

BETWEEN DREAM AND REALITY: THE IRAQI KURDS

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KUTBETTİN KILIÇ

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Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

Prof. Dr. Sencer Ayata
Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science.

Prof. Dr. Meliha Altunışık
Head of Department

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science.

Prof. Dr. Meliha Altunışık
Supervisor

Examining Committee Members

Assist. Prof. Özlem Tür (METU, IR) _____

Prof. Dr. Meliha Altunışık (METU, IR) _____

Assist. Prof. Aykan Erdemir (METU, SOC) _____

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ABSTRACT

BETWEEN DREAM AND REALITY: THE IRAQI KURDS

Kılıç, Kutbettin

MS, Department of International Relations

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Meliha Altunışık

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This thesis departs from the idea that the political behaviors of the Iraqi Kurds will play important roles in shaping of the future of Iraq in particular and the Middle East in general. Based on this idea, this thesis analyzes the perceptions of Iraqi Kurds towards new political and economic developments in Iraq appeared after American invasion in 2003. The research questions of the thesis are the following: what are the perceptions of Iraqi Kurds of their leaders Jلال Talabani and Mesud Barzani, who are considered to represent all Iraqi Kurds, of new socio-political developments in Iraq, for the political situation in Northern Iraq, of the status of Kirkuk, of foreign support and of Turkey. In order to find answers of these questions, this thesis evaluates the results of interviews and inquiries made with Iraqi Kurds. In order to contextualize the perceptions of Iraqi Kurds, this thesis also focuses its attention on the domestic and international dimensions of the issue. By doing this, it aims to show how both dimensions affect each other in terms of escalating the Kurdish problem in Iraq. Furthermore, it emphasizes on how the international and domestic evolution of the issue played roles in determining of perceptions and ideas in the region.

Keywords: Perception, Kurds, Colonial Legacy, Iraq.

ÖZ

HAYAL VE GERÇEK ARASINDA: IRAK KÜRTLERİ

Kılıç, Kutbettin

Master, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü

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Bu tez, Irak Kürtlerinin siyasi tavırlarının özelde Irak'ın genelde ise Ortadoğu'nun geleceğinin şekillenmesinde önemli roller oynayacağı fikrinden hareket etmektedir. Bu görüşe dayalı olarak, bu tez Irak Kürtlerinin 2003'teki Amerikan işgalinden sonra ortaya çıkan yeni siyasi ve ekonomik gelişmelere yönelik algılamalarını analiz etmektedir. Tezin temel araştırma soruları şöyledir: Irak Kürtlerinin bütün Iraklı Kürtleri temsil ettikleri düşünülen liderleri Celal Talabani ve Mesut Barzani'ye, Irak'taki yeni sosyo-ekonomik gelişmelere, Kuzey Irak'taki siyasi duruma, Kerkük'ün statüsüne, dış desteklere ve Türkiye'ye yönelik algılamaları nelerdir? Bu sorulara cevap bulmak için bu tez bazı Iraklı Kürtlerle yapılmış anketlerin ve roportajların sonuçlarını değerlendirmektedir. Irak Kürtlerinin algılamalarını bağlamına yerleştirmek için bu tez ayrıca sorunun iç ve uluslararası boyutuna da odaklanmaktadır. Bunu yaparken bu iki boyutun Irak'taki Kürt sorununun tırmanması açısından birbirlerini nasıl etkilediklerini göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Buna ek olarak, bu tez sorunun iç ve uluslararası boyutunun bölgede algılamaları ve fikirleri etkilemede nasıl önemli roller oynadıklarına vurgu yapmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Algı, Kürtler, Sömürge Mirası, Irak

To My Brother Latif Kılıç

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Istanbul, August 2007

Kutbettin Kılıç

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CHAPTER 1

1. INTRODUCTION

It is possible to say that the severity of the Kurdish problem is second only to that of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the modern Middle East. While the latter receives the most attention due to its symbolic and religious dimensions, making the former seem secondary in importance, the Kurdish issue one of the main reasons behind instability in the contemporary Middle East.

Kurds mainly live in four states of the region: Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Iraq. To a lesser or greater extent, these states have Kurdish problems within their borders. However, the Iraqi Kurds are historically different. They have been in a constant state of revolt since the creation of Iraq. This situation is likely the result of the artificial character of the Iraqi state, especially when compared to those states having old state traditions such as Turkey and Iran. It is because of this that they have had never-ending dreams of an independent state; they have continued to believe that they could overcome the Iraqi government and establish their own state. However, in the face of reality, their hopes and dreams have not come to fruition but rather have met frustration and tragedy. The history of Iraqi Kurds has been wrought by these conditions.

The current Kurdish state of affairs has been shaped by the First Gulf War and the existing American invasion in Iraq, which have given a central role to the Iraqi Kurds in determining the future of Iraq. It is quite clear that Iraqi Kurds are more powerful politically in Iraq than they have been since the creation of Iraqi state. It must be noted that Iraq is a miniature prototype of the Middle East. It includes almost all ethnic groups that exist in the region. It is possible to say that while a possible political stability in Iraq can contribute to the stability of the region, the problems within it can also destabilize the region as a whole. The current American invasion has provided the Kurds with a strategic position in Iraqi politics. There is

no doubt that their decisions will play a very important role in the future of Iraq, in particular, and the Middle East, in general.

