense to assist the displaced Kurds.
6 April 1991	Joint Task Force (JTF) Provide Comfort forms and deploys to Incirlik Air Base in Adana, Turkey. The U.S. Army's 10th Special Forces Group is already in Turkey. The first 72,000 pounds of relief supplies arrive at Incirlik Air Base.
7 April 1991	The first relief supplies are staged forward. JTF Provide Comfort personnel move to the Iraq-Turkey border.
8 April 1991	JTF Provide Comfort conducts the first humanitarian relief airdrops.
9 April 1991	JTF Provide Comfort is redesignated Combined Task Force (CTF) Provide Comfort in recognition of international cooperation.
11 April 1991	A ceasefire agreement is signed between U.S. and Iraqi military forces.
13 April 1991	The first U.S. Special Forces teams, designated Joint Task Force-Alpha (JTF-A) are inserted into border refugee camps in northern Iraq.
16 April 1991	CTF Provide Comfort creates a security zone in northern Iraq to protect the Iraqi Kurdish refugees.
16–19 April 1991	The 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) (Special Operations Capable [SOC]) arrives in Turkey to support Operation Provide Comfort. The MEU is designated Joint Task Force-Bravo (JTF-B).
20 April 1991	The city of Zakho is secured by Coalition forces. JTF-A deploys forward to Zakho. A tent city for refugees is established there.
22 April 1991	The 45 Commando Royal Marines of the British Royal Marines arrives in theater and is attached to the 24th MEU (SOC).
23 April 1991	The 1st Amphibious Combat Group of the Netherlands Marine Corps arrives in theater and is attached to the 45 Commando Royal Marines.
28 April 1991	The 3d Battalion of the U.S. Army's 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment and

	the 18th Military Police Brigade (-) arrive in theater.
29 April 1991	The 40 Commando Royal Marines of the British Royal Marines and 3 Commando Brigade headquarters arrive in theater. The 3d Marine Infantry Parachute Regiment of the French Army also arrives in theater.
30 April 1991	The U.S. Army's 18th Engineer Brigade (-) arrives in theater.
3 May 1991	The U.S. Army's 4th Infantry Brigade (-) arrives in theater.
13 May 1991	The U.S. Army's 354th Civil Affairs Brigade (-) arrives in theater.
24 May 1991	Duhok is declared an "open city," and a mass exodus of refugees from camps back into northern Iraq begins in earnest.
4 June 1991	The population of Iraqi Kurdish refugees in the mountain camps has dwindled to nearly zero.
7 June 1991	The last Operation Provide Comfort refugee camp is closed. The UN takes over relief projects in the region.
8 June 1991	Redeployment of CTF Provide Comfort personnel begins.
15 July 1991	The 24th MEU retrograde from Iraq is complete. Approximately 500,000 Kurds have resettled back in northern Iraq.
24 July 1991	Operation Provide Comfort is declared over.

Source: courtesy of the author, adapted by MCUP.

Operational Culture Impacts on the Mission

The following section will detail the impact that the five dimensions of operational culture had on successfully accomplishing the mission of Operation Provide Comfort. Close examination will be given to how obstacles to the mission's success, created by the unique culture in northern Iraq, were overcome, primarily focusing on the Marines of CTF Provide Comfort.

Physical Environment

> *The thing that grips you in these camps is the enormity, the size. This is a whole people, a whole culture on the move.*
>
> ~ Brigadier General Richard W. Potter Jr., U.S. Army, CTF Provide Comfort[89]

The mountainous environment along the Iraq-Turkey border provided the Marines of CTF Provide Comfort with an opportunity to be used as a true expeditionary force rather than an amphibious force operating far from the sea. No MEU in Marine Corps history had ever been deployed so far inland. It was difficult to operate in the physical environment. The mountains in northern Iraq near the Iranian and Turkish borders range from 3,300 to 13,000 feet, and the winter weather in the region exacerbated the crisis, with some areas seeing up to 18 feet of snow. A number of Kurdish refugee camps dotted the Iraq-Turkey border, with the Turkish village of Işıkveren hosting one of the largest camps, which housed as many as 80,000 refugees. Işıkveren was located above the 5,000-foot mark in the mountains close to the border. The spread of disease among the refugees was a grave concern, given the unsanitary living conditions they were facing. Coalition forces distributed leaflets that addressed health, sanitation, and medical concerns and noted that rain would wash garbage and human waste downhill into rivers and streams, contaminating the water and causing greater risk of disease.

Table 4. Kurdish refugee camps

Camp	Approximate number of Iraqi Kurdish refugees
Cukurca	115,000
Isikerven	80,000
Yekmal	71,000
Uzumla	60,000
New Haj	20,000
Kayadibi	12,000
Pirinceken	12,000
Schendili	10,000
Sinat	6,000
Yesilova	6,000
Unnamed camps	60,000
Total:	**452,000**

Source: Donald G. Goff, "Operation Provide Comfort" (master's thesis, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA, 1992), 7, adapted by MCUP.

