THE KURDISH DILEMMA IN IRAQ:
INDEPENDENCE VS. AUTONOMY

by

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the dilemma faced by the Kurds in Iraq: press for independence or sustain autonomy. In the wake of World War I, betrayed by the colonial rulers, the Kurds lost their prospect for independence. The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire was a precursor to a more rigorous Kurdish quest for statehood. Saddam Hussein's atrocities against the Kurds amounted to the *de facto* state of Kurdistan in northern Iraq. Despite considerable progress, polarized debates over the reconstruction of Iraq post 2003 have generated concerns over the probable emergence of an independent Kurdistan. Nevertheless, the Kurdish leaders have insisted upon autonomy within a federal Iraq and have rejected partition as a solution to Iraq's ethno-sectarian conflict. They believe autonomy serves their nationalist aspirations further in preserving regional self-governance.

Keywords: Partition; Independence; Autonomy; Kurdistan; Iraq

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ACRONYMS

KDP   Kurdistan Democratic Party

KRG   Kurdistan Regional Government

PKK   Kurdish Workers' Party

PUK   Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The toppling of Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime in 2003 sparked a renewed debate about the future of the Kurds in Iraq and the viability of an independent state of Kurdistan. The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire in the early part of the twentieth century had laid the seeds for Kurdish statehood. The Treaty of Sevres, in 1920, allowed for the formation and validation of a fully independent Kurdistan but this was soon quashed by the imperial powers.

The Kurds rightly believe that they have long served as pawns in a vicious game of de-colonization and imperialism. With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Britain and France promised the Kurds their own, independent state as outlined in the Treaty of Sevres. However, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the Turkish republic, summarily declared the treaty void. The Kurds then found themselves living as minorities, spread throughout the newly created states of Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran. However, Kurdish nationalist aspirations for an independent state or, at the very least, regional autonomy, have remained fiercely alive.

The Iraqi Kurds have enjoyed *de facto* independence since 1991. This is mainly due to the non-intervention of the US when President Bush Sr. encouraged an uprising against the Baathist regime and promised to support their revolt. The Kurds in the north and the Shiite Arabs in the south rose to overthrow the Baathist regime. The United States was caught in a dilemma of whether or not to actively assist in the revolt. It chose

not to for two reasons: the American administration feared that if the Shiite Arabs succeeded in the south, they would turn Iraq to an Iranian-style theocratic state; and secondly, if the Kurds succeeded in the north, Iraq might break up with the Kurds seeking an independent state. The US remains concerned about both possibilities.

The gassing of the Kurds by Saddam's troops in 1988 and the subsequent invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 led to the creation of a UN sponsored "safe haven". The US and the UK provided troops and weapons systems to enforce a no-fly-zone, in 1991. Kurdistan was gradually transformed into a quasi-independent entity "politically and administratively, [and with] separate political institutions (parliament, regional government and political parties), infrastructure, security arrangements and economic development all have contributed to this process" (Salih).

An autonomous Kurdistan within Iraq is a precarious entity. Having almost full control over its natural resources and a relatively large share of Iraq's oil revenues, Kurdistan displays the characteristics of a *de facto* state within a state. With its own constitution and parliament, flag and militia, its own border and official stamp with which to mark visitor's passports (Carnes, "Qubad"), Kurdistan has created the impression that it is truly a sovereign entity. Indeed, it even has its own Washington representation.

Kurdish leadership and power are not exclusive to Kurdistan, as there are also many Kurdish representatives in the national government in Baghdad. The current, elected, Iraqi President, the Deputy Prime Minister, and the Foreign Minister, are Kurds. In addition, Kurds occupy six other cabinet posts, as well as other positions within

various national institutions and organizations. They have been involved, since 2003, in the reconstruction of Iraq, while also maintaining self-governance over their own affairs. While administrative and political authorities and institutions have been badly fractured in the Arab region of Iraq, Kurdistan has managed to preserve its institutions and police forces and retained economic stability. This is, in part, due to a considerable amount of foreign aid and the above mention efforts by the UN, the US and Britain.

Kurdistan is, currently, the most secure and stable region within Iraq and Kurdish identity is present in everyday life. Until recently, the Kurdish flag alone was flying on governmental buildings and Kurdish logos remain visible on the security forces. Kurdish is also the common language throughout the area. According to Gareth Stansfield, in their unambiguous efforts to break "linguistically" from the rest of Iraq, "English is now being promoted as the second language in Kurdish schools and colleges" ("Divide" 7). The younger generation does not speak Arabic, and the older generation cautiously observes the new Iraq and looks optimistically toward possible independence.

Many Kurds viewed the invasion of Iraq, in 2003, as a logical step toward independence. But the question of an independent Kurdish state remains open, even though it is clear that a very large number of Kurds desire statehood. In an unofficial referendum compiled in 2005, an overwhelming majority of Kurds voted for an independent Kurdistan. Yet, independence will not be easily attained. Kurdistan's not-so-friendly neighbours, its geopolitical position, and most importantly, claims to the oil-rich province of Kirkuk, are impediments to achieving complete independence. Under such conditions, autonomy within the Iraqi state may be a better, more viable alternative

to independence. However, arguing for autonomy does not negate the significance of the Kurdish quest for statehood later.

As the ethno-sectarian conflict in Iraq remains unresolved, one of the most commonly suggested proposals to curb the violence is partition. This would involve dividing Iraq along ethnic and religious lines, thereby creating two or three separate states. This plan would provide separate homelands for the Shiites, the Sunnis and the Kurds. Whether the partition strategy provides for a two or three state solution, the Kurds are the most likely to gain a sovereign state. A partitioned Iraq would automatically validate an independent Kurdistan. An important question remains, however, namely the implications for the broader Middle East of an independent Kurdistan.

The aim of this paper is not to offer a 'perfect' solution, as there is no single proposal that satisfies each group's or individual's desires. Rather it argues that autonomy is an alternative which is of long-term strategy of benefit to the Kurds, providing Iraq does not disintegrate. Proposed solutions that seek to address the issue of ethno-sectarian conflict in Iraq range from federalism to power sharing, as well as to partitioning the state. This paper makes reference to the latter two possibilities, but the focus of the discussion will be on partition, which is seen as the most radical option.

Some argue that the partitioning of Iraq is inevitable. They believe that it is only a matter of time, as Iraq is already demographically separated into ethno-sectarian regions (Galbraith, "Make Walls"). Forced partition, they claim, would expedite and legitimize the process that would otherwise take place over a longer period, with much shedding of

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blood. Underlying the proposal is the idea that partitioning would end the ethno-sectarian violence, which is believed to exist because enemies are forced to live and compete with one another.

The critics of partition argue that this strategy hinders efforts toward peace and violates the basic principles of the sovereignty of states. Is this argument valid with respect to the different groups that were long ago lumped together to form the modern state of Iraq? This paper explains that these smaller entities need international approval and recognition as independent states in order to succeed economically and politically. It is difficult, if not impossible, for them to succeed if powerful regional forces oppose independence.

The following chapters analyse the problems of, and prospects for, an independent Kurdistan both regionally and internationally. This paper argues that partition is not a viable solution to ending the current violence or preventing future violence. This paper discusses alternative paths to the Kurdish quest for self-governance. It argues that currently independence has little or no international or regional support. However, the prospects for autonomy within a multi-ethnic Iraq, an arrangement that would have many of the attributes of sovereignty, are very promising. The focus here is primarily on the Kurds in Iraq because their aspirations for greater autonomy are more practicable than the rest of the Kurds situated elsewhere in the Middle East. Included is a brief look at the regional status of other Kurds by way of explaining the improbability of a pan-Kurdistan.

Chapter 2 reviews the academic debate regarding the pros and cons of partition. The Kurdish quest for independence would involve the partition of Iraq. Chapter 3 examines the relevance of partition theories to Iraq and to the Kurds. The chapter analyzes the regional and international implications of an independent Kurdistan. Chapter 4 discusses independence vs. autonomy. It includes a brief historical background of the Kurds and the principle of self-determination. The role of oil in Kurdistan is discussed in Chapter 5, which also reviews the argument over the incorporation of Kirkuk into Kurdistan, and the implementation of Article 140 of the new Iraqi constitution. A discussion on nationalism is the focus of Chapter 6 wherein details on the evolution of Kurdish nationalism are presented. It is argued that as Kurdish nationalism has evolved since the 1920s, so has the aspiration for independence. The paper concludes with Chapter 7 wherein is a discussion of the possible future for Kurdistan, as well as arguments opposing partition, and advocating for the autonomy for Kurdish nationalists.

CHAPTER 2: THEORIZING PARTITION

Partition is the division of a sovereign state into smaller entities of two or more, with defined boundaries (O'Leary, "Analyzing Partition" 2). O'Leary further defines partition as separating "…a previously unified territorial entity into two or more parts, which may be marked with borders, codified in new maps" (*ibid.*). As with any discourse, diverse and divergent views and opinions are brought to the notion of partition. As proponents and opponents convey their arguments, skewed reactions to partition are to be expected.

Although perceived by some as a necessary tool with which to implement peace and stability over ethnic conflict, scholars offer dissimilar perspectives on partition. Advocates and proponents reach contradictory conclusions as to whether partition is the only solution to resolving ethnic conflict. Some believe that partition is a radical, but useful method of homogenizing ethnic groups who cannot live peacefully together. Others consider the process dangerous in that it sets a precedent for future secessionist groups desiring independent nationhood. This chapter examines both perspectives.