It is against this historical backdrop that this thesis focuses on the Iraqi Kurds, particularly on their perceptions towards new sociopolitical and socioeconomic developments in Iraq since the American invasion. It aims to clarify the perceptions of Iraqi Kurds in order to provide an appropriate ground for healthy predictions of their future behavior. The research questions of this thesis are the following: What are the perceptions of Iraqi Kurds of their leaders Jلال Talabani and Mesud Barzani, who are considered to represent all Iraqi Kurds, of new socio-political developments in Iraq, for the political situation in Northern Iraq, of the status of Kirkuk, of foreign support, and of Turkey. In order to answer these questions, I went to Northern Iraq and conducted fieldwork between the dates 4th May and 24th May 2006. While there, I conducted 9 interviews and 20 inquiries with politicians, journalists, academicians and students.

This thesis consists of three chapters. In the first chapter, I discuss the internal dimension of the issue. I try to show the internal evolution of the issue by focusing on historical turning points. In this chapter, I show how structural transformations that Iraqi politics have undergone have shaped the nature of the Kurdish revolt in Iraq.

In the second chapter, I examine the reasons behind the internationalization of the issue and the policies of individual global and regional powers. In the first part of this chapter, I discuss the main features of the international relations of the Middle East. In the second part of the chapter, I analyze the involvement of global and regional powers in the Kurdish problem in Iraq.

In the last chapter, I analyze the interview and inquiry results. The first two chapters contextualize the analysis made in this chapter. The main aim of the third chapter is to answer the research questions of this thesis. This is what makes it the most important chapter of the thesis. It provides the results of the interview and my

personal observations. In addition, it also includes theoretical and methodological reflections that are used by the thesis.

In the conclusion, I focus on general points that I have reached during my reading and fieldwork in the region.

CHAPTER 2

2. THE DOMESTIC DIMENSIONS OF THE KURDISH PROBLEM IN IRAQ

In this chapter, I discuss the domestic dimension of Kurdish problem in Iraq that has continued since the establishment of the Iraqi state. Emphasized are the historical turning points of the nationalist Kurdish movement in Iraq and its socio-political features. First, a brief historical background is provided in order to place the issue into historical context. The periodic Kurdish uprisings in Iraq and their consequences will be covered in chronological order. Secondly, the dominant features of this movement in Iraq that have become apparent during the historical evolution of the issue are clarified.

2.1 Historical Context

To elaborate on the historical evolution of the Kurdish national movement in Iraq, it seems logical to treat it in a wider context of the general history of the Iraqi state. It is logical because all structural transformations that Iraqi state has experienced have also transformed the character of the Kurdish movement. For example, the approach of the Hashemite monarchy towards the Kurds was substantially different from that of the Republican regime. Similarly, the responses of the Kurds to the Hashemite regime are distinct from their responses to Republican Iraq. As a result, I will treat the historical context under five headings: the Kurds and the Hashemite Monarchy, 1920-1958; the Kurds and Republican Iraq, 1958-1968; the Kurds and the Baath Regime, 1968-1991; the First Gulf War and the Kurds, 1991-2003; and the American Occupation and Kurds, 2003-present.

Despite differences in content, almost all of the literature available on Iraqi Kurds follows a similar methodology: chronologically beginning with the uprising of Sheikh Mahmud Berzenci, continuing through the uprisings of Barzani, the activities of Kurdistan Democratic Party of Barzani and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan of Jela

Talabani, and coming to an end with the current situation. Because this methodology enables one to obtain an historical picture of the issue, I have chosen to use it, too.

According to most experts on Iraqi Kurds, including academics, journalists and writers, the root cause of the Kurdish issue in Iraq is British colonial rule and its design of the Iraqi state.¹ When the British army occupied the land that was later to be called Iraq, they employed a number of techniques designed to facilitate their colonial rule. These included, for example, encouraging Kurdish desire for an independent Kurdish state.² Moreover, instead of a direct control based on the British army, the British preferred to give local autonomy to the Kurdish tribal leaders in order to avoid additional economic and military costs.³ In order to maintain this state of affairs, they made official and unofficial promises for an independent Kurdish state. As a result, these promises and practices raised expectations of Kurds of attaining an independent state.

2.1.1. The Kurds and the Hashemite Monarch, 1920-1958

On May 1, 1920 the League of Nations, at the San Remo Conference, gave the British mandatory power over Iraq and Palestine.⁴ British chose the second son of Sharif Hussein of Mecca Amir Faisal as the king of Iraq in August 1921.⁵ As a result, the British thought that bolstering a strong pro-British monarchy in Iraq was

¹ Michael Gunter, *The Kurds of Iraq: Tragedy and Hope*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), p.1. Stansfield, *ibid.* p.155.

² Wadie Jwaideh, *Kürt Milliyetçiliğinin Tarihi*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1999), p.330.

³ *Ibid.* and Nader Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*, (Colorado, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992), p.50.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.51.

⁵ *Ibid.*

more appropriate for their long-run interests than giving autonomy to the Kurds.⁶ Therefore, “by 1925, Britain, with vested interests in this oil-rich region, put all its weight behind the annexation of Mosul Wilayet to Iraq.”⁷ Consequently, the expectations of Kurds regarding independence or autonomy were not met.