During Operation Provide Comfort, the Iraqi Kurds stranded on the Iraq-Turkey border were living in what can best be described as squalid refugee encampments in the mountains. These makeshift camps were ill-equipped to handle the refugees. Sanitation was a primary cause of concern, since human excrement was present on the ground due to a lack of proper facilities. Without any materials to build shelter, the Iraqi Kurds camped outside high in the mountains; the more fortunate refugees fled their homes with their vehicles, which they used for shelter. The difficult environment required innovative ways to deliver food and water to the refugees. Airdrops by parachute were initially employed, but with limited level space available for drop zones and overcrowded conditions, they were

inherently dangerous—indeed, several refugees were killed by falling pallets as they rushed the drop zones. Many of the packages that were dropped were also damaged, including some of the water supplies, which were of vital importance. Despite these unfortunate consequences of the airdrops, the faster flow of supply distribution resulted in a more orderly distribution system that halted the immediate chaos of the starving refugees. The early delivery of relief supplies was conducted by helicopter, but here too, the limited landing zone availability in the area as well as refugees rushing into the drop zones to gather the supplies created extremely dangerous situations, especially as the helicopters were often prevented from landing due to the crowds of refugees below. Early on, desperate mothers often tossed their young babies aboard the helicopters, trying to ensure the survival of the children. The Marines of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 264 (HMM-24) developed a low-altitude rolling drop-off delivery method at 20 feet above the ground, which was low enough to ensure survival of the supplies and moving quickly enough to keep ahead of the crowds of desperate refugees. This method was quickly adopted by U.S. Army helicopter aircrews as well.[90]

The problem of widespread mines in the area of operations was addressed through a successful mine awareness campaign conducted by the POTF in the Kurdish language. Maps were created to help refugees identify which areas were dangerous due to the minefields. The mine awareness campaign also employed the refugees themselves as an additional resource to identify the location of the land mines; this was accomplished by creating instructional cards that helped the refugees identify mines and explained how to inform the responsible authorities of

their location. The campaign was successful in decreasing mine-related injuries and deaths among the refugees, particularly children.[91]

There were a substantial number of Iraqi Kurds who requested that U.S. military personnel investigate whether or not returning to Halabja was an option for them. When Marine Corps brigadier general Anthony C. Zinni sent a team to reconnoiter and assess the location, it was discovered that the area was still heavily contaminated with poisonous chemicals, so returning there was not an option. Despite this unfortunate news, the willingness of the Americans to explore the area demonstrated a strong sense of commitment to the Kurdish refugees and strengthened the relationship between the two groups. Other areas in northern Iraq were later used as intermediate waypoints to return the refugees to their homes.[92]

Economy

Given the state of crisis in northern Iraq, formal economic structures were not in place to facilitate legal economic activity. The U.S. forces established processes and procedures to reduce the amount of black-market activity in the refugee camps, primarily food aid that was being resold by some refugees. This was successfully accomplished by using ration cards for the distribution of food in several camps. Another benefit of issuing food ration cards was the reduction of incidences of intimidation by stronger refugees. The almost complete breakdown of social structure among the Kurds at anything above the immediate family level was quickly noted. Initially, each family's senior male would present himself as a leader (which caused a profusion of "tribal" leaders mentioned above). Once the immediate specter

of starvation was averted, it was noticed that groups, often based on familial relationship, would form. The stronger groups would then co-opt the distribution of food, favoring their own group/families vice other weaker groups. Fortunately, this eased as the volume of supplies increased. Not only did ration cards help reduce black-market activity but they also helped safeguard the credibility of the U.S. forces by presenting an image of "being in control."[93]

The Iraqi government-sponsored economic policies that led to northern Iraq's relative economic underdevelopment limited the financial capacity of the Iraqi Kurds to obtain military weapons to effectively fight back against the Iraqi military. While Peshmerga forces actively supported the Coalition's efforts, they were ultimately limited in their ability to obtain up-to-date weaponry and had to rely on Coalition forces to effectively secure the northern Iraq region. That the local Peshmerga, who were crowded out of their mountain refuges by the overwhelming number of refugees, did support the Coalition was to probably be expected. What was beneficial was that since they were unable to engage Iraqi security forces, they had little choice but to cede all military activity to the Coalition, making the situation just a bit easier to manage by avoiding unintentional combat engagements.

Social Structures

As noted earlier, after Turkey announced that it would be closing its borders to the Iraqi Kurds, there developed a more pronounced level of hostility between Turkish soldiers and the refugees. At the beginning of Operation Provide Comfort, Coalition forces demonstrated relatively greater levels of

sympathy toward the refugees in comparison to Turkish forces. However, the feelings of the Coalition forces evolved during the course of the operation to becoming less altruistic and more realistic as events progressed. U.S. Special Forces medics reported that they observed differences in sex-specific dynamics, including the negligent treatment of female infants that resulted in a number of unnecessary infant deaths. Medics also observed that "Kurdish men would often sit idly by as their women did much of the physical labor necessary for all of them to survive. The men often refused to wait in line for supplies or would cut in on women who had been waiting patiently."[94]

Some of the problems present might have been predicted, such as dietary preferences and restrictions that arose once the initial period of near-starvation was averted. The first influx of food supplies for Operation Provide Comfort had been diverted from the holds of ships returning with cargo from Operation Desert Storm, and so much of the food was targeted for American tastes. The Iraqi Kurdish refugees were thereby provided with large amounts of corn (which they considered food fit only for animals), beans with pork products, cranberry sauce (roundly rejected by almost all Kurds as awful), snack foods consisting primarily of candy products (which kids loved but adults did not, and which caused dental requirements to explode within a month), and vast amounts of cheeseballs (which both Kurds and Coalition personnel rejected). Other problems were unexpected, such as the coupling of an overwhelming provision of infant formula—normally a good thing—and a lack of clean water and the ability to sterilize bottles, which led to a rise in infant diarrhea and dehydration and increased the infant mortality rate.[95]