2.1: Pros

Avid exponents of partition maintain that peace is unattainable unless a state already divided by religious or ethnic strife is physically partitioned into a number of ethnically or religiously independent, homogenous states (Mearsheimer and Pape; Mearsheimer and Van Evera; Kaufmann). These proponents espouse absolute partition,

and not *de facto* or soft partition as was developed and agreed upon in the Dayton Accord regarding Bosnia.

Chaim Kaufmann emphasizes the importance of separating warring ethnic factions into homogenous territories where the possibilities of ethnic cleansing are non-existent. Only under such circumstances, he believes, are there probabilities of lasting peace. Otherwise, the spectre of the 'security dilemma' poses an ongoing threat to the ethnic and religious identities of diverse groups. On this, Kaufman argues, "intermingled population settlement patterns create real security dilemmas that intensify violence, motivate ethnic cleansing, and prevent de-escalation unless the groups are separated" (Kaufmann, "Possible" 137). Kaufmann further notes, "the severity of ethnic security dilemmas is greatest when demography is most intermixed, weakest when community settlements are most separate" (*ibid*. 148). Once ethnic or religious conflict increases or crosses a certain perceivable boundaries, all parties are susceptible to the security dilemma (Posen 27-47). Each side fears the other. One way to resolve this is to separate them along ethnic and religious lines. The aim of partition, then, is to decrease the security dilemma between warring groups (*ibid*.).

Another factor raised by partition advocates is the matter of control over the state's armed forces. In a disintegrated, ethnically intermixed state, one group usually controls the armed forces, thereby enforcing dominance over the weaker factions. Seeking security, the weaker groups then organize an armed resistance (*ibid*.). Thereby, each side feels threatened by the other, creating a "security dilemma" (Kaufmann, "Possible" 139). Kaufmann and Mearsheimer argue that the only solution to easing the

security dilemma is the physical division of the warring factions. In such instances, the ingrown ethnic animosities and resentments are not solvable by "power-sharing, state re-building, or identity reconstruction" (*ibid.* 139). In inter-mixed territories "each side has a strong incentive … at both national and local levels … to kill or drive out enemy populations before the enemy does the same to it, as well as to create homogeneous enclaves more practical to defend" (*ibid*. 148). The only solution is for the newly formed entities to be "militarily and economically viable" (Mearsheimer and Pape 23).

Advocates of partition argue that if populations are not separated along ethnic and religious lines, the chances of renewed hostilities or conflicts are high. Through the efforts of external interveners the partitioning of states will diminish the possibilities of dominant groups forcing out the weaker segments. John Mearsheimer's solution for an end to the conflict in Bosnia was to partition the state into three homogenously independent states, one each for Muslims, Croats and Serbs. Mearsheimer and Pape proposed the migration of minority populations into the newly created homogenous states, administered and managed by the United Nations' Commission of "Balkan Population Exchange" (23).

In their article, Mearsheimer and Stephen Van Evera express concern and disappointment at the results of the Dayton Accord, particularly for its *de facto* partitioning of Bosnia (21). They claim that the different groups in Bosnia would be prompted to separate at the first opportunity. Mearsheimer was in favour of complete partition for Bosnia, not *de facto* statehood.

Kaufmann acknowledges that partition has been perceived unfavourably for many decades. He insists, though, that it should be seriously considered as an alternative in certain situations. He advocates territorial divisions where warring ethnic groups are already separated from one another. Kaufmann's reasoning is that war terminates any "possibilities for ethnic cooperation" ("Possible" 137). He opposes the forced reunification of ethnic groups after war, particularly after they have lived separately, such as in the case of the former Yugoslavia. In such instances, advocating for a loose autonomy or partition toward sovereignty may salvage the situation.

Advocates of partition also raise the issue of humanitarian intervention as a method of ending violence between disputatious groups. Kaufmann proposes territorially separating ethnically conflicting groups with the aim of attaining a more manageable result. Ethnically mixed communities increase the risk of ethnic cleansing and genocide. Kaufmann insists that an end to intrastate violence is attainable with external humanitarian intervention, but for a very limited period and under the control of the intervening powers.

As partition is often synonymous with sovereignty, Kaufmann argues, humanitarian intervention in an effort to save lives is a more important reason to create homogenous territories than sovereignty. However, sovereignty is achievable if ethnic communities are not coerced into forming one united country. Instead, it is imperative to encourage and organize "population movements to create true national homelands" (Kaufmann, "Possible" 137). Kaufmann favours partition as a resort to save lives, but he is adamant that saving lives can come about only by separating the warring groups. He

concurs that some of the past partitions (India, Ireland, and Israel, for example) have resulted in a great deal of violence between the separated communities. Still, he is convinced that, if done correctly, partitioning can minimize violence ("When All Else Fails" 120-156).

2.2: Cons

While proponents of partition see humanitarian intervention as a tool to decrease the security dilemma, critics deem it a much less effective method in bringing peace and stability to intrastate conflict. Partition, with or without humanitarian intervention, they argue, is not a solution to ending intrastate conflict. The separation of the Bosnian communal population, for example, did not create peace. In fact, it resulted in the opposite outcome. In the period following the post-Dayton Agreement, the Serbian government resorted to the violent ethnic cleansing of 1.6 million Kosovo-Albanians. Without international intervention, a regional war may have broken out in the Balkans "involving Albania, Macedonia and perhaps Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey" (Mearsheimer and Pape 24).

Opponents claim that partitioning communities into ethnically homogenous territories is ethnic cleansing in a different guise. Partition, they argue, causes mass movements of populations, resulting in displacement and hardship. In many instances, such movements are involuntary. For instance, the partition of Palestine produced a large number of refugees fleeing into neighbouring countries. Many of these dislocated Palestinians feel resentment still, for the loss of their homes and land.

Nicholas Sambanis maintains that scholars have so far focused on partition as a method of ending on-going civil wars rather than as a strategy in preventing the rise of future conflicts (437-83). In a statistical study conducted in 2000, Sambanis rejected Kaufmann's argument that partition offers a viable solution toward ending ethnic conflict. Sambanis argues that partition simply does not reduce the risks of re-occurring conflicts.

In fact, his findings indicate that partition tends to trigger the reappearance of even more ethnic conflict. He points to a number of recurrent conflicts in post-partition nations:

> Croatia fought a second war with Serbia after it was partitioned in 1991. Ethiopia and Eritrea fought a bitter territorial war in 1999–2000 after being partitioned in 1991. The partition of Somaliland collapsed in a wave of new violence in 1992. India and Pakistan have fought three wars since their partition in 1947. Cyprus was at war again in 1974 after it was effectively partitioned into militarily defensible, self-administered enclaves between 1963 and 1967. (464)

In contrast, Sambanis notes that a few countries - South Africa, Guatemala, and Uganda – having been afflicted with civil wars and ethnic conflicts, eventually achieved peace without resorting to partition.

In Ethnic Groups in Conflict, Donald Horowitz also refutes the claim that partition creates ethnically homogenous states. The majority of states, he contends, are not heterogeneous. Moreover, it takes time to bring about peace and harmony in newly separated states. He adds that ethnicity should not be a catalyst for building homogenous

states ("Cracked Foundation" 5-17). In addition, partition may cause intrastate wars to spill over into the surrounding region and possibly trigger regional or international wars. Horowitz points to the possession of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan and the ongoing disputes between the two states following the partition of India.

Furthermore, Horowitz indicates that the partition of one particular state disturbs the ethnic balance and propels other ethnic factions in the "truncated state" to consider whether to remain or attempt separation ("Cracked" 11). For example, the creation of Bangladesh undermined the relationship among the remaining diverse communities in Pakistan. Horowitz argues, "the only thing secessions and partition are unlikely to produce is ethnically homogeneous or harmonious states" (Ethnic 589). There will always remain a group (or groups) of minorities within secessionist and rump states, which are likely, to be found the target of harassment and, at times, ethnic cleansing. Partition, Horowitz confirms, is not "the end of an old bitterness but the beginning of new bitterness" ("Cracked" 9).

Another factor that critics of partition put forward is its role as a provisional solution to conflicts (Kumar "the Troubled" 33). Radha Kumar contends that, historically, partition has been inflicted as a form of decolonization, to abate exacerbated tension and to provoke involuntary mass migration. These issues have been evidenced in the cases of Cyprus, India, Palestine, and Ireland (*ibid*. 24). Kumar refers to partition as a method by which to "divide and be forced to stay," (*ibid*.) as ethnic strife will not be eradicated by the re-drawing of boundaries. As evident in the case of Bosnia, NATO forces will have to remain there indefinitely to dispel further eruptions of violence.

Warring factions have rarely agreed as to where the lines between them are to be drawn. It is not an easy task to draw neat, tidy lines separating ethnic and religious enclaves. It is a messy process in which there are always losers. In the event of separating warring communities, disputes over territories will not dissipate as easily as the interveners might wish. Post-partition affairs and interactions between most divided communities persist because of intense and prolonged animosities. The disputes over Kashmir, for example, have not subsided since the original partitioning of India. There is also the tricky issue of intermarriage between communities in conflict.

Another concern in drawing borders purely along ethnic or religious lines is the high probabilities of some members of ethnic and/or religious minorities remaining in partitioned or rump states. Horowitz points to "Hindus in Kashmir, Muslims in Tamil areas of Sri Lanka, Javanese in Aceh and Irian Jaya, [and] Serbs and Roma in Kosovo" ("Cracked" 8). In such circumstances, partition advocates optimistically propose that the rights of minorities will be maintained in newly formed rump or secessionist states. However, such rights are difficult to guarantee, as it is usually the desire of the majority to rule over the minority (though not necessarily in a democratic manner). It is this form of governing which stimulates "secessionist movement in the first instance" (*ibid*.). Horowitz further questions the necessity of dividing a state if the guarantee of minority protection is not certain. He also questions the necessity to espouse partition if such provisions could be implemented in the "undivided state" to prevent break-up (*ibid*. 8-9). Internationally, the mistreatment of minority groups often remains unnoticed, and their rights cannot be guaranteed and monitored (*ibid*.).