British officers did not grant Kurds an independent state due to geopolitical and economic rationale. According to Stansfield, there are three reasons behind this preference:

The necessity of producing a viable political entity from the southern Mesopotamian region (the *vilayets* of Basra and Baghdad) led the British to betray their previous promises of autonomy to the Kurds and effectively saw the Kurdish northern region joined with Baghdad and Basra to form Iraq. Behind this decision was a combination of political, military, and economic considerations. Even at this point, the British were keen that Iraq be dominated by Sunnis rather than by the Shiite, even if they were forced to identify Kurds as Sunnis; militarily, Mesopotamia could be defended from the mountains far more easily than from the plains; and, most significantly, there were indications of large oil reserves under Kurdish territory at Kirkuk.⁸

In order to achieve this strategy, the British took the following approach: they recognized and strengthened the local power structures of tribal leaders with the aim of making the Kurds loyal to the Iraqi state, and provided financial support to these leaders. When tribal leaders assumed their powers and rejected being included in Iraq, the Iraqi government and the British forces used all means at their disposal, including intensive attacks to force them to behave in a way that was in line with British interests.⁹ According to Stansfield, this way of dealing with the Kurdish problem in Iraq has become a strategy commonly used by the Iraqi government. In other words, “the methods employed by the British to deal with the Kurds in the

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ofra Bengio, “Autonomy in Kurdistan in Historical Perspective” in Brendon O’leary, John McGarry, and Khaled Salih (eds.), *The Future of Kurdistan in Iraq*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), p.173.

⁸ Stansfield, Anderson, *ibid.*, pp. 162-164.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

post-World War I period set the blueprint for successive Iraqi regimes to follow and refine.”¹⁰

2.1.1.1 Sheikh Mahmud Revolt

The British decision resulted in grievances among Kurds who wanted to establish a Kurdish state since Kurdish uprisings began breaking out after 1925, with the exception of the uprising of Sheikh Mahmud Berzenci. The sheikh was a member of the famous Berzenci family/tribe. This family was famous because of their religious tradition. As a result, Sheikh Mahmud exercised great control over the Kurds, especially those of Sulaimaniya. As stated above, as a result of the British policy to give local autonomy to tribal leaders instead of direct control, Sheikh Mahmud consolidated his position. Britain tried to use its influence and gave him local autonomy.

The British wanted Sheikh Mahmud to recognize the suzerainty of Iraq over Kurdish lands. However, Sheikh gradually acted independently and saw himself as “the king of Kurdistan.”¹¹ This clash of interests resulted in a number of revolts led by Sheikh Mahmud. His last revolt broke out when British declared that they would grant independence to Iraq in 1932. But after an intensive offensive of the Iraqi Army with the support of Royal Air Force (RAF) of British, Sheikh was defeated in 1931.¹² Hence, the first serious Kurdish movement against British was suppressed. However, this rebellion was not last but actually the first Kurdish rebellion, a hint for future Kurdish revolts.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Gerard Chaliand, *The Kurdish Tragedy*, (London&New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd, 1994), p.52. Gunter, *ibid.*, p.3. Jwaideh, *ibid.*, pp. 331-333.

¹² Jwaideh, *ibid.*, Entessar, *ibid.*

2.1.1.2 The Sheikh Ahmed Revolt

It is possible to argue that the history of the nationalist Kurdish movement in Iraq, in particular, and the history of Kurds of Iraq, at large, cannot be understood without taking into consideration the key roles played by the members of Barzani family in these movements. They have played and continue to play important roles in nearly every Kurdish movement in Iraq. As a result, they have succeeded in exercising great influence over the major part of Iraqi Kurds. The first person that created this influence and spread the fame of the Barzani family was Sheikh Ahmed Barzani.

Sheikh Ahmad had influence over his followers in two ways. First, he was a religious leader, a sheikh of a Naqshbandi order. Through this title, he had an unquestioned spiritual authority stemmed from strong and spiritual relations between Sheikh and disciples. Second, as a leader of the Barzani tribe, he was referred to as an Agha, which meant that he had great influence over his tribesmen. In other words, the most important power behind his authority was his success in combining both secular and religious titles with his name.

Some writers argue that Sheikh Ahmad had heretical beliefs that were incompatible with Islamic rules. For example, according to these claims, he imposed Christianity and ordered his followers to eat pork.¹³ According to Entessar, “Sheikh Ahmad proved to be an adept military leader, but his eccentricities, especially in his unorthodox Islamic practices that combined Christian and Islamic elements, caused other tribal leaders to oppose Barzani.”¹⁴ But Entessar also points out that he reverted to the practices of Orthodox Islam later.¹⁵ Jwaideh makes the same claim. On the other hand, in his book, he provides counterclaims of writers belonging to the

¹³ Gunter, *ibid.*, p.6.

¹⁴ Entessar, *ibid.*, p.54.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Barzani tribe. According to them, the accusations made against Sheikh Ahmed have no basis in truth. They regarded these claims as slander designed to keep people from supporting Sheikh Ahmed.¹⁶ It must be said that these two counterclaims have wide support among writers.

On the other hand, there are diverse claims concerning the reasons for Sheikh Ahmad's rebellion. The most common view is that this rebellion stemmed from the British decision to settle Assyrians in the Barzan region. According to this view, Sheikh opposed this decision and refused to pay taxes to the new Iraqi government in the 1932. As a consequence, the Iraqi government launched an offensive against Sheikh Ahmad with the support of Royal Air Force (RAF). After this intensive offensive, the Sheikh and his younger brother, Mullahh Mustafa, had to cross the Turkish border and subsequently surrendered to Turkish officials on June 22 1932.¹⁷

According to Jwaideh, there were two groups of writers in terms of reasons given for this rebellion.¹⁸ The first consisted of writers who were generally British officers working in Iraq during British mandate. He also shares the claims of writers belonging to this group. They stressed Sheikh Ahmad's complex personality and his religious eccentricity as the main reason for the rebellion. The second group consisted of Kurdish and partly Arab writers. They claimed that the reason for this rebellion was the British decision to settle Assyrians in the Barzan region. Jwaideh wrote his book in 1961. From that time onwards, it seems that almost all subsequent writers accepted the second claim unquestioningly as the main reason for the revolt.