Fortunately, Peshmerga forces were able to work successfully with Coalition forces. U.S. Special Forces units were provided training that was designed to prepare them to work alongside indigenous paramilitary groups, making them adaptable to unique working conditions. Close collaboration occurred between U.S. Army brigadier general Richard Potter and colonel William P. Tangney and the senior Peshmerga commander, Omar Aswan Ibrahim, which provided Coalition leaders valuable insight on how to establish a positive working relationship with Peshmerga leaders. Colonel Tangney wanted to involve Iraqi Kurds in the construction and administration of the refugee camps, as well as the oversight of food distribution and the provision of services. Involving Iraqi Kurdish "tribal" leaders in the design of the camps was also vital to coalescing various tribes and family members.[96] This helped ensure that conflicts among camp members were minimized. Consulting with tribal leaders also established trust between the Coalition forces and the refugees.[97]

Political Structures

In the case of Operation Provide Comfort, for the first time in modern history a refugee problem was stopped as it began to unfold, and the burden of the problem was placed squarely on the offending party to the conflict: the government of Iraq. Had the usual procedures prevailed, the Coalition would have put pressure on Turkey to accept the refugees. The refugees would then be condemned to a generation or more of exile. The world might have faced a festering insurrection movement taking its frustration out on the international community, and Turkey would have been forced to accept an unstable political element in a highly sensitive

area. Instead, Iraq was forced to stop killing its own people, withdraw and restrain its military forces, restore essential services, and permit the people to reintegrate into their communities. Most important, as reintegrated Iraqi citizens living within the country's borders, the Iraqi Kurds were re-empowered to deal with the government. As a result, the possibility now exists that at least a partial or intermediate solution to the Iraq-Kurdish question might be developed.[98]

Turkey

Turkey recognized early on that it would be a major player in assisting the Iraqi Kurdish refugees massed at its border. However, as Gordon Rudd notes, "at the same time, [Turkey was] concerned about being burdened with [the Iraqi Kurds] for an indefinite period. Returning the refugees to northern Iraq was the basic goal of Turkish policy."[99] One of the key political-cultural factors overlooked in the admittedly rapid planning for Operation Provide Comfort was the tense relationship that the government of Turkey had with Kurdish populations both inside and outside its borders. Since the creation of modern Turkey in 1923, the Turkish government has denied the existence of ethnic Kurds in the country and has sought to assimilate (often forcibly) those who considered themselves to be Kurdish. Accordingly, Turkish authorities have used harsh measures, including violence, to suppress the Kurdish identity. In 1978, Abdullah Öcalan, an ethnic Kurd living in Turkey, and several of his associates founded the PKK, whose goal was to create, by armed struggle, an independent Kurdistan for all Kurds in the Middle East. The movement soon turned into an insurgency, and in 1984 the Turkish military launched an on-and-off campaign against the PKK. The

struggle was most intense during the 1990s. The PKK established a complex support network that was partially financed by criminal activities and contributions from Kurds living in Turkey and Europe. The movement also established safe havens in Iraq, Syria, and Europe.[100]

The number of Iraqi Kurdish refugees along the Iraq-Turkey border was two to three times more than the number that had crossed into Iran. Still, Turkey received disproportionately more financial assistance than Iran to help manage the crisis. This difference in assistance was justified through several additional explanations, as detailed by Thomas Weiss:

> First, the Turkish government initially refused to admit the Kurdish refugees, whereas Iran did not. Second, Turkey, as a member of NATO, had a working relationship with the Allies, whereas Iran was a pariah, especially in Washington. Moreover, Tehran wanted the UN to supply the Iranian government directly so that it could then distribute supplies to needy populations. Third, Turkey directly requested Allied assistance earlier than did Iran. . . . Iran did not request a UN military presence but accepted two thousand German paratroopers and engineers (Very few ever went to Iran. Instead, a smaller number were ultimately diverted to support Operation Provide Comfort and worked in Turkey or northern Iraq). Although the Allied intervention did not directly target the situation in the facilities, the creation of transit camps and the security created by their presence in the region indirectly facilitated a solution to the crisis on the Iranian border.[101]

Despite the long-term tensions shared between the Turkish and Kurdish populations, the Turks were full partners in mitigating the

humanitarian disaster and enabling the return of the Iraqi Kurdish refugees back to Iraq. However, one significant complicating factor was that the government of Turkey refused to authorize the Coalition to operate out of Turkey for longer than six-month increments. Without being certain that Turkey would allow Operation Provide Comfort to last for longer than six months at a time, flexible long-term planning was difficult, and even short-term logistical planning was negatively impacted. Another factor that contributed to the hostility between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurdish refugees was the general ill treatment that the refugees received from the Turkish military. U.S. forces were shocked by how the Turkish troops treated the refugees, which included stealing their relief food and selling it back to them. Pilferage of relief supplies by Turkish soldiers was a constant issue, one that the U.S. forces tolerated but the British forces did not. These different approaches occasionally created issues, though they were always resolved.[102]