Furthermore, cases such as "Kashmir, Serb claims in Bosnia and in the Krajina region of Croatia, warfare between Ethiopia and Eritrea" are reminders of the dangers of a domestic conflict turning into an international war. This is often provoked by the desire of the newly formed entities or the rump states to reclaim marooned minorities outside of their borders (*ibid*.).

There are no guarantees, of course, that partitioning will not result in bloodshed and involuntary dislocation. Opponents of partition site the case of India, where more than a million people lost their lives in internecine fighting. Another often sited example is that of Palestine, where an enormous number of refugees were forced to flee their homes and property to find shelter in neighbouring countries. Furthermore, the population of the former Soviet Union was never distributed along ethnic lines, and the breakup of the Union has not resolved the problems in Chechnya.

CHAPTER 3: PARTITIONING IRAQ

Partitioning Iraq along ethnic and religious lines amounts to allowing the Shiites and Kurds to take possession of the oil rich territories of the country. This would leave the Sunnis with land that may, or may not, render up oil revenues in the future, as little of their land has been explored. Peter Galbraith's solution to this predicament is for the Shiites and the Kurds to assure the Sunnis a share of their oil revenues for a prescribed period of time. While this may be a recipe for a quick partitioning of Iraq, Galbraith's prescription is perhaps unduly optimistic about the 'good faith' of the Shiites and Kurds once the oil revenues start to pour in.

While the Shiites constitute 60 percent of Iraq's population they have been continuously discriminated against, and restrained from holding or even sharing power in Baghdad. However, in the years since the overthrow of the Baathist regime the Shiites have been instrumental in reconstruction efforts in Iraq. They do not desire a partitioned Iraq because they want to rule the entire nation (Rafaat, "an Independent" 277). Some of the strongest opposition to partition has arisen from Muqtada al-Sadr's Shiite movement, which perceives "partition or hard federalism…as a divide and rule tactic," and a blow to Iraqi national identity (Stansfield, "Divide" 1).

The Sunni Arabs, the original holders of power in Iraq, are even more adamant in rejecting partition (Rafaat, "an Independent" 277). They see partition as destabilizing their long-held dominant position within the state. In addition, the Sunnis would

fervently resist any settlement that denies them ready access to oil. Their opposition to

partition also stems from their historical role as the vanguards in maintaining a largely

Arab character in Iraq.

The one group that might seem to most benefit from partition would be the Kurds.

They "have felt deprived of their basic right to self-determination and an independent

Kurdistan, and so their main interest is to escape from its boundaries" (Rafaat, "an

Independent" 277), but as will be discussed later in this paper, this option may be not

viable at present.

3.1: The Biden-Brownback Proposal – De Facto Partition

The Bush administration has consistently called for unity in Iraq, rather than

partition. However, in 2006, Democratic Senator Joseph Biden and Sam Brownback,

Republican of Kansas, proposed a plan that strongly recommended the "soft

partition[ing]" of Iraq into three autonomous entities. These would comprise a Shiite

south, a Sunni centre, and a Kurdish north (Galbraith, "Make"). Modeled on the Dayton

Accords for Bosnia, this plan allows Iraq to remain as one nation. Governmentally, the

country would be decentralized, characterized by a weak central government with strong

regional authorities. Leslie Gelb, an avid supporter of decentralization for Iraq, claims

that this is the only way to keep the country united. However, Iraq is not Bosnia. In the

case of Bosnia, the neighbouring states of Serbia and Croatia zealously recommended

and were insistent that Bosnia accedes to partition (Rubin A15). Iraq's neighbours are

adamantly against any division of Iraq.

The response to the Biden-Brownback "loose federalism" plan has not been encouraging. Nouri al-Maliki, the Iraqi President, has proclaimed that the proposal is a surreptitious plan for Iraq's eventual partition. Al-Maliki's cabinet was united in stating, "The Iraqi government categorically rejects the resolution" (Dreyfuss). Biden, however, claims that his plan is far different from partition in the sense that it allows each ethnic and religious group a region of its own, replete with more power than that held by the central government (Galbraith "Make"). However, this could create another set of intra-sectarian conflict - Shiites versus Shiites, for example.

Biden's proposal restricts the current population of one region to form a "state" and allows only the creation of individual regions comprised of an identical group: Sunnis with Sunnis, Shiites with Shiites and Kurds with Kurds ("Iraq: Kurdish Paper"). This amounts to "devolving most functions to ethnically defined entities" (Galbraith "Make"). Under the Biden-Brownback proposal, each group is restricted to one specific region. Meanwhile, the Iraqi constitution identifies a geographical basis for the creation of regions, with no basis on ethnicity or sectarianism ("Iraq: Kurdish Paper").

The Biden-Brownback proposal requires the active presence of the United Nations in Iraq to monitor and guarantee the administration of soft partition. However, the United Nations currently is almost non-existent in Iraq. The UN evacuated the country immediately after the attack on the UN headquarters in Baghdad that killed Special Envoy Sergio de Mello and at least 14 others in August 2003 (UN News Centre). Furthermore, the Biden-Brownback proposal does not offer assurances that 'soft partition' would not result in more bloodshed. Partition is not a solution to ending the

war in Iraq; it will not ease the sectarian violence as each of the militias aspire to exert

dominance and control over all of Iraq, not just a portion of the country (Rubin A15).

3.2: Impediments to Partition

Most nations are heterogeneous and comprise more than one ethnic and religious

grouping, "and nationalities themselves are frequently divided among two or more states"

(Henderson, Lebow, and Stoessinger 433). Very few countries in the world encompass

no minorities or a very limited number of minorities (*ibid*.). Division is not a new

concept, "nations have multiplied in the last generation, and so has division" (*ibid*.).

Despite this, most intrastate conflicts cannot be resolved by alterations to state borders by

way of granting nationalist movements their own states (Gottlieb 100).

Some observers interpret partitioning Iraq as simply another flagrant example of

colonial splitting: "what imperialists can assemble they can also disassemble" (mentioned

in Stansfield, "Divide" 1). These critics argue that partition is a favoured strategy of the

international community because it provides "an exit strategy or a means of limited

containment rather than a lasting solution to an ethnic conflict" (Kumar, "Partition" 6).

Advocates of this approach, however, view partition as the only possible exit

strategy for the US in Iraq (Galbraith, "the Case"). Peter Galbraith, a proponent of an

independent Kurdistan, strongly supports the Biden-Brownback proposal. He claims that

partition is the one obvious and viable method of ending the civil war. He also suggests

splitting Iraq "into separate Kurdish, Sunni and Shiite states" (*ibid*.). Ironically, a key

conceptual proponent of partition, Chaim Kaufmann, stands in opposition to division of

Iraq. Partition, he asserts, will destabilize the Middle East. He further notes that the state

actors in the region – Iran, Syria and Turkey – will each react differently to partition in accordance with their own perceived interests. Seemingly, Iran might desire a partitioned Iraq so that it can dominate the large Iraqi Shiite population. Ankara, though, is concerned only about the formation of an independent Kurdistan and the potential repercussions within Turkey resulting from this. Turkey fears an independent Kurdistan would provoke its Kurdish minority population to push harder with their demand for some form of self-determination, if not outright independence. This was evident in a statement issued by Ankara noting "…Turkey will continue to oppose creation of entities based on sectarian and ethnic criteria in Iraq" (qtd. in Ahmed 163). It is doubtful that Ankara's position will change at any time in the near future.

3.2.1: Artificial State

Some analysts defend the idea of partition by arguing that Iraq was originally formed as an artificial construct that had been cobbled together by the British and French in the 1920s from the three provinces of Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul (Toal 172). The inhabitants of these provinces were forced to become citizens of the newly created, but artificial, Iraqi state despite their conspicuous ethno-sectarian diversity. This argument for partition allows that the inhabitants of Iraq should not be forced to live together any longer (*ibid*.). Supporters argue that Iraq's existence and survival as a modern state is largely due to a king, handpicked by the British, followed by rule under the Baathist Party dictatorship, which centralized the control of every aspect of life in Iraq (*ibid*.).

Gareth Stansfield rejects the artificiality argument for the current failures in Iraq, referring to it as a "cliché". Stansfield emphasizes that the boundaries of almost all states

have been artificially drawn at inception (Stansfield, "Divide" 3). He argues that more than eighty years of co-existence has provided Iraq's Arab population with a sense of national identity. Furthermore, co-existence is not alien to the population of Iraq. The three provinces, prior to the formation of Iraq, had developed a formidable bond under the Ottomans. This connotes the existence of a regional identity prior to the formation of Iraq that, over time, evolved into a collective Iraqi nationalism. The current ethno-sectarian crisis did not exist under the Ottomans. Stansfield rejects the notation of a historical sectarian problem, and censures imperial interference for the ethnic Kurdish problem (*ibid*.).

Prior to the invasion in 2003, Iraq's territories were ethnically and religiously heterogeneous. One example of Iraq's conspicuous heterogeneity was the non-promulgation in "official, public debates, nor" as a tool to point out with an intent to decry Iraq's different communities (Al-Marashi 97). Although, rampant discriminations against, and widespread oppression of Iraqi citizens are undeniable, nonetheless, the media did not place prominence on ethnicity or sect, as a strategy to upholding Iraqi identity, which also included other non-Arab groups (*ibid*.). The present violent circumstances in Iraq are largely due to an invasion that sought successfully to get rid of Saddam Hussein, but which had no established long-term plans for the benefit of Iraqis. The initial dismantling of the Iraqi army and the marginalizing of Baathist loyalists contributed enormously to the subsequent anarchy and lawlessness. Clearly, other distinct factors have led to the present failures, and the initial artificiality of its creation is not a valid reason for the partition of Iraq.