¹⁶ When I was in the region for field research, I found a chance to ask these claims to the old members of Barzani tribe. They rejected these claims and labeled them as slanders aimed at preventing people to support Sheikh Ahmed. However, many other people including journalists with whom I made interviews considered these claims likely.

¹⁷ Gunter, *ibid.*, p.7.

¹⁸ Jwaideh., *ibid.*, p. 425.

Nevertheless, Mesud Barzani, in his book entitled “Barzani and the Kurdish National Liberation Movement,” touches upon another point. According to Barzani, the British decision regarding the Assyrians was not the real result of the clashes between British forces and Barzani's but the result of an ongoing feeling of revenge on the part of the British stemming from Sheikh Mahmud's revolt. He argues that Sheikh Ahmad gave great support to Sheikh Mahmud Berzenci in his rebellion against the British. This support had become apparent to the British when tribal leaders who were on the side of Iraqi government gave the governor of Mosul the letters written by Sheikh Ahmed inviting them to support Sheikh Mahmud's revolt. According to Mesud Barzani, this was the main reason behind the clashes between the British and Sheikh Ahmed. As for decision of British to settle the Assyrians in the land of Barzan tribe, Mesud Barzani says that this decision was the result of British feelings of revenge vis-à-vis Sheikh Ahmed that led them to want to punish him for his support of Sheikh Mahmud's revolt.¹⁹ Whatever the reasons for this revolt, it failed.

After a short adventure in Turkey, Sheikh Ahmed and Mullahh Mustafa were turned over to Iraq. The Iraqi government arrested and transferred them firstly to the city of Nasiriye, located in Southern Iraq, and then allowed them to move to the city of Sulaimaniya.²⁰ According to Gunter, the decision to transfer them to Sulaymaniya was a big mistake on the part of the Iraqi government because this city had a symbolic importance for Iraqi Kurds. It was the home to nationalist Kurdish urban intellectuals.²¹ Gunter argues that, “It was here that young Mullahh Mustafa undoubtedly began to stretch his limited, tribal horizons and reach instead for a nascent appreciation of Kurdish nationalism”.²² On the other hand, according to

¹⁹ Mesud Barzani, *Barzani ve Kürt Ulusal Özgürlük Hareketi*, vol. I, (İstanbul: Doz Yayınları, 2005), p. 37

²⁰ Kerim Yıldız, *The Kurds in Iraq*, (London: Pluto Press, 2004), p.15.

²¹ Gunter, *ibid.*, p. 7.

²² *Ibid.*

Jwaideh, one of the reasons for transferring Sheikh Ahmed and Mullah Mustafa to Sulaymaniya was the rebellion of Khalil Khosnav that had begun in 1934. One of the demands of Khalil Khosnav was the returning of the Barzanis to the Barzan region. Perhaps Iraqi government did not accept this demand but they allowed Sheikh Ahmed and Mullah Mustafa to move Sulaimaniya instead.²³

According to Mesud Barzani, there were two factors behind the decision of the Iraqi government to transfer Sheikh Ahmed and Mullah Mustafa to Sulaymaniya. The first reason was World War II. Because of this war, the British could not give enough attention to Iraqi affairs. The second reason was that the Iraqi government had forgotten the Barzani problem.²⁴

2.1.1.3 The First Mullah Mustafa Revolt, 1943-1945

Mullah Mustafa found a way of escaping from Sulaimanya and arrived in the Barzan region in 1943. There are also different views regarding the explanations for the escape of Mullah Mustafa. The most widely common view is that after Sheikh Ahmed and Mullah Mustafa were transferred to Sulaimaniya under house arrest, they faced financial difficulties due to reduced government aid. These financial difficulties are shown as the most important motive for his flight.²⁵ Quoting from a Kurdish writer, Jwaideh explained in his book that according to Sheikh Ahmed there were two factors leading to the fleeing of Mullah Mustafa: financial difficulties and being insulted by government officials.²⁶

²³ Jwaideh, *ibid.* pp. 444-45.

²⁴ Barzani, *ibid.*, p.79.

²⁵ Chaliand, *ibid.* p.54. Jwaideh, *ibid.*, p.449. Yildiz, *ibid.*, McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1996), p.290.

²⁶ Jwaideh, *ibid.*, pp.448-49.

In addition, Hewa (“hope”), a party founded in 1941, helped Mullahh Mustafa in his escape from Sulaimaniya.²⁷ This party was founded with the participation of two different Kurdish movements: the Brayati (Brotherhood) and Karker. Chaliand describes these parties as follows:

Brayati, a group which had been established along the lines of the Kurdish clubs of Constantinople, brought together notables and intellectuals and was dominated by Sheikh Latif, one of the sons of Sheikh Mahmud. On the other hand, Karker, was an association of young progressives close to the Iraqi Communist Party.²⁸

This support of Hewa for Mullahh Mustafa can be seen as the first contact between Urban Kurdish intellectuals and tribal leaders with the intent of combining forces against the Iraqi government. But their later relations would be conflictual, as will be explained in the following pages.