There were also concerns about Kurdish reactions toward the Coalition members. It was obvious that most of the Iraqi Kurds were in dire need of assistance, but they were notoriously fragmented, not only socially but also politically. Coalition forces assisting them had to be neutral dispensers of humanitarian aid and never appear to be "playing favorites." A *New York Times* article notes that while the Turkish government was heavily criticized for its treatment of Iraqi Kurds during Operation Provide Comfort, it did allow them "to enter its territory, albeit confining them to pitiless mountain slopes where early on many children died. In addition, Turks were the main providers of aid for many weeks. When it became clear that the crisis was beyond their limited resources, they did not hesitate to let

thousands of foreign soldiers into the country's southeast for a huge rescue mission."[103]

In addition to maintaining a hostile relationship with the Iraqi Kurds, Turkey also had a shaky relationship with British and U.S. forces, which was aggravated primarily about concerns that Coalition forces were violating Turkey's sovereignty. Allegations were leveled by Turkish newspapers that the United States was covertly arming the Iraqi Kurds, with a desire to establish a sovereign Kurdish state along the Iraq-Turkey border. There was also a moment of heightened conflict with British forces when a Turkish governor attempted to loot a supply tent that had stored relief supplies for the refugees. Turkish troops came to the defense of the governor and were ready to physically defend him. Even though both Turkey and the United Kingdom are members of NATO, the Turkish government expelled 30 British soldiers as a result of the incident. The high level of international criticism of Turkey's treatment of the Iraqi Kurdish refugees generated a strong nationalist reaction in Turkey that was fueled by the Turkish media.[104]

Iran

Throughout history, Iran has generally been the most receptive state in the Middle East to Iraqi refugees, and it is geographically the most accessible country for Iraqis leaving Iraq. In 1991, an estimated 1 million Iraqis, Kurds as well as Shi'a, poured across Iraq's eastern border into Iran. While the humanitarian crisis along the Iran-Iraq border rivaled what was unraveling along the Iraq-Turkey border, Iran was viewed as an adversary of the United States, and there was consequently little collaboration between the U.S.-led Coalition and Iran. Despite lacking strong international support, Iran

implemented many initiatives to assist the influx of refugees; for example, Iran's IRGC established official refugee camps in northwest Iran and escorted Iraqi Kurds there. Despite massive Iranian efforts, relief workers noted that the situation continued to be desperate. As a *New York Times* article noted, "There is no sanitation. There are no medical services. The camp is at the foot of the mountain, the temperature is at the freezing mark, and the children are all barefoot. And there is very little food."[105]

Tensions arose between Iran and the Western Coalition about the disproportionately greater aid and financial assistance that was being provided to Turkey. Iran was specifically lacking in the resources needed to set up camps for the refugees. Shortages included medical supplies, transport vehicles, and tents. The director of the Iranian Ministry of Interior's Crisis Center for Displaced Iraqis partially blamed the West's lack of familiarity with Iranian laws and customs, while also explaining a misunderstanding: "Western European relief officials had accused Iranian authorities of reneging on a verbal agreement without realizing that a 'verbal understanding is not enough'."[106] In addition, Iran was not restrained in expressing its belief that the United States was responsible for the plight of the Iraqi Kurds.

Iraq

The "Memorandum of Understanding between the United Nations and the Republic of Iraq," signed on 19 April 1991, "permitted UN humanitarian agencies to operate throughout the country; created a route for the provision of humanitarian aid; and allowed the establishment of the United Nations Guards Contingent in Iraq."[107] This enabled Coalition forces to

establish a safe haven on the Iraqi side of the Iraq-Turkey border without fear of interference from Iraqi military forces and helped safeguard negotiations on autonomy for Kurdistan between Jalal Talabani, Massoud Barzani, and Saddam Hussein.[108]

The relationship between the Coalition and Iraq can be characterized as hostile, given the recent defeat of the Iraqi military in Operation Desert Storm. Coalition forces informed the Iraqis to "withdraw their forces from the security area [that the Coalition] had established in northeastern Iraq." They "also informed the Iraqi government that [they] were establishing the no-fly zone, and that [they] would shoot down any [Iraqi] aircraft that entered the air space."[109]

One of the greatest challenges in dealing with the Iraqi government and military forces was the lack of trust that Coalition forces and the Kurdish refugees had in dealing with the Iraqi representatives. With the ultimate goal of Operation Provide Comfort being the safe return of the refugees into Iraq, the refugees did not trust that they would be safe from harm at the hands of Iraqi police and forces if they left the security zone. As Chris Seiple writes, "Even with the apparent safety of the transition camps, the presence of the 24th MEU, and an eastward expanding security zone, there remained the problem of the 300 Iraqi regular police who were still in Zakho. As long as they were there, the Kurds would not feel secure."[110]

A variety of approaches were implemented to help resolve the issue of mistrust. One involved the issuing of safe-conduct passes to the Kurdish refugees, which communicated to Iraqi forces the following message: "Please allow the bearer of this pass safe passage. They have been sheltering in Turkey and are returning home with the assistance of

international forces. This person is not a collaborator. This person is an innocent civilian caught in circumstances beyond their control." The safe-conduct passes were issued in both English and Arabic to make them widely useful to the Iraqi forces. Another approach was to ensure that any member of the Iraqi police engaged in misconduct would be held accountable for their actions. This was achieved by the issuance of visible identification badges, which allowed the police to be publicly identified. This approach was deemed successful, as it helped identify as many as 300 imposter Iraqi police officers.[111]