3.2.2: Regional Reactions

Partition is a generally triggered by divisions emanating from internal sources. These often include formidable ethnic and religious conflicts (Henderson and Lebow 434). There are no guarantees that partition would ease what are currently intrastate, ethno-sectarian conflicts in Iraq. At present, the concurrent conflicts taking place may be summarized as Sunni Arab versus Shiite Arab, Shiite versus Shiite, Arab versus Kurd (Cordesman 9), and Sunni versus Al-Qaeda. The emergence of three states may well further escalate these inner-group hostilities, and escalate tensions within surrounding states. As the violence accelerates, there is danger that it may spill over into neighbouring countries as warring groups cross national boundaries seeking shelter or sustenance.

Partitioning, therefore, could exacerbate what is now an intrastate conflict and lead to a devastating international war. Partitioning Iraq can only mean more bloodshed "as minorities are targeted and forced migration purify territories" (Horowitz, "the Iraq" A16). It could possibly start an interstate war, involving Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and other international powers that have stakes in Iraq's future. Partition, Horowitz argues, "threatens the Sunni states in the region, [which] means the danger of a wider war" (*ibid*.). It would also disturb the "inter-communal harmony and tolerance" (Terrill, "Strategic" vi) in such states as Saudi Arabia and some of the Gulf countries with Shiite populations who might in turn demand some form of autonomy from the dominant regimes.

Regional states would likely support the side that would seem to serve their future economic and political needs. Saudi Arabia and other Sunni regimes in the region would

support the Sunni minority in the south; Turkey would invade the northern region in an effort to support the Turkmen minority; the Iraqi Shiites would have the backing of Iran (Terrill, "Strategic" vi). However, there are also fears regarding the possibility of a Shiite dominated, Iranian-style theocracy coming to the fore in Iraq.

3.2.3: Population Transfer

The advocates of partitioning maintain that any successful partition requires the transference of populations – forcibly, if necessary - into relevant, ethnically demarcated, homogenous territories (Kaufmann, "Possible" 137). This transference would have to be monitored and enforced by the international community, likely under a UN special commission (Mearsheimer and Pape 26). This proposal would be very difficult to implement in Iraq. Approximately 3.7 million Kurds live in the country, of which nearly 2 million have settled outside the northern region of Kurdistan. Many of these Kurds dwell in cities such as Baghdad, Mosul and Kirkuk (O'Leary, "the Kurds" 1). The emergence of an independent Kurdistan would require transferring Kurdish citizens from the inter-mixed territories into a homogenous Kurdistan. This could be an extremely messy process considering that not all Kurds would prefer to live in Kurdistan. However, Kaufmann's proposal includes the voluntary migration of populations; minorities would not be forced to migrate to the new, ethnically or religiously homogenous states ("Possible"). In contrast, other advocates of transference insist that in order for partition to succeed (Mearsheimer & Pape 1993), the populace must be transferred involuntarily or convinced to migrate. In an effort to convince them it must be pointed out that their minority status in a rump state may expose them to discrimination and, possibly, ethnic cleansing.

Another factor to consider is the heterogeneity of the Kurdish region. Based on Kaufmann and Mearsheimers' proposals for successful partition, future independence for the Kurds implies driving Turkmen minorities out of Kurdistan. Unsurprisingly the Turkmen population is apprehensive of being discriminated against in any future independent Kurdish state. Turkey has threatened to cross the border into Kurdistan to protect the Turkish inhabitants there. Turkey's involvement would also invite other states such as Saudi Arabia and Iran into the field, as each would ally themselves with individual ethnic and sectarian groups (Gunter, "the Kurds" 100).

An added stress remains over the state of internally displaced Iraqi Arabs who have taken refuge in Kurdistan for security reasons. The Kurds remain concerned about the possibility of sectarian conflict generating more Arab refugees seeking refuge in their UN-created safe haven. Partitioning Iraq and subsequent population transfers could involve ejecting the internally displaced out of the more peaceful and stable Kurdish region into the pits of the sectarian conflicts in other areas of Iraq. If the displaced persons insist on remaining in Kurdistan, the Kurds worry that violent conflict may erupt in their comparatively peaceful region.

CHAPTER 4: KURDISTAN

4.1: Historical Perspectives

The Kurds are the fourth largest nationality in the Middle East. It is believed that their ethnic origins are Central Asian and, therefore, they are closest to the Iranians (O'Leary, "the Kurds" 1). An ancient people, for centuries they were divided "between Persian and Ottoman Turkish empires" (Fuller 109). They currently number between 24-27 million. Kurds have traditionally inhabited the mountainous territories in an area where Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey connect (O'Leary, "the Kurds"). The term "Kurdistan" is widely used in Iraq to refer to the Kurdish area of northern Iraq, and in Iran to refer to the Kurdish area of northwest Iran (*ibid.*). Turkey and Syria, however, avoid this term for political reasons, although it was widely used and understood under the Ottomans. The Kurds comprise approximately 20 percent of Iraq's 27 million people (Stockman). They vary by dialect, region, and religion (O'Leary, ""the Kurds"). Although the majority is comprised of Sunni Muslims, they regard themselves as being ethnically separate from the Shiite Arabs and Sunni Arabs (Stockman).

The emergence of national ethnic conflict is largely due to tensions "between the state and ethnicity... expressed in different forms ranging from small-scale local conflicts to large-scale autonomy or independence claims" (Saatchi 550). The Kurds once saw hope of an independent Kurdistan as outlined in the Treaty of Sevres in 1920. This hope was dashed when the province of Mosul, in which the Kurds lived under Ottoman rule,

was incorporated into the new state of Iraq (Simons 2004). Kurdish struggles for political autonomy from the control of Baghdad have continued since.

At the end of World War I, the Kurds were encouraged by Woodrow Wilson's "Fourteen Points" of 1918, and were optimistic about the prospects for the establishment of an independent state. The twelfth of Wilson's points declares, "The nationalities now under Turkish rule should…be assured…an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development." The principle of self-determination states, "any people, simply because it considers itself to be a separate national group, is uniquely and exclusively qualified to determine its own political status, including, should it so desire, the right to its own state" (qtd. in Hannum 7).

Article 62 of the peace treaty with Turkey, signed at Sevres in August, 1920, called for "local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas." Article 64 outlined the possibility of granting of independence to "the Kurdish peoples" from Turkey as well (Gunter, "the Kurdish" 199). Initially Britain and Turkey were signatories to the treaty. However, following a war against any further disintegration of the modern Turkish state, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the Turkish republic, declared the treaty void. Consequently, the Treaty of Lausanne in1923 replaced the Treaty of Sevres. The provisions for establishing three new Arab states remained the same, but no further reference was made to an independent and separate Kurdish entity. The Kurds were denied their right to self-determination (*ibid*.). Although, the rebirth of Turkish nationalism under Ataturk occurred with substantial help from the Kurds, "because the Turks promoted the theme of Islamic unity" (*ibid*.), the Turks refused to recognize the

Kurdish ethnic and linguistic identity, and ferociously quelled subsequent Kurdish nationalist uprisings (Simons 297-298).

Based on Woodrow Wilson's points, the Kurds believe, still, that they have the right, under the principle of self-determination, to demand, and be awarded, sovereignty. In effect, the Wilsonian principle is the foundation for all separatist movements (Hannum 1996), but it is not synonymous with independence. It encompasses a variety of meanings including autonomy, federalism, and independence (*ibid*.).

4.1.1: Iraqi Constitution

The dismantling of Saddam's Baathist regime created new opportunities for the marginalized ethno-sectarian communities in Iraq to demand inclusion in the state rebuilding process. The Shiite Arabs, being approximately 60 percent of the population, seized this opportunity for political gain and leadership. They felt their long, deliberate exclusion from partaking in the governing of the country automatically justified their empowerment in Baghdad. The Sunni Arabs, who comprise almost 20 percent of Iraq, became increasingly concerned at being sidelined and not included in the new distribution of power. They resented the new arrangements of demotion in light of their holding power since the formation of Iraq. The Kurds, however, were content with governing their autonomous region in the north, and wished to continue with self-rule.

The culmination of the constitutional process in 2005 called for federalism with the devolution of power to regional provinces. The constitution was, in essence, a Kurdish-Shiite transaction based on power sharing. Despite a seeming victory for the Kurds, some are skeptical, as they point out there is no reference made to Kurdistan's

boundaries in the constitution (Fatah). Further, approximately 40 percent of disputed

Kurdish territories are outside the KRG's jurisdiction, and are unrecognized as parts of

the Kurdish region (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, under the new Iraqi constitution, the Kurds have

retained influence over the future of Kurdistan as well as the reconstruction of Iraq.

During the negotiations to draft the Iraqi constitution a Sunni member of the

committee, Kamal Hamdun, while rejecting federalism for the state of Iraq, said, "…we

accept the Kurdish region as it was before the war" (qtd. in Ahmed 171).

Notwithstanding, federalism is enshrined in the constitution ratified in December, 2005,

as is the formal recognition of autonomy for Kurdistan. In addition, Kurdish and Arabic

are recognized as the two official languages. On the subject of Kurdistan's independence

however, the Shiites and Sunnis strongly opposed it. Thus, Kurdistan remains an

autonomous region within a federal Iraq, with no changes made regarding self-

governance and rule.