Mullahh Mustafa’s first action after coming to the Barzan region was establishing small fighting forces and attacking police stations.²⁹ While these actions were being carried out, Nuri Said was the prime minister of Iraq. In order to stop the deleterious activities of Mullahh Mustafa, he wanted to use Sheikh Ahmed, who was under arrest, as a bargaining tool. But Mullahh Mustafa rejected all offers made by the government regarding Sheikh Ahmed and continued his armed activities.³⁰ His rejection of the Government’s offers and continuation of his activities even though his elder brother Sheikh Ahmed was in the hands of government seems very strange. But according to Mesud Barzani, his father received an order from Sheikh Ahmed to continue his fighting and not to negotiate with the government for his release.³¹

²⁷ McDowall, *ibid.*, pp.293-294. Jwaideh, *ibid.*, pp.464-468. Gunter, *ibid.*, p.9.

²⁸ Chaliand, *ibid.*, p.54.

²⁹ Entessar, *ibid.*, p.55. Jwaideh, *ibid.*, p.450. McDowall, *ibid.*, pp.290-291.

³⁰ Entessar, *ibid.*

³¹ Barzani, *ibid.* p.80.

Because Britain had to give its undivided attention to World War II, it was concerned about the development of undesirable events in Iraq. Consequently, it strongly advised the Nuri Said government to negotiate with Mullahh Mustafa and to solve problems peacefully.³² Nuri Said sent a delegation headed by Majid Mustafa, the minister of Kurdish affairs in the Nuri Said cabinet who was of Kurdish origin, to negotiate with Mullahh Mustafa.³³ Mullahh Mustafa submitted a list including his demands of the government. In the literature, this list differs from writer to writer. It seems that Jwaideh's list generally covers what these different lists include. According to Jwaideh, This list contained briefly six demands:

1. Establishment of a Kurdish province including Kirkuk under control of elected Kurdish leaders.
2. Appointment of a Kurdish official, a member of the Iraqi cabinet, to govern this new province.
3. A Kurdish vice-minister for each ministry in the cabinet.
4. The maintenance of provincial authority in cultural, agricultural, and economic issues with the exception of military and police affairs.
5. Removal of corrupt persons from office and their transfer to other places.
6. Acceptance of Kurdish as an official language.³⁴

Mullahh Mustafa and Majid Mustafa met in Mergesor to negotiate these demands and agreed on following points:

1. The release of Sheikh Ahmed together with all women, men and children belonging to the Barzan tribe who were under arrest and allowing them to return to the Barzan region.

³² Entessar, *ibid.*, Gunter, *ibid.*, p.9.

³³ Entessar, *ibid.*

³⁴ Jwaideh S. 451-52. Gunter, McDowall, and Entessar's lists include lesser demands than Jwaideh's list. See for example, Gunter, *ibid.*, p.9. Entessar, *ibid.* McDowall, *ibid.*, pp.292-293.

2. The moving of Mullahh Mustafa to Baghdad in order to present his loyalty to government in a convenient manner.
3. The appointment of honest, right and just persons to administration of the Barzan region.
4. The provision of schools, roads, police stations and other similar means that result in creating a milieu of order and welfare.³⁵

Majid Mustafa returned to Baghdad and presented a detailed report to the Iraqi Cabinet. The cabinet opposed the proposals contained in the report. Not only did they reject the demands but also decided to suppress the Barzani movement.³⁶

According to Jwaideh, it was clear that this decision of the Iraqi cabinet represented the success of the anti-Kurd front within the cabinet. This decision was taken when Prime Minister Nuri Said, whose took a relatively moderate approach to the Kurdish problem, was on a visit to Palestine. His absence at the cabinet meeting made it easy to reach that decision.³⁷ In any case, his government was overthrown in 1944 while negotiations were still going on.³⁸ “One concrete result of these negotiations was the removal of surveillance restrictions on Sheikh Ahmed in 1944.”³⁹

With the negotiations having stopped, clashes between Barzani and government forces began in 1945. Although the Barzani forces experienced some successes, the government forces and some rival Kurdish tribes, such as Bradosti, Surchi and Zibar, defeated Mullahh Mustafa and forced him to cross Iranian borders.⁴⁰

³⁵ Jwaideh, *Ibid.*, p.452.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 454.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Entessar, *Ibid.*, p.56.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*. Chaliand, *ibid.*, p.55. Gunter, *ibid.* pp.9-10.

During that time, new developments were occurring in Iran. As a result of occupation of Iran by Britain and the Soviet Union during World War II, Iranian Kurds, under the leadership of Qazi Muhammad, who was an Iranian Kurdish nationalist and intellectual, declared the independence of Mahabad Republic in January 1946, with the support of Soviet Union.⁴¹ Mullahh Mustafa joined the Mahabad Republic and assumed the military leadership. But this experience was very short lived. This transitory state was a result of a power vacuum along the Iraqi-Iranian frontier caused by the conditions of World War II. When conditions normalized, it was understood that this state could not stand on its own feet.⁴²

With the destruction of the Mahabad Republic in late 1946, there was no choice for Barzani but to make the difficult retreat to the Soviet Union with the some of his fighters. He was well aware of that the Iraqi regime was prepared to execute him if he was arrested.⁴³ After marching fifty-two days through mountainous border regions, they reached the Soviet Union. When they arrived, they were dispersed through country. They spent 12 years in the Soviet Union until the withdrawing of Hashemite Monarch in Iraq in 1958.⁴⁴ Between Mullahh Mustafa's nearly 12-year Soviet experience and 1958 coup, there were no important clashes between the Iraqi government and Iraqi Kurds. But one of the most important developments of the Kurdish movement in Iraq during this interlude was the establishment of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in 1946.