Belief Systems

Given the remarkably high levels of incipient starvation among the Iraqi Kurdish refugees along the Iraq-Turkey border, the distribution of food was a prime priority of Operation Provide Comfort. U.S. military forces provided the refugees with meals ready to eat (MREs). Only after the potential for mass starvation was obviated and more normal food supplies started to become available did many of the Iraqi Kurds refuse to eat the MREs, many of which contained pork. As Muslims, Kurds are prohibited from consuming pork products, and many Kurds were adamant that they would not consume pork. While many Muslims will eat pork products if the alternative is starvation, they believe that they become ritually unclean as a result and that if the threat of death is removed, eating pork is a betrayal of their religious convictions.[112] While the MREs were only partially packaged with pork entrees, the inability of many of the refugees to read the English-language labels made it impossible for them to discern which entrees were

acceptable under Islamic dietary rules. Consequently, many refugees simply opted to eat none of the MREs once enough regular food became available.

In addition to violating Islamic dietary restrictions, much of the initial food provided to the refugees was not well-received simply because it was uncommon to the local diet. It took some time for the OFDA and the U.S. military to rectify the type of food that was being distributing to the refugees. Conversely, Turkish Kurds and the Turkish government, both of whom are predominately Sunni Muslims, distributed bulk food rations to the Iraqi Kurds that were correctly aligned with their dietary restrictions. Making the necessary adjustment to the food supply that the Coalition contracted was a direct result of the cultural intelligence that it received from a Turkish-American U.S. Army intelligence officer. Not only was the food supply adjusted to suit the cultural needs of the Iraqi Kurds, but the POTF eventually developed handbills that described the content of each MRE in the Kurdish language and provided instructions on how to prepare the meal. These handbills also included language that appealed to Islamic beliefs by including references to Allah (God).[113]

As many of the refugees were inadequately clothed and suffering from the cold and wet weather, additional clothing and blankets were key relief items. Clothing began to flow into the area relatively quickly to be disseminated to the refugees. Many refugees, however, were discontented with the clothing provided, as much of it was used, and they felt insulted by this. Serendipitously, a complete shipment of new Levi 505 blue jeans arrived in late April, but the Iraqi Kurds refused to wear them, saying they were Jewish and therefore an insult.[114] They claimed the jeans were from

the tribe of Levi; however, they did accept the jeans but then sold them to U.S. and other Coalition personnel, usually for around $10 a pair.[115]

The onset of Operation Provide Comfort coincided with the holy month of Ramadan, a period in which Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset. Ramadan began on 17 March and lasted until Eid al-Fitr on 16 April. Despite the general obligation to observe fasting during Ramadan as mandated by Shari'a, the malnourished state of the refugees was so dire that many of them did not partake in the fast.[116] However, this was fortunately not an enormous issue, for the Qur'an states exemptions to fasting, which apply to those who are on a journey, the elderly, the sick, prepubescent children, and pregnant or nursing mothers.[117] These exemptions applied to almost all the refugees.

Conclusion: Enduring Lessons on Culture from Operation Provide Comfort

As has been outlined in this case study, the cultural dimensions that went into carrying out Operation Provide Comfort were numerous. The major points are offered here, some of which have been described in more detail above:

- The initial distribution of food supplies to the Iraqi Kurdish refugees was executed with what was available, not with what was in line with Muslim dietary restrictions or Kurdish food preferences.
- The vast majority of refugees were basically healthy but hungry. Consequently, they were not yet susceptible to starvation and all the attendant illnesses that accompany starvation. This reduced the requirement for extensive hospitalization or forward-deployed medical teams. The Coalition did employ military personnel to

conduct routine population health assessments. Fortunately, the UNHCR also had an official on hand who communicated regularly with the commander of CTF Provide Comfort.

- Looking at the regular Kurdish diet, supplies of rice, flour, tomato paste, cooking oil, tea, and sugar became the norm. Potatoes could be used if they were fried; otherwise, they were generally not used. In one instance, a group of Kurdish men requested several hundred pounds of potatoes, which puzzled Coalition personnel provided within a few days. The Kurds then used the potatoes to throw at Iraqi troops.
- Infant formula was provided in quantity but required sterilization of bottles and access to clean water, neither of which was possible in the mountains. As a result, infant mortality temporarily increased.
- Social organization had broken down among the Iraqi Kurds, with almost all leaders at the basic family or family cluster level. Higher clan and tribal leadership was nearly nonexistent. As the situation stabilized; as food and shelter became available to the refugees; and as the prospect of returning to their homes in northern Iraq improved, that higher leadership began to coalesce.
- Overall, the refugees did not trust each other. Moreover, they did not trust the Turks, who, in turn, did not trust them. Neither the Iraqi Kurds nor the Turks trusted the Iraqi Arabs, and initially even the Coalition forces had to earn the trust of the Iraqi Kurds.
- Once the delivery of food supplies eased problems and regularized, Kurdish political organizations reappeared among the refugees. In this instance, most were PUK-related.