4.2: Pragmatists and Separatists

Some Kurds feel the constitution offers little hope for an independent state of

Kurdistan in the future. They view "the idea of federalism as diluted to a very simple

form of federation", which is not helpful to them. They maintain the federation does not

recognize the ethnic, historic and geographical reality of a Kurdish homeland" (Fatah).

An overwhelming number of Kurds participated in the January 2005 elections in hopes

that would lead to "establishing Kurdish independence and separating their region from

Iraq" (Spinner A18). Others were just happy to be part of "the dialogue" and were

unconcerned with central government influence over the Kurdish region (*ibid.*). Still

other Kurds criticized their political leaders for settling for "a federalist system of government that would make the Kurdish region a state within Iraq" (*ibid*.). Clearly, there is no one single solution to content everyone.

With respect to attitudes to independence within the Kurdish population, there are two groups: separatists and pragmatists. The pragmatists would prefer an independent Kurdistan, but realize that it is not currently viable. They are prepared to settle for regional autonomy, and believe that Kurdistan should co-exist within a federal Iraq, but with equitable sharing of power among all ethnic and religious groups. Among the pragmatists is the Kurdish leadership, who believe the Kurds would benefit from sharing power in Baghdad, and would be in a stronger position, than if they were independent, to bargain for Kurdish nationalist demands. Their claim for autonomy means self-governance, which wards off potential attacks from neighbouring countries (Lawrence 312). Above all, by remaining a part of Iraq, the Kurds remain participants in the rebuilding of the state.

The separatists claim that without independence there can be no guarantee against future repression by the central government. They recall the infamous Anfal campaign, when Saddam deployed chemical weapons against the civilian Kurds. They "associate Iraq with poison gas and mass executions" (Galbraith "Flashback"). To the separatists an independent Kurdish state is the only way to safeguard vital Kurdish national interests. The elections of January 2005 generated resentment in Kurds who accused their political leaders of making concessions and advocating a system of federalism that merely allows Kurdistan to exist as province within Iraq (Spinner A18).

Kurdish leaders are firm in their belief that independence is not feasible at present. In part, this is because they do not want to be perceived as being the destroyers of the Iraqi nation. Filad Merani, a prominent leader within the Kurdistan Regional Government, concedes that, independence "is a goal [they] have to struggle for – but when the time comes" (Spinner A18). He further notes, "[they] know it's important for [them] to be part of Iraq strategically. [They] know if there is no peace and security, it's going to affect [them]" (*ibid.*).

The separatists argue that since WWI, the assimilation policies of the surrounding host countries toward their Kurdish populations have mainly been attempts to quell any ethno-nationalistic quests for independence. They insist that with enforced assimilation in those countries, and the possibility of similar policies in promulgated in Iraq, the Kurd's distinct identity may be on the path to extinction (Gunter, "Why Kurdish" 106). Their feeble chance of independence, the separatists believe, is only possible in the further escalation of civil war and the failure of Iraq's central government (Stockman). It is at that point that the Kurds would most likely press for independence (*ibid*.).

4.3: Independence

Ethnic and religious minorities within a state often are faced with two possibilities: expulsion or assimilation (Kellas 1998).   In such circumstances, the dominant power exerts hegemony over citizen's affairs with the aim of building a nation-state (*ibid*.). Some Kurds fear that without an independent state, they are susceptible to future repressions if they remain as minorities within Iraq. Complete sovereignty, they

maintain, diminishes future probabilities of ethnic cleansing and reprisals against them, as they "associate Iraq with poison gas and mass executions" (Galbraith, "Flashback").

Although these fears are certainly justified, others maintain that independence for the Kurds could bring about other, serious, political and economic repercussions. Moreover, attacks from neighbouring states may ensue. Turkey, with its perpetually restless Kurdish minority population, has threatened invasion in the event of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan. Iran and Syria, too, have also expressed their opposition to independence. They fear this event could encourage their own Kurdish populations to demand autonomy, if not outright separation. The Kurds' key ally, the United States, is also not supportive of establishing a sovereign state of Kurdistan. It supports only a unified Iraq and fears the destabilizing effect independence might have on the entire region.

Another major factor is that the US does not wish to anger Turkey. Political logic suggests that the US would take side with a major NATO ally in any dispute over the future of the Kurds. If it had to choose between supporting Turkey or the Kurds in any conflict, it would choose Turkey "every time" (Phillips 36). Therefore, it is highly improbable the US would lend support to the Kurdish aspirations for statehood. In fact, Washington has emphasized, repeatedly, that it would not favour one Iraqi group over another and has further stated that the three groups collectively should work toward a unified state (Stockman).

In the period leading up to the invasion, the Kurds assured the Bush administration that they would not press for independence. It was stated that the Kurds

wished only to preserve their self-governance over the Kurdistan region (Galbraith, "Flashback"). Although desiring independence, the Kurdish leadership has not recanted on their promise. The leadership has consistently pressed for autonomy within a federal Iraq while collaborating in the reconstruction of the state.

The Kurdish leadership acknowledges the desirability of creating a sovereign state, but also realizes that the process is not feasible. In his inauguration speech as the first President of Iraqi Kurdistan, Masoud Barzani stated, "I promise to safeguard the accomplishments of Kurdistan and to carry out my duties faithfully." He further added, "I will do my best to strengthen national unity and brotherhood between Kurds and Arabs" (qtd. in Ahmed 162). Later, the Kurds in Iraq fiercely criticized Talabani for imparting, "The establishment of a Kurdish state is an impossible dream…the Kurds will have much greater stability within a united Iraq rather than as part of a fragmented country" (Aslan). The title of Azad Aslan's article, "Dear Mr. President, Kurdish state, not a dream, it's inevitable," encapsulates the longing of the Kurds for independence.

According to Talabani, "…there are merits to a stable situation in Baghdad…if Iraq were to be a stable, relatively democratic society, then that would be a help to Kurdistan" (qtd. in Carnes, "Qubad"). Moreover, the KRG would not risk the profitable economic relationship it has established with Baghdad, nor imperil the benefits in return for independence (*ibid.*). The price of independence is too high and the Kurdish leaders are not willing to compromise their autonomy just yet. In an attempt to display their solidarity with the rest of Iraq, the KRG has decided to fly the new national flag, along with that of Kurdistan, in the Kurdish region ("Kurds Display New Iraqi Flag" 2008).

James Fearon notes, "Nations are not born but are made, partly in response to international incentives and major power politics" (394). The regional states are not happy at the prospects of sharing borders with an independent Kurdistan. International support for the creation of newly independent states is also limited, as can be seen in the case of Kosovo, in February 2008. Furthermore, any future Kurdish independence denotes the presence of the US military base in Kurdistan indefinitely, which would threaten its sovereignty, as it would be a potential target, being allied with the US. As well, the US military base would not please Iran and Syria, as they would fear US attacks from Kurdistan. The US would be perceived as occupiers, which might give impetus to terrorist organizations to further their missions in resisting occupation.

However, the presence of the US military has not deterred Turkish and Iranian forces from crossing into the Iraqi northern region on the grounds to target Kurdish rebels. During the no-fly-zone years, Turkey periodically launched military strikes inside the Kurdish region with the full knowledge of the American administration. As well, on the pretext of targeting the Kurdish rebel group, the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), Turkey's air strikes inside Iraq have resulted in the killing of a number of Iraqi Kurdish civilians (Human Rights Watch Report). On several occasions, the Clinton administration had defended Turkey's raids inside the American protected 'safe haven' and stated, "Turkey's an ally and we have no reason to question the need for an incursion across the border" (*ibid.*). In contrast, the US administration strongly denounced Iran's air strikes against an Iranian political organization, Mojahedines, harboured in southern Iraq (*ibid.*). The US administration threatened taking "whatever action necessary to prevent both Iraqi and Iranian entry into the no-fly-zone" (*ibid.*). Turkey's incursions

have not abated. Ankara has repeatedly uttered military threats in the event of an independent Kurdistan. Although the US might be able to deter such future attacks, political strategy would prevent it from siding with the Kurds against Turkey.

4.4: Autonomy

Ted Gurr maintains "…threats to divide a country should be managed by the devolution of state power and that communal fighting about access to the state's power and resources should be restrained by recognizing group rights and sharing power" (52). Gurr recommends autonomy as a solution to ending conflict, as it does not lead to secession and independence (*ibid*.). Although, satisfactory outcomes for all parties are rare, most ethno-nationalist movements are reconciled to results that amount to less than independence. This is mainly due to their weaker status at the negotiations. Conflicts for complete independence, Gurr adds, often lead to "autonomy, negotiated or de facto autonomy within the state" (*ibid*. 57). If autonomy is a solution to resolving conflicts, why do some states ignore this process? Gurr maintains the answer invariably lies in the central governments' grip on power. There are very few ethno-nationalist movements fighting for absolute independence. The fighters in Chechnya and East Timor may be seen as an exception, however (*ibid*.).

The multi-layered definition of autonomy is generally accepted as "a useful concept and means by which to address competing claims for political and minority rights" (Yildiz 197). A minority group within an encompassing state is granted autonomy depending on the state's cultural, economic and political infrastructure. Autonomy does not grant the nation within a sovereign state international recognition, or

allow it to possess powers "such as in the areas of defence or foreign affairs" (*ibid*. 198). However, at times autonomy may include developing independent diplomatic, economic and political relationships with other countries.

Ernest Gellner states that "…the power and prestige of a nation depends on its annual rate of growth and its economic clout, and [not], on how much of the map it manages to paint with its own colour (107-8). Currently Kurdistan is dependent upon the central government for its budget. Under the Iraqi constitution, the KRG receives 17 percent of the national budget (Carnes, "Expert"). The KRG budget for the 2007 fiscal year reached almost $4.7 billion. This is approximately 95 percent of the region's annual budget, of which 64 percent is allotted to private sector salaries (Carnes, "Qubad"). As yet there are no international investors or foreign banking in the region (Gunter, "the Kurds Ascending" 51).