⁴¹ Gunter, *ibid.*, p.11. James Ciment, *The Kurds State and Minority in Turkey, Iraq and Iran*, (USA: Facts On File, Inc., 1996), p.65

⁴² Ciment, *ibid.* p.66

⁴³ Chaliand, *ibid.* p.55. Entessar, *ibid.* p.56. Gunter, *ibid.*, p.10.

⁴⁴ Ciment, *ibid.*

2.1.1.4 The Kurdistan Democratic Party

When Mullahh Mustafa joined the Mahabad Republic, he witnessed new economic, political and organizational developments there. It seems that he wanted to implement what he saw in the Mahabad Republic to Iraqi Kurds. The establishment of the KDP, which has been the preeminent Kurdish party in Iraqi history, can be seen as an example of this. Although there have been many Kurdish parties in Iraq, including Heva, Shoresh, and Rizgari, none has been able to successfully organize Iraqi Kurds to the degree the KDP has since its establishment.

Urban intellectuals who wanted to replace traditional tribal leadership and the tribal structure of Kurds with the modern sense of urban leadership and modern social classes established the majority of these parties. But in a society where tribal relations are deeply rooted, it is difficult to attract people to such parties. Urban Kurdish elites in Iraq understood this situation. It is because of this that Heva helped Mullahh Mustafa to escape from detention in Sulaimaniya in 1943 and his unsuccessful uprising of 1945.

The desire of Mullahh Mustafa to apply new developments occurring within Mahabad to Iraqi Kurds and the needs of urban elites to cooperate with a charismatic tribal leader in order to increase their influence over the Kurdish people brought them together in the idea of establishing the KDP. The establishment of Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) in 1945 inspired both Mullahh Mustafa and urban Kurdish intellectuals such as Hamza Abdullah. The following year, Hamza Abdullah went to Mahabad in the name of Shoresh to learn what possibilities of cooperation existed. His visit to Mahabad and his meetings with Mullahh Mustafa and other Iraqi Kurds paved the way for the idea of establishing a new party in Iraq modeled long the line of Iran's KDP.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Gunter, *ibid*, p.22

Hamza Abdullah returned to Iraq after a short time with two letters written by Mullahh Mustafa. One of these letters was for Sheikh Baba Ali, Sheikh Mahmud's son, to mediate with Baghdad for his return. With the second letter, Mullahh Mustafa suggested the establishment of the KDP-Iraq.⁴⁶ From the outset, the idea of establishing the KDP-Iraq was not welcomed by the members of either small Kurdish parties – the Shoresh and Rizgari Kurd – in Iraq. The majority of these people consisted of leftist urban intellectuals who devoted their efforts to eliminating the influence of tribal relations on Kurdish society. They knew that the establishment of this party would mean strengthening the position of tribal leaders such as Mullahh Mustafa, Sheikh Latif and Ziyad Agha. In other words, they were afraid of endangering their efforts to demolish the effects of tribal structure with the establishment of KDP-Iraq. In the process, they understood that they had no choice but to accept to join this party in order to increase their control over Kurdish people. As it was stated before, they realized that they could not reach their political aims without cooperation with tribal leaders.⁴⁷ This ironic situation led them to join the KDP-Iraq.

In August 1946, both the Shoresh and Rizgari dissolved themselves. As a result, the KDP-Iraq was established in 1946 through the cooperation of four different parties: the Shoresh, the Rizgari, the Hewa, and the Iraqi branch of the Iranian KDP.⁴⁸ This newly established party held its first congress in Baghdad on 16 August 1946 with the participation of 32 delegates. At this congress, Hamza Abdullah was chosen to be the first secretary general. Mullahh Mustafa was elected as the president of the party in exile, and Sheikh Latif and Ziyad Agha were elected as vice-presidents.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ McDowall, *ibid.*, p.296

⁴⁷ Martin van Bruinessen, *Kurdish Ethno-Nationalism versus Nation-Building States*, (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2000), p.199

⁴⁸ Gunter, *ibid.* For more details about these parties, see McDowall, *ibid.*, pp.293-294.

⁴⁹ McDowall, *ibid.*, p.296

After the establishment of the KDP, an intensive intraparty struggle occurred between the party's first secretary general Hamza Abdullah and Ibrahim Ahmed, who was the representative of the KDP-Iran in Sulaimanya. At the beginning, he was reluctant to accept the idea of establishing the KDP-Iraq. When the Mahabad Republic fell in the 1947, he agreed to join the newly established party.⁵⁰ The first intraparty struggle broke out between these two leftist intellectuals. In 1950, Hamza Abdullah was imprisoned because of his political activities. At the second congress of the KDP held in the summer of following year, Ibrahim Ahmed was elected as the secretary general.⁵¹ His first action was to expel Hamza Abdullah from the party. It is said that Mullah Mustafa did not like the new leader of the party and supported Hamza Abdullah.⁵² But Ibrahim Ahmed remained secretary general of the KDP until 1959.