- The refugees preferred small or medium tents for family groups to allow for privacy. They did not want larger tents, which were more economical for relief personnel to bring in. For the refugees, smaller tents were easier to set up and move.
- When Coalition engineers began to build three-hole latrines, refugees would move into them as a dwelling. Even after it was pointed out that the latrines were for bodily waste functions, the refugees refused to move.
- The refugees would only use single-hole latrines due to privacy concerns. Otherwise, they would go outside, spreading urine and fecal matter about.
- The physical environment in the mountains along the Iraq-Turkey border made it necessary for Coalition personnel to be innovative in their approach to distributing humanitarian aid by developing an airdrop approach to prevent casualties among the refugees. When supplies were initially delivered by truck, refugees would swarm the vehicles, inadvertently destroying some of the supplies and increasing wastage.
- As food supplies increased and social cohesion slowly rebuilt, Coalition forces included Iraqi Kurdish leaders from all levels in the dissemination of food and the building and maintenance of tent-city refugee camps, making the Kurds responsible for themselves.
- The collaboration between U.S. and non-U.S. Coalition members fostered easier cross-cultural communication, with English being the usual lingua franca, though some Coalition leaders spoke foreign languages such as Arabic and French.

- The willingness displayed by the Coalition to carefully incorporate Kurdish leaders into the planning process, as well as adjusting to the cultural needs when required, ensured that the mission of Operation Provide Comfort was achieved as successfully as possible.
- The psychological operations support that was offered to Coalition personnel was instrumental in providing them with extensive cultural expertise, which they were in critical shortage of. This was primarily due to the fact that the U.S. forces were brought in from EUCOM rather than CENTCOM, within whose purview the Kurds of Iraq normally fell. However, it is worth noting that cultural expertise on the Kurds within CENTCOM was markedly limited due to a general lack of contact with that population.

The ultimate success of Operation Provide Comfort served as a clear indicator that the mission's objective was reached and that earlier deficiencies did not overwhelmingly hinder its accomplishment. The willingness of the U.S. military, Coalition forces, and NGOs to be flexible when necessary was a key contributing factor in the success of the mission and is a major reason why U.S. officials often cite Operation Provide Comfort as a model for humanitarian operations. Operation Provide Comfort has provided numerous lessons to be implemented in future humanitarian missions to help them be more effective. There was an initial failure by operational planners to take into consideration key cultural factors of the Iraqi Kurdish population that they intended to serve, but the willingness of Coalition leaders to listen to the feedback of the local population, intelligence officers, and the NGO community allowed for these

mistakes to be quickly rectified. These lessons set in motion the later successes of Operation Provide Comfort II (1991–96) and its successor, Operation Northern Watch (1997–2003).

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[1] Barak A. Salmoni and Paula Holmes-Eber, *Operational Culture for the Warfighter: Principles and Applications*, 2d ed. (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2011).

[2] See, for example, *Genocide in Iraq: The Anfal Campaign against the Kurds*, Middle East Watch Report (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1993); Dave Johns, "The Crimes of Saddam Hussein," PBS Frontline/World, 24 January 2006; and "Anfal Campaign and Kurdish Genocide," Kurdistan Regional Government, 1 September 2020.

[3] Gordon W. Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention: Assisting the Iraqi Kurds in Operation Provide Comfort, 1991* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2004), 36.

[4] United Nations Security Council Resolution 688, S/RES/688 (5 April 1991).

[5] LtCol Richard M. Meinhart, USAF, "Joint Task Force Proven Force: An Outstanding Success" (master's thesis, U.S. Naval War College, 1994), 17.

[6] There is an argument regarding whether the ancient Kurds were *Corduchoi* or if they were *Cyrtians* (or *Kyrtians*), a grouping of nomadic tribes. See "Cyrtians," Encyclopædia Iranica, 10 November 2011.

[7] W. H. D. Rouse, *The March Up Country: A Translation of Xenophon's* Anabasis *Into Plain English* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1947), 136.

[8] Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 4.

[9] "British Mandate for Mesopotamia," United Nations Library and Archives Geneva, accessed 27 February 2023.

[10] Peter Sluglett, *Britain In Iraq: Contriving King and Country, 1914–1932* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 42–64.

[11] Vernie Liebl, "Kurdistan Cultural Brief" (PowerPoint presentation, Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning, Marine Corps University, Quantico, VA, February 2019).

[12] Hadi Elis, "The Kurdish Demand for Statehood and the Future of Iraq," *Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies* 29, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 192.

[13] Archie Roosevelt Jr., "The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad," *Middle East Journal* 1, no. 3 (July 1947): 247–69.

[14] Robert Rossow Jr., "The Battle of Azerbaijan, 1946," *Middle East Journal* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1956): 17–32.

[15] Col Pesach Malovany, IDF (Ret), *Wars of Modern Babylon: A History of the Iraqi Army from 1921 to 2003* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017), 37–78.

[16] Johns, "The Crimes of Saddam Hussein." The Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party was a political party that ruled Iraq from 1968, when Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr led a coup d'état to overthrow the Iraqi monarchy, until 2003, when the U.S.-led "coalition of the willing" invaded the country. The party's ideology was influenced by secularism, socialism, Pan-Arabization, and independence from Western influence.

[17] Malovany, *Wars of Modern Babylon*, 37–78.

[18] Malovany, *Wars of Modern Babylon*, 37–78.