Since 2003, the KRG has joined with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), in calling for autonomy within a federal Iraq. Both organizations realize that Kurdistan is in a much stronger position to grow and prosper within an equally thriving economy in Iraq as a whole. The KRG recognizes that absent international support, demanding separation and independence will not be beneficial.

In a statement issued by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) on January 21, 2006, the leadership concedes that the progress and security of Kurdistan's future are possible only through "the development of a democratic and federal Iraq." The statement emphasizes the importance of the Iraqi Constitution, the "[establishment] of a genuine federal and democratic Iraq," and calls for the "[restoration of] Kirkuk…to the embrace

of the Kurdistan region" (KRG Unification Agreement 2006). The Kurds want real

domination over their own territory and titular control over any armed forces from

Baghdad that are within Kurdish lands. The president of the KRG, Masoud Barzani, has

gone so far as to remark, "What we really need to work on in the parliament of Kurdistan

is that the region of Kurdistan should have its own special constitution and laws. There is

absolutely no need to have a link that whatever is done in Baghdad should be done here

too" (qtd. in Eland, Newman, et.al. 2).

4.4.1: Relations with Turkey and Iran

Since the formation of a quasi-independent Kurdistan, Ankara has been a major

trading partner. As well, in the period since the invasion the construction of the new

airport in Irbil was made possible with the aid of Turkey and Britain ("Does

Independence Beckon"). Ankara's agreement for the operation of Pet Oil and General

Energy Oil and Gas in the Kurdish region was on "government to government relations,"

thus, tacitly acknowledging the probability of a "future entity with a sovereign

government, if not as a state" (Olson 116).

The *de facto* northern region has also maintained good economic and political

relations with Tehran. According to statements from Kurdish authorities, the value of

economic trade between Kurdistan and Tehran has been approximately $800 million

annually (Rafaat, "US-Kurdish" 83). The presence of Iranian consulates in Irbil (the

capital of Kurdistan) and Sulaymanyeh, and the official representation of the KRG in

Tehran, illustrates the recognition, if not legitimization, of Kurdistan by Tehran (*ibid.*).

However, Iranian Kurdish movements opposed to the government in Tehran have

established bases in Iraqi Kurdistan. Since 1991, the KRG has made strenuous efforts to prevent the armed groups from operating in Iraq. It recognizes that good relations with its neighbours are imperative in achieving political strength and economic prosperity. Without the continued economic relations with its neighbours, Kurdistan would risk the development and prosperity it has gained since 1991.

4.4.2: UN Security Council: their reaction

Graham Fuller argues, "the international system characteristically does not welcome the break-up of existing states and the resulting turmoil and violence" (109). Furthermore, legitimacy of new states often is acknowledged by the presence of the separatist group in the United Nations, if not as members, at least as observers. The Kurds do not have representatives in the United Nations, even though other stateless nations such as Palestine have observers. The UN Security Council's unwillingness to recognize Kurdistan as an independent state is, to a degree, due to some members of the Council facing challenges from their own separatist groups at home. This may be seen in the cases of the Chechens within Russia and the Tibetans and Muslim minorities in China. Moreover, the United States will not willingly oppose Turkey, a NATO ally, in support of the Kurdish cause for independence.

Some believe the Kurds have acquired something better than membership in the United Nations. Quil Lawrence in his book, Invisible Nation, states the Kurds have acquired a status better than *de jure* independence (2008). They enjoy *de facto* sovereignty without causing their concerned neighbours – Turkey and Iran – reason to invade or interfere with their autonomy and self-governance (*ibid.*).

CHAPTER 5: OIL

Aside from their long-denied desire for full autonomy or independence, the Iraqi Kurds are also the beneficiaries of an accident of geography. This is with reference to the discovery, in the early 20th century, of vast oil reserves on their territories (McDowall 7). Kurdistan's significance to its immediate neighbours and the international community is due largely to the development of its oil and other natural resources since World War II (*ibid.*). Over the course of eighty years, the Kurds have unsuccessfully challenged the government in Baghdad for full control of these areas, particularly the ethnically mixed city of Kirkuk. While there have been attempts at compromise between various Baghdad governments and the Kurds by way of granting some form of autonomy to Kurdistan, all negotiations excluded Kirkuk. The Kurds have thus rejected previous offers (Phillips 2005).

Approximately two-thirds of the oil production and reserves in Iraq – five percent of the world's oil resources - are located in the province of Kirkuk and "its surroundings" (Raphaeli 2005). In efforts to explore possibilities of oil reserves within Kurdistan, the KRG has negotiated deals with foreign oil companies. These include DNO, a Norwegian oil company, and recently a Canadian company, Western Oil Sands. The deals infer that the KRG, and not the Iraqi government, would claim ownership over any resources found (Stansfield, "Divide"). The Kurds look to the unequivocal language in Articles 109 and 112 in the Iraqi constitution, claiming that their regional rights grants them full access to, and operational control over, oil and gas on their territories. The Articles stipulate the

maintenance of the national oil by the Iraqi government, Iraq's provinces and regions (O'Hanlon and Taspinar A15).

Despite signing contracts with foreign companies, the KRG is currently restricted from exporting oil as it does not have control over the national pipelines. However, there have been ongoing talks of connecting "feeder pipelines" to the national line "just before it reaches the Turkish border" ("Does independence Beckon"). Baghdad, for its part, has declared illegal any oil deals constituted in Kurdistan since a national oil law has not yet been ratified (O'Hanlon and Taspinar A15).

5.1: Kirkuk

Resolving the continuing dispute between the Kurdish leaders and the Iraqi government over Kirkuk is the key to a secure and stable Iraq. From the onset, Kirkuk has been a source of tension between Baghdad and the Kurds. In the course of the formation of Iraq, Britain was fearful of Turkish hegemony in Mosul, and decided to enjoin the oilfield-rich province with the new nation of Iraq. The Kurds were disappointed by this action, as they have always looked to the province as a revenue provider and Kirkuk as the potential future capital for an independent state.

Traditionally, the Kurds have been the main inhabitants of the land and therefore feel a "historical and emotional attachment to Kirkuk" (Ferris and Stoltz 4). For the same reason they press for the inclusion of Kurdish populated, but oil-less, "Khanaqin and Mandali" (O'Leary, "the Denial" 24). Negotiations for Kurdish autonomy have always included demands for these three cities, to no avail (*ibid*.). Realistically, without Kirkuk and its oilfields an independent Kurdistan is simply not economically viable. Despite the

Kurdish claim to Kirkuk, it is highly improbable that Baghdad would agree to relinquishing control of the city and its oil "and hope to survive in view of the broad popular opposition in Arab Iraq" (qtd. in Farrell 2).

Furthermore, the prospect of Kurdistan's complete control of the oilfields is not very appealing to Ankara, where the province is believed to be the "rightful home" of the Turkmen population (Ferris and Stoltz 7). Turkey has threatened military intervention numerous times, in defence of the Turkish minority in the area (*ibid.*). Further impediments to any annexation are raised by Iran, the US and the Iraqi religious leader, Muqtada al-Sadr (Lawrence 223-4). Each, for varying reasons, contests the implementation of Article 140.

Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution provides for an official referendum to determine the future of Kirkuk. This was to be held in December 2007 but was deferred to a later date in 2008. At the time of the referendum the citizens of Kirkuk will vote either to remain a part of Iraq or to join the Kurdistan region and be ruled under the KRG. Baghdad's indecision on voter eligibility and the fear of an unwanted outcome from the referendum have stalled implementation of Article 140. It is unclear whether the residents of Kirkuk will be the only eligible voters or if citizens in other "disputed territories" (Ferris and Stoltz 2) would partake in the process as well. The other citizens of Kirkuk – Arabs and Turkmen – fervently reject the idea of living as minorities in Kurdistan for fears of discrimination and persecution ("A Kurdish Conundrum" 59). Further communication and negotiation between the KRG and the residents of Kirkuk

would be an essential ingredient in calming such concerns so that the KRG may govern peacefully over the province without invasion threats from Turkey.

The implementation of Article 140 could spark new waves of intrastate violence and ignite an interstate war. In an interview, Jalal Talabani attempted to dampen the region's unease, in particular Turkey's. He denied allegations of forceful domination over Kirkuk, arguing, "If we can't have it with a referendum or a legal way, we are not going to use force. It will be a peaceful solution between the communities" ("A Kurdish Conundrum" 59). The Prime Minister of the KRG, Nechirvan Barzani, has insisted that the inclusion of Kirkuk into Kurdistan is not tantamount to control over its oilfields. He adds, "the benefits of oil should be fairly distributed. Revenue sharing must be equitable, and no Baghdad government must ever again be able to blackmail [the Kurds]" (Barzani). Nevertheless, one of the other obstacles to incorporating Kirkuk into Kurdistan is the promise the Kurdish leaders made to the US administration, prior to their invasion, to not "take Kirkuk" (Galbraith, "Flashback").

CHAPTER 6: ARAB AND KURDISH NATIONALISM

Nationalism emerges from economic, cultural, or political changes (Kellas 1998). This chapter discusses the evolution of Kurdish and Arab nationalism and their pertinence to today's crisis in Iraq. It will be argued that, since the coerced amalgamation of Arabs and Kurds in Iraq, the initially uneasy arrangement has evolved into a form of co-existence, from ethnic and sectarian mixed marriages to co-existence within the well-populated cities.