2.1.2 The Kurds and the Republican Regime 1958-1968

With the ousting of the Hashemite monarchy from power on 14 July 1958, a new era started for the Iraqi Kurds, in particular, and for Iraq, at large. A group of officers headed by Abd al-Karim Qasim, together with the support of different social and political groups that came together under the umbrella of the National Unity Front founded in 1959⁵³, replaced the monarchy with a three-man Sovereignty Council,

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.298

⁵¹ Ibid. According to Gunter, this change did not taken place in the second congress held in 1951 but in the third congress held in 1953. See for example, Gunter, *ibid.*, p.23

⁵² Gunter, *ibid.* Mesud Barzani says that his father (Mullah Mustafa) gave great support to Hamza Abdullah, but he could not appreciate fully his and party's interests. See for example, Mesud Barzani, *ibid.*, pp.495-496.

⁵³ These parties were following: Iraqi Communist Party, Independence Party, Patriotic Democratic Party, Arab Socialist Baath Party. According to Mesud Barzani, although the KDP wanted to join this front, the Baath Party rejected membership of the KDP. As a result, the KDP could not join the front, but maintained harmonious policies with this front. See for example, Barzani, *ibid.* p.437. However,

including an Arab Sunni, an Arab Shiite, and a Kurd.⁵⁴ The early years of this republican era, which lasted ten years – from 1958 to 1968, created an optimistic atmosphere for the Kurds. For the first time in Iraqi history, the provisional constitution that was published two weeks after the overthrow of Hashemite monarchy recognized that the Arabs and the Kurds were associates in Iraq.⁵⁵ For example, it was stressed in article III that “Arabs and Kurds are partners in the Homeland, and their national rights are recognized within the Iraqi entity.”⁵⁶ “Symbolically, the arms of the new republic were made up of an Arab sword crossed with a Kurdish dagger.”⁵⁷ What is more, Abd al-Karim Qasim allowed Mullahh Mustafa to return to Iraq. In this way, his 12-year exile in the Soviet Union came to an end.

The KDP was fervent in its support of the new regime. In order to express his party’s support for Abd al-Karim Qasim, Ibrahim Ahmad, KDP Secretary General, issued a declaration that hailed the *coup d’etat* and equality for the Kurdish and Arab peoples.⁵⁸ Mullahh Mustafa and other Kurdish leaders, including Ibrahim Ahmad, wanted to get Abd al-Karim Qasim to trust them by trying to demonstrate their sincerity at every opportunity. The uprising against the new regime that broke out in Mosul provided a good opportunity for Mullahh Mustafa to demonstrate his

According to McDowall, ICP also was not a member of this front. See for example, McDowall, *ibid.*, p.302.

⁵⁴ McDowall, *ibid.* Phebe Marr, “Republic of Iraq” in David E. Long, (ed.) Bernard Reich, *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa*, (USA: Westview Press, 2002), p.108. According to Mesud Barzani these persons were Muhammad Necip Er-Rubeyi (an Arab Sunni), Muhammad Mehdi Kubbe (an Arab Shi’a), and Halid Naqshbandi (a Kurd). See for example Barzani, *ibid.*, p.445. Entessar. p.58

⁵⁵ Chaliand p.56

⁵⁶ McDowall, p.302. V. Minorsky, TH. Bois, D.N. Mac Kenzie, *Kürtler & Kürdistan*, (İstanbul: Doz Yayınları: 2004), p.116.

⁵⁷ Chaliand. *ibid.*

⁵⁸ McDowall. *ibid.*

importance to Abd al-Karim Qasim. His forces successfully suppressed this uprising. By doing so, he confirmed his worth to Qasim.⁵⁹ This suppressed rebellion provided an excellent pretext for Qasim to remove Nationalists and Baathists from the armed forces and government.⁶⁰

The most important reason for the collaboration between Abd al-Karim Qasim and Kurds was the presence of common adversaries.⁶¹ As it is noted before, different political groups that had different worldviews supported the regime change led by Qasim. Shortly after regime change, the differences and clashes of interest between these groups came to the surface. “Qasim’s internal adversaries included the Communists, the Baathists, the Nasserites, and other Arab nationalists, all of whom wished to shape the sociopolitical structures of the new Iraq in their own image.”⁶² Qasim saw Arab nationalists as the biggest threat for himself. The main goal of Arab nationalists was to integrate Iraq into the United Arab Republic (UAR) that had been established between Syria and Egypt only few months before the overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy.⁶³ The possibility of integration into the UAR was unacceptable to the Kurds, the Iraqi Communist Party and Abd al-Karim Qasim.

Each had their own reasons for opposing this idea of integration into the UAR. For example, Kurds opposed Iraq’s joining the UAR because “in a union whose basic philosophy was to promote Arabism and Arab nationalism, their condition would not improve.”⁶⁴ On the other hand, the ICP opposition to this union was completely

⁵⁹ McDowall, *ibid.*, p.304. Entessar, *ibid.*, p.60. Chaliand, *ibid.*

⁶⁰ McDowall, *ibid.*

⁶¹ Entessar, *ibid.* p.59

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

ideological. The ICP regarded the UAR as a union of Arab countries constructed by two ideological movements: bourgeois nationalism and anticommunism.⁶⁵ Therefore, this union represented nothing to the ICP apart from its anticommunist stance. Qasim's opposition to the idea of joining this union was grounded in personal attitude. As McDowall states very well in his book, "Qasim did not wish to bow to Arab nationalist pressure, and certainly had no intention of playing second fiddle to Nasser in an enlarged UAR."⁶⁶ The presence of these common interests led them to closely work together.⁶⁷