[19] Malovany, *Wars of Modern Babylon*, 37–78.

[20] Martin van Bruinessen, *Mullas, Sufis, and Heretics: The Role of Religion in Kurdish Society: Collected Articles* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011), 213–30.

[21] David McDowall*, A Modern History of the Kurds*, rev. 3d ed. (London: I. B. Taurus, 2005).
[22] The Ba'athists of Syria had long disputed leadership of the movement with the Iraqi Ba'athists. Moreover, Iraq disapproved of Syria's invasion of Lebanon in 1976 as well as Syria's intent to limit the flow of the Euphrates River by building a dam.
[23] Steven R. Ward, *Immortal: A Military History of Iran and Its Armed Forces* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 286–312.
[24] Ward, *Immortal*, 286–312.
[25] Ward, *Immortal*, 286–312.
[26] Malovany, *Wars of Modern Babylon*, 95–131.
[27] *Genocide in Iraq*.
[28] Malovany, *Wars of Modern Babylon*, 665–71.
[29] The capital of the Kurdistan Regional Government (Kurdish Iraq) is Erbil, which can also be spelled as *Irbil* or *Arbil*. The city dates back to Sumerian/Akkadian era, making the name at least 3,500 years old. While there is no Department of Defense/Central Command standard for the name, *Erbil* is phonetically the closest to the actual sound of the city's name that English speakers can pronounce. However, Kurds refer to the city as *Hewler* or *Hawler*, which is a corruption of the Greek *Arbela*. Local Assyrian Christians, who also live in and around the city, refer to it as *Arba-ilu* (or *Arbela* for Western historians). Similar issues impact the Kurdish-Iraqi cities of Duhok, often spelled *Dohuk*, *Dahuk* or *Dihok*, and Sulaymaniyah, which can be spelled *Sulaymaniyyah* (the Arabic spelling), *Sulemania*, *Soleymani*, *Sulaimani*, *Silemani* or *Slemania* (as Kurds pronounce it). The name *Sulaymaniyah* comes from *Soloman*/*Suleiman*, a corruption of the city's namesake, Sulaiman Baban, who died in 1703.
[30] Malovany, *Wars of Modern Babylon*, 672–81.
[31] These six Iraqi Republican Guard divisions included the Al-Madina, Hammurabi, Nebuchadnezzar, Al-Abed, Al-Nida, and Special Forces divisions.
[32] Malovany, *Wars of Modern Babylon*, 672–81.
[33] The large Kurdish-inhabited areas of the governorates of Ninewa, Kirkuk, and Diyala were not considered part of Iraqi Kurdistan.
[34] McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 365–92.
[35] "Kurdistan Region Climate," Presidency of the Kurdistan Region–Iraq, accessed 23 February 2023.
[36] LtCol Ronald J. Brown, USMCR, *Humanitarian Operations in Northern Iraq, 1991: With Marines in Operation Provide Comfort* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1995), 29.
[37] Almas Heshmati, Alan Dilani, and Serwan M. J. Baban, eds., *Perspectives on Kurdistan's Economy and Society in Transition*, vol. 2 (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2013), 287.
[38] Denise Natali, *The Kurdish Quasi-State: Development and Dependency in Post-Gulf War Iraq* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 23.
[39] Natali, *The Kurdish Quasi-State*, 29–51.
[40] Amir Hassanpour, "A Stateless Nation's Quest for Sovereignty in the Sky" (paper presented at the Free University of Berlin, Germany, 7 November 1995), 3.
[41] Brian A. Kennedy, "The Shaikh's Republic: The Kurdish Regional Government's Incorporation of Tribalism" (political honors paper, Ursinus College, 2015), 40.
[42] "Iraqi Kurdistan Profile," *BBC News*, accessed 26 July 2016.
[43] McDowall*, A Modern History of the Kurds*, 305–40.

[44] Talabani would remain the leader of the PUK until his death in October 2017.
[45] These liberated zones were to be called *Rojhalat*, meaning *east* in Kurdish, as opposed to *Rojava*, used by Kurds in Syria in 2015–20, meaning *west*.
[46] Ranj Alaaldin, "A Dangerous Rivalry for the Kurds," *New York Times*, 16 December 2014.
[47] Kennedy, "The Shaikh's Republic," 29–32.
[48] Kennedy, "The Shaikh's Republic," 37–39.
[49] Kennedy, "The Shaikh's Republic," 48.
[50] Kennedy, "The Shaikh's Republic," 40–41.
[51] "Kurdish Tribes," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 20 June 2004.
[52] "Timeline: Iraqi Kurds," *BBC News*, 19 April 2011.
[53] Hassanpour, "A Stateless Nation's Quest for Sovereignty in the Sky," 3.
[54] Michael J. Totten, "The Trouble with Turkey: Erdogan, ISIS, and the Kurds," *World Affairs* 178, no. 3 (Fall 2015): 5–12.
[55] Totten, "The Trouble with Turkey," 5–12.
[56] "Profile: Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)," *BBC News*, 27 July 2015.
[57] Hassanpour, "A Stateless Nation's Quest for Sovereignty in the Sky," 3.
[58] "Syria: The Silenced Kurds," Human Rights Watch, October 1996.
[59] Hassanpour, "A Stateless Nation's Quest for Sovereignty in the Sky," 3.
[60] Hassanpour, "A Stateless Nation's Quest for Sovereignty in the Sky," 3.
[61] Dialectology is a necessary subfield of historical linguistics for the Kurds. It studies variations in language based primarily on geographic distribution and associated features. Dialectology treats such topics as the divergence of two local dialects from a common ancestor and synchronic variation. Dialectologists are ultimately concerned with grammatical features that correspond to regional areas.
[62] W. M. Thackston, "Sorani Kurdish: A Reference Grammar with Selected Readings," Harvard University, accessed 10 March 2016.
[63] Liebl, "Kurdistan Cultural Brief."
[64] Brown, *Humanitarian Operations in Northern Iraq*, 4.
[65] Johns, "The Crimes of Saddam Hussein."
[66] Johns, "The Crimes of Saddam Hussein."
[67] Johns, "The Crimes of Saddam Hussein."
[68] Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 224.
[69] Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 59.
[70] Malovany, *Wars of Modern Babylon*, 665–71.
[71] Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 210–11.
[72] Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 36–37.
[73] The nations supporting Operation Provide Comfort included the United States, Turkey, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Canada, Spain, Australia, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Luxembourg.
[74] Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 229.
[75] Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 237–43.
[76] "Profile: Turkey's Marxist DHKP-C," *BBC News*, 2 February 2013.
[77] *Terrorist Tactics and Security Practices* (Washington. DC: Department of State, 1994), 20–35.
[78] Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 60.
[79] Relief agencies operating in Turkey and northern Iraq from April to July 1991 included the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and World Food

Programme, the Swedish National Rescue Services Board and Swedish Rescue Services Agency, and more than 30 international nongovernmental organizations. Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 60.

[80] Chris Seiple, *The U.S. Military/NGO Relationship in Humanitarian Interventions* (Carlisle, PA: Peacekeeping Institute, Center for Strategic Leadership, U.S. Army War College, 1996), 22–23.

[81] Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 42.

[82] Brown, *Humanitarian Operations in Northern Iraq*, 30–31.

[83] Brown, *Humanitarian Operations in Northern Iraq*.

[84] These religious leaders presumably included Assyrian Christians who had been misidentified by Saddam Hussein's regime in 1987 as Kurds.

[85] Brown, *Humanitarian Operations in Northern Iraq*, 50–55.

[86] Brown, *Humanitarian Operations in Northern Iraq*, 25.

[87] LtCol John P. Cavanaugh, USA, *Operation Provide Comfort: A Model for Future NATO Operations* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1992), 12–13.

[88] Brown, *Humanitarian Operations in Northern Iraq*, 93–94.

[89] John Kifner, "After the War: Green Berets Bring Food and Discipline to Kurds," *New York Times*, 25 April 1991.

[90] Brown, *Humanitarian Operations in Northern Iraq*, 29–30.

[91] Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 187–88.

[92] Joost R. Hiltermann *A Poisonous Affair: American, Iraq, and the Gassing of Halabja* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 224–44.

[93] Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 89–92.

[94] Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 102.

[95] Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 91.

[96] There were no actual tribal leaders but rather family and later clan leaders. This was and continues to be a U.S. misapprehension that tribalism, specifically Arab tribalism, is the be-all, end-all in the Middle East, but it is not.

[97] Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 75.

[98] Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 210–11.

[99] Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 62.

[100] Walter L. Perry et al., eds., *Operation Iraqi Freedom: Decisive War, Elusive Peace* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2015), 111.

[101] Thomas G. Weiss, *Military-Civilian Interactions: Humanitarian Crises and the Responsibility to Protect* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 49.

[102] Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 16.

[103] Clyde Haberman, "Turks Angry as Kurd Aid Backfires," *New York Times*, 17 May 1991.

[104] Haberman, "Turks Angry as Kurd Aid Backfires."

[105] Michael Wines, "After the War: Kurds Trudge into Iran, Filling a Village 6 Times," *New York Times*, 14 April 1991.

[106] Alan Cowell, "After the War: Iranian Says West Has Failed to Deliver Some Kurdish Aid," *New York Times*, 8 May 1991.

[107] "Timeline: Iraqi Kurds."

[108] "Iraqi Kurds, Operation Provide Comfort, and the Birth of Iraq's Opposition," Association for Diplomatic

Studies and Training, 10 February 2016.
[109] "Iraqi Kurds, Operation Provide Comfort, and the Birth of Iraq's Opposition."
[110] Seiple, *The U.S. Military/NGO Relationship in Humanitarian Interventions*, 37.
[111] Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 117–18.
[112] Ali Al Saloom, *Ask Ali: Why Pork is Forbidden for Muslims* (The Nation [UAE], 13 Dec 2012).
[113] Rudd, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 88–91.
[114] Levi Strauss was founded by a Jewish German-American.
[115] Brown, *Humanitarian Operations in Northern Iraq*, 99.
[116] *Shari'a* is Islamic canonical law based on the teachings of the Qur'an (also spelled *Koran*) and the traditions of the Prophet (Hadith and Sunna) that prescribes both religious and secular duties and sometimes retributive penalties for lawbreaking. It is the ideal law of God as interpreted by Muslim scholars over centuries aimed toward justice, fairness, and mercy. Shari'a is overwhelmingly concerned with personal religious observance, such as prayer and fasting, and not with national laws.
[117] Qur'an 2:183–87 (Yusuf Ali translation).