As Kurdish nationalism has evolved over the last eighty years, so has their quest for independence from Iraq. At the present time, the nationalists see a brighter future in an autonomous region within the greater state of Iraq. Although the focus of this paper is on the Kurds in Iraq and their aspirations for independence and autonomy, this chapter begins by addressing the significance of a pan-Kurdistan and why it is unlikely to reach fruition. The chapter then argues that, for a variety of reasons, Kurdish and Arab nationalisms are obstacles to partition.

6.1: Pan-Kurdistan

A key factor for the improbability of the emergence of a pan-Kurdistan is in how Kurdish nationalism has evolved since WWI, leading to the materialization of degrees of nationalisms within each group settled in separate countries (Natali, the Kurds). The common feelings of Kurdish identity that all Kurds share are entwined with other identities in the "political space" in which each Kurdish faction is situated (*ibid.*).

The variations of treatment meted out to the Kurds by host states have created different forms of identities within each state. Therefore, Kurdish nationalism is a manifestation of the political atmosphere in which they live. The more diverse the political realms within a given state, the more different are the relations between the central government and the Kurds (Natali, "Transnational" 113). The Kurds in Iran, for example, are excluded from occupying high-ranking posts, and more than their counterparts in other states, tend to lean toward accommodation with the Iranian state (Natali, the Kurds). As well, the assassinations of their nationalist leaders and continuous government surveillance have driven many members of the Iranian-Kurdish nationalist movements to choose "[affiliation] with Iranian cultural organizations rather than mobilize on behalf of a larger Iranian or pan-Kurdish nationalism" (Natali, "Transnational" 113).

In Turkey, where Kurdish culture, social, and political rights are banned, Kurds have long been struggling for the implementation of basic human rights. The PKK, the Kurdish nationalist movement, has abandoned its call for an independent federation, and now is willing to accept "genuine democracy within the preexisting Turkish borders" (Gunter, "Why Kurdish" 108).

Nonetheless, Denise Natali holds that under the Persian and Ottoman rulers, the Kurds were not unanimous in their ideals of what should constitute an independent Kurdish state (Natali, the Kurds). Under the banner of Islam, Arabs, Kurds, and Turks shared a common religion, and fought "against Christian infidels," not each other (*ibid*.).

Following the creation of Iraq, the Kurds deeply resented the fact that their Sunni Muslim brothers, who were previously their co-equals, were not ruling them.

The belief of many Kurds that statehood is necessary for Kurdish security and wellbeing is due in large part to the continual betrayals and repressions Kurds have suffered throughout modern history. In Turkey, they are disparagingly referred to as "mountain Turks" (Hannum 189). The assassinations of Iranian Kurds abroad, and the regular surveillance of Kurdish nationalists in Iran, as well as the genocidal acts of Baghdad against the Kurds, are all factors that have driven the Kurdish quest for independence. However, the quest for Kurdish independence, or even real autonomy, in Turkey and Iran is not as viable as for that of the Kurds in Iraq. This is due to a variety of factors.

Ankara, Tehran, and Damascus all fear that the events of 1946 may be repeated. It was then that the Kurds in western Iran proclaimed independence. The *Republic of Mahabad* lasted almost a year before collapsing under attacks from the government of Reza Shah. The leaders of the independence movement were then executed (Lawrence 17-18).

However, although the Kurds may be seen to be victims of "a historical injustice" (Gunter, the Kurds Ascending 52), the emergence of a pan-Kurdish state is not foreseeable in the near future. This process is only possible with the collapse of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey (Gunter, "why Kurdish" 106). Iraq is a failed state, but the probability of the other three states failing and collapsing any time in the near future is highly improbable (*ibid*.).

The hope for "Greater Kurdistan" is a geographically landlocked entity within the states of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. None of these states would willingly permit a section of their lands to be broken off, not least because this might lead to even more secessionist movements. As Kurdistan is landlocked, it would be, as it is now, highly dependent on its "neighbours for access to the Gulf and Eastern Mediterranean" (Whitley 245).

6.2: Kurdish Nationalism

Nationalism is not fixed, it evolves. The configuration of Kurdish nationalism pivots on a "larger political context" (Natali, the Kurds xviii). As mentioned earlier, Kurdish identity has formed differently in each region, depending on the relationship between the Kurds and the state in which they live. Although Kurdish nationalism was not a reason for the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, it was a byproduct of its disintegration (Gunter and Ahmed, ed. the Evolution). In Iraq, it emerged in opposition to the building of an Arab state intolerant of Kurdish autonomy within its boundaries (*ibid*.10). Despite historical impediments and what has been described as a "stunted and divided" (*ibid*.15) nationalism, the Kurds have remained a nation without a state.

The ethnicization of national identity occurs when a group feels isolated from the "dominant culture or when it considers itself distinct in regard to the notion of citizenship" (Natali, the Kurds xxvi). The Kurds claim that their uniqueness as an ethnic group, separate from Arabs and other ethnic minority groups in Iraq such as the Turks, affords them a legitimate right to statehood. Their distinct culture, language, and customs vary from the dominant Arab group. Kurdish nationalism, like all other nationalisms, has

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different meanings for different individuals. Hakan Ozoglu defines Kurdish nationalism as an "intellectual and political movement that is based mainly (though not entirely) upon two premises – the belief in a consistent Kurdish identity, which is rooted in an ancient history; and the conviction of an unalienable right for self-determination in a historic Kurdish homeland or territory" (10). Ozoglu further differentiates between Kurdish nationalism and Kurdish nationalists. He notes that Kurdish nationalists publicize their "Kurdish identity and self-determination," and cultivate the concept of an "ethnically based unity and of a historical homeland…but [do] not necessarily strive for [independence]" (*ibid.* 10-11).

Denise Natali observes that Kurdish nationalism has evolved and is "part of a contextually contingent process whereby a nation can follow multiple paths over long periods" (the Kurds xxiv). She further states that Kurdish nationalism is configured by the regional states. In each state, the Kurds identify themselves differently. In Iraq, they identify themselves as "Kurdish" first, "Iraqi" second, and never as "Arabs" (Anderson and Stansfield 155).

Since their incorporation into the Middle East, Kurdish nationalism has been most successful in Iraq where the Kurds were recognized "officially and legally…as ethnic minorities having certain rights of their own qua Kurds" (Edmonds 92). Nonetheless, the Iraqi governments (from the monarchy to Saddam's Baathists) have ruled in constant fear of the likelihood of Kurdish separatism. Each governing body in turn, has attempted to quash the Kurds nationalistic ideologies, at times violently. Samantha Power states, "the Kurds have been innocent of desiring any harm to the Iraqi people, but …were guilty of

demanding autonomy for themselves" (174). In their efforts to curb the Kurdish desire for autonomy or outright separation, the Baathist government resorted to ethnic cleansing and genocide.

One of the major concerns was that Kurdish separation would not only reduce the Iraqi population, it would also set a precedent that the Shiites – constituting a majority in Iraq – might wish to follow. This would severely threaten the future security and stability of the country (Gunter, the Kurds 12). Edmonds attributes some of the imbalanced treatment of Kurds to their disproportional number within each state (92). Although there are fewer Kurds in Iraq, the Kurdish populations in Turkey and Iran are relatively greater than in Iraq. As well, in comparison to the centuries-old nations of Iran and Turkey, Iraq was a relatively new state possessing "less legitimacy as a political entity" (Gunter, the Kurds 11-12). Michael Gunter further explains that a Sunni-Shiite Muslim division present in Iraq has been absent in Iran and Turkey.

6.3: Arab Nationalism

The concept of Arab nationalism first emerged in Syria and was later legitimized under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt (Dawisha 2002). It was a new wave of nationalism forged with the aim of resisting colonialism and European occupation. Unsurprisingly this brand of nationalism had great appeal to the masses. Adeed Dawisha notes the one difference between the two brands of nationalisms, those in Egypt and Iraq, is that Nasser's pursuit of Arab nationalism was viewed as anti-imperialism and a resistance to British occupation. In Iraq, the emphasis was mainly on Arab culture, community, language, and history. The Shiites and the Kurds were less

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vulnerable to Saddam's purported notion of Arab nationalism or pan-Arabism (a vision of

a culturally and politically unified Arab nation) (Edwards 56) - that swept the Middle

East and propelled the Arab nationalist attempts to form a common Iraqi and Arab

identity (Dawisha 2002).

Saddam's vision for Iraq entailed one nation living under the rubric of Arabness.

The national identity he envisaged was an amalgamation of Shiite Arabs and other

minority groups - Kurds, Turkmens, Christians, and Jews. Yet, he blatantly advocated

Sunni Arabism. The majority of the population was marginalized while a minority of

Sunni Arabs governed the country. In the early years of the Baathist regime, Iraq

cultivated and promoted an educated middle class (mainly Sunni Arabs) that eventually

regarded itself as "a privileged elite," born to administer and rule (Marr).

As mentioned above, Iraq was created by combining the three ex-Ottoman

provinces of Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul. The arrangement of the new country into two

zones encompassed primarily Kurds and Arabs. Mosul, in the north, consisted of mostly

Kurds with a Turkish minority. The province of Baghdad, in the south and center, was

comprised of a largely Sunni Arab population. Basra was a primarily Shiite Arabs

populated province. Unlike the Ottomans, the British regarded the Kurdish inhabited

province of Mosul as a separate territory from Arab Iraq and recognized, to some degree,

their nationalist aspirations (Natali, "Manufacturing").