As a result of this alliance, Mullah Mustafa assumed his power in the Kurdish regions in the northern part of the country.⁶⁸ His first step was to attack rival tribes (e.g., the Surchis, Baradustis, Zibaris, and Harkis) that had allied themselves with Iraqi government to force him to cross Iranian border in 1945. Moreover, these tribes, especially the Baradustis, had rebelled against the republican regime mostly because of the Agrarian Reform Law. Through this law, the Government "limited landholdings to a maximum of 1,000 dunums of irrigated and 2,000 dunums of rain-fed land; this implied redistribution of almost half of the total cultivated area of Iraq (24 million dunums) to the peasantry."⁶⁹ In other words, the Agrarian Reform Law was a major threat to tribal leaders in terms of economic gain. Mullah Mustafa became very successful in defeating these tribes and forcing them to cross Turkish and Iranian borders. Examining the situation from this angle, Mullah Mustafa greatly assisted Qasim by suppressing rebel Aghas.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.60.

⁶⁶ McDowall, *ibid.* p.303.

⁶⁷ Entessar, *ibid.*, p.59.

⁶⁸ Entessar, *ibid.*, p.63.

⁶⁹ McDowall, *ibid.*, p. 306.

On the other hand, he also replaced Ibrahim Ahmad with Hamza Abdullah as the secretary general of the KDP for a short time in 1959. According to McDowall, the real reason for this replacement was the displeasure of Qasim stemming from Ibrahim Ahmed's effort to build good relations with Arab nationalist General Arif at the expense of himself.⁷⁰ He wanted Mullah Mustafa to remove him.⁷¹ But when Qasim's relations with the ICP deteriorated,⁷² Mullah Mustafa replaced Hamza Abdullah, who was a well-known communist, with Ibrahim Ahmed once more, and reinstated Jلال Talabani as Politburo member in 1960.⁷³

2.1.2.1 The Second Mullah Mustafa Revolt 1961-1963

However, good relations between Mullah Mustafa and Qasim deteriorated due to Qasim's increasing anxiety regarding Mullah Mustafa's power.⁷⁴ Although he gave great support to Qasim in order to remove his rivals, such as Arab nationalists, Baathists and rebel Aghas, Mullah Mustafa's increasing power in the northern part of the country was a source of increasing apprehension for Qasim.⁷⁵ In contrast to

⁷⁰ McDowall, *ibid.*, p.303. This view seems true, because Ibrahim Ahmed, according to Entessar, supported unification of Iraq with the UAR. It can be because of this support that Ibrahim Ahmed wanted to build good relations with General Arif who was the chief advocate of this unification. See for example, Entessar, *ibid.*, p.61.

⁷¹ McDowall, *ibid.*

⁷² When Qasim held ICP responsible for Kirkuk massacre in 1959, his relations with this party deteriorated and he assumed a negative manner against this party. As a result of this negative manner, Qasim banned all activities of the ICP in 1960 with the pretext of lacking of technical requirements. See for example, Entessar, *ibid.* McDowall, *ibid.*, p.305.

⁷³ McDowall, *ibid.*, p.306. According to many other writers including Mesud Barzani, Hamza Abdullah with his communist orientation kept KDP under control of the ICP. As a result, in order to prevent this danger, Mullah Mustafa removed Hamza Abdullah from Party. See for example, Barzani, *ibid.*, p.495. Entessar, *ibid.* McDowall, *ibid.*

⁷⁴ McDowall, p.307.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

other political groups in Iraq, there was no party support behind Qasim. It was because of this situation that he regarded all political groups, including Mullah Mustafa and KDP that supported his *coup d'état* against Hashemite Monarchy, as threats to himself.⁷⁶ In order to balance Mullah Mustafa's increasingly undisputed grip on Kurdish region, he tried to build relations with the tribes that were the rivals of Mullah Mustafa and supported them financially, including equipping them with arms.⁷⁷

Mullah Mustafa was greatly displeased by Qasim's hostile attitudes towards him, as well as his support of rival tribes. According to Entessar, he even "traveled to the Soviet Union to ask the Kremlin to put pressure on Qasim to change his policies."⁷⁸ But it seems that he was unsuccessful in preventing Qasim's policies against him. When intensive clashes occurred between the Barzanis and two traditional rival tribes, the Surchis and the Herkis, in mid-1961⁷⁹ and Mullah Mustafa's forces occupied Zakho, Qasim retaliated by sending troops to the region and bombing the villages of Barzan.⁸⁰

Moreover, Qasim put pressure on the KDP and its leaders. Ibrahim Ahmad was arrested because of being accused for the assassination of Sadeq Miran, a Kurdish associate of Qasim in March 1961. Although he was released due to lack of

⁷⁶ Ibid., Entessar, *ibid.*, p.62.

⁷⁷ Entessar, *ibid.* Mesud Barzani admits that Qasim had has right on his side to behave and think like that. Because the KDP started to behave as a state within state. See for example, Mesud Barzani, *ibid.*, second vol., p.18.

⁷⁸ Entessar, *ibid.*

⁷⁹ While Entessar put points out struggle between Barzanis and these two tribes, Chaliand give great emphasis on struggle between Barzanis and Zibaris. But McDowall touches on struggle between Barzanis and three of these tribes. Entessar, *ibid.*, p.63. Chaliand, *ibid.*, p.57. McDowall, *ibid.* p.307.

⁸⁰ Entessar, *ibid.*, p.62. Chaliand, *ibid.* McDowall, *ibid