The palpable display of ethno-sectarianism in present day Iraq is a manifestation

and gradual accumulation of British state-building policies. The newly constructed Iraq

of 1926 was composed of diverse groups of "Shiite and Sunni Arabs, Shiite and Sunni

Kurds, Christians, Turks, Armenians, Jews, and Assyrians" (Natali, "Manufacturing"

259). The population comprised an overwhelming majority of Shiite Arabs and about

one-fifth Kurds. The British officials ignored the diversity and instead, started the

process of what Denise Natali refers to as "Sunni-Arabizing the [Iraqi] government"

(*ibid*.). The long Sunni Arab domination of power started with the monarchy, under King

Faisal. The Sunnis then inhabited subsequent high-ranking ministerial posts. Their

seeming entitlement to power was not a result of their advanced education or possessions

of other higher qualifications, but rather their association and collaboration with the

British as a means to providing welfare to their Sunni community (Terrill, "Nationalism"

3). The British act of empowering the Sunni Arabs as the power holders in Iraq

emphasized the "notions of ethnic belonging in a pervasive and divisive way leading to a

compartmentalization of the polity along ethnic lines" (Wimmer 173).

The animosities that have existed since the creation of Iraq, therefore, are the

result of government oppression, which all groups experienced (McDowall 289).

Although prior to the formation of Iraq, the Kurds and Kurdistan were "scrawled across

tracts of either the Ottoman or Qajar empires," a transformation in attitudes occurred in

the 20th century. This was largely because of "the anxiety of the new states to impose

their identity on all peoples within their territory" (*ibid.*7). During this time, the Kurds

realized their loss of statehood.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1: Discussion

Partition is the territorial separation of diverse groups unwilling to live within the boundaries of a state. Dividing Iraq along ethnic and religious lines in the hopes of achieving peace is not a long-term solution. A corollary may be seen in the earlier partitioning of the Ottoman Empire by re-drawing boundaries in the Middle East and forcing the integration of ethno-sectarian groups. Britain incorporated the oilfield-rich province of Mosul to not only ensure the economic viability of the newly formed state, but also because Sunnis comprised the majority of its population. At the time, the British trusted the Sunnis more than the Shiites. Another reason for this was because its "mountainous terrain" provided the vulnerable new state "with natural defences" (Stansfield, "Divide" 3). This action of the British colonialists complicated and adversely affected the region's geo-political arrangement, leading to conflicts, which have continued ever since (Everest 35). As evidenced, decades later Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait claiming that, historically, the land belonged to Iraq.

Partition promotes disparities and discourages tolerance and acceptance of others. Scholars favoring partition claim that conflicting ethnic groups should live separately in ethnically and religiously homogenous territories. This sort of partition is not effective in Iraq, since the historical strife has not been between Arabs and Kurds, but between Kurds and the central government. Based solely on this argument, there is no justification for partition.

Kurdish claims for independence stem, in part, from the betrayals of the past as well as demands for recognition of their existence as Kurds, having distinct cultural, social and political rights. As a stateless nation within Iraq, the Kurds have the "collective right" to "determine themselves" (Seymour 408). For this reason, any future "unified" state of Iraq, requires the "political recognition" (*ibid.* 406) of the Kurds as a distinct nation. Without such recognition, the international community would be more sympathetic to the Kurdish fight for eventual independence. Political recognition would also instill in the Kurds loyalty to the state, which is necessary for a stable and unified future of Iraq.

The Kurds established and gained more rights in the new Iraqi constitution, particularly having been granted self-rule in Kurdistan. These rights include the ability to maintain autonomy in the three provinces they ruled, the preservation of an army along their border with Turkey, Iran and Syria, and power to establish economic, political and diplomatic relations with other states.

Since 2003, their struggle has been to preserve their autonomous region rather than seek independence. They realize a probable formation of an independent Kurdistan will assume drawing borders along the ethnically mixed province of Mosul. It may then provoke the Turkmen and Arabs to form alliances with Turkey and other Arab states, invoking hostility against Kurdistan. In the event of attacks against Kurdistan, the Kurds in other states might join in the conflict, forming alliances with their Kurdish counterparts, thus triggering an interstate conflict.

The participation of the Kurds in the national decision making process has been important for Kurdistan on two levels. First, Kurdish politicians have managed to protect Kurdistan and the various achievements made since 1991. Second, political negotiations in Baghdad have made it possible for Kurdistan to share in the distribution of power, reconstruction aid and revenues. In this process, they have been able to secure Kurdistan's self-rule and to maintain its own institutions, police and security forces, and economy (*ibid*.).

During the constitutional negotiations, Kurdish leaders strongly recommended federalism, as they insisted it was not a means to separate from Iraq but to provide security of all of the country. Federalism, they claimed, was vital to keeping Iraq united. Although the northern region is more prosperous than the rest of Iraq, it is dependent on an economically thriving Iraq to maintain growth. Presently, the Kurds can manage their economic vitality to an extent, but as revenues from oil are distributed regionally, according to population, they remain dependent on Baghdad.

In order for Kurdistan to develop further within Iraq and to maintain its autonomy, the KRG, should share revenues with other regions in Iraq. An economic agreement must be formulated between the central government and the regional governments, particularly for sharing oil revenue. The central authority will decide on the allocation of certain portions of the revenues from oil and gas to other provinces. This agreement should then be incorporated into the constitution, which will be open for amendment with the consent of regional governments. This contract will also legitimize

the central government's authority in the international arena, while allowing the Kurds to maintain self-governance in Kurdistan.

The Kurdish leaders recognize the greater merits of autonomy as opposed to independence. In the event of the creation of an independent state, Kurdistan's landlocked position would jeopardize its oil agreements and contracts. In such a circumstance, how would it develop economically without Kirkuk? In addition, in the political realm, it is likely that old arguments and feuds between the rival organizations, the KDP and the PUK, would resurface. In the early years of the *de facto* Kurdistan, the struggle for power between the two factions resulted in divisions and subsequent infighting. This, ultimately, came to a halt with the intervention of the US and subsequent negotiations for power sharing. The two parties settled their disputes and following the invasion in 2003, formed the Kurdistan Regional Government. Future independence for Kurdistan would mean the two organizations would have to renegotiate their disputes and jointly work toward a successful independent state.

In the uncertain future of Iraq, the best-case scenario for the Kurds would be to have an independent state of Kurdistan with no fear of invasion. In such an event, the Kurdish leadership would have to pursue not only more rigorous diplomatic, economic and political relations with Iran and Turkey, but also have to assure these countries they would not foment or support Kurdish uprisings within their respective countries. In fact, establishing relations with Iran and Turkey would lessen these countries' fears of their restive Kurdish minorities. Strengthening alliances with both countries would largely alleviate fears of future incursions into Kurdistan.

However, the Kurds possess something much better than independence: autonomy. In the 1933 Montevideo Convention on Rights and Duties of States, a state is defined as possessing "a) a permanent population; b) a defined territory; c) government; and d) capacity to enter into relations with other States" (Stansfield, Iraqi 14). Kurdistan in Iraq comprises these features, but it is not an internationally recognized sovereign entity. It is a *de facto* state within a state.

As their nationalism has evolved over the decades, the Kurds might consider sharing their nationalism with Iraq. Their *Kurdishness* would remain intact; they would be considered Kurds first, and Iraqis second. Arabism would not mask their unique Kurdish identity. This might not appeal to all, but they are citizens of a sovereign and internationally recognized entity, and a few concessions are necessary in preserving their autonomy. It seems that such sentiments can be found among the Kurdish leaders. In a ceremony announcing the interim constitution, the President of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Masoud Barazani, claimed, "for the first time in his life, he was proud to be an Iraqi" (Al-Istrabadi 18).

7.2: Conclusions

Iraq is a fractured country that will not heal easily. The recent ethno-sectarian violence is a reflection of long term, ingrained political divisions. The violence is altering the social and demographic structure of the country, as Iraq's future is dependent upon balancing the demands of its primary communal groups – Shiite Arabs, Sunni Arabs, and Kurds. Each of these groups has a defined conception of what it means to be an Iraqi, and what the nation of Iraq should be in the future. The future of Iraq will

inevitably contain some form of ethno-sectarian identity based politics, but it must include all the principle ethnic and sectarian actors. Achieving a lasting peace will be a protracted and difficult process, but it is a necessity for a stable, viable state. The process will have to involve dialogue and negotiations with Iraqis and the regional actors – including Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia. The US must take a central role in this process and strongly advocate ethno-sectarian power sharing.

Any long-term plans for Kurdistan in Iraq must consider a strategic national vision, as well as regional ideal. For the reasons discussed herein, an independent state of Kurdistan is not viable at present and not congruent with the interests of the US and other international actors. Furthermore, Kurdistan's neighbours, particularly those with restive Kurdish populations, would not agree to a re-drawing of boundaries that could lead to destabilizing their own nations. As well, there is international concern that the creation of an independent Kurdistan would give impetus to other separatist groups around the globe.

It can be see, though, that the future establishment of real autonomy depends on a strong US presence in the northern region. Without US support and a long-term military base, the Kurds will remain vulnerable to the whims of their less-than-friendly neighbours, as well, to a possible resurgence of Arab nationalism in Iraq and other Arab states that perceive Iraq as a purely Arab entity. Conversely, the presence of the US limits the Kurdish nationalist desire for independence. In the meantime, the Kurdish leadership does not wish to be regarded as the catalysts for dividing Iraq, and will bide there time, comfortable with autonomy, until the moment is right to declare independence.

The dilemma faced by the Kurds in Iraq is whether they should press for independence or sustain their autonomy in the north. Although they strongly desire independence, they have, at least in the short term, chosen autonomy. International recognition has allowed the Kurds to enjoy diplomatic relations with other nations and to further ventures in international trade and investment. Whatever the future holds for Kurdistan, present circumstances grace them with recognition of their distinct ethnic identity and culture.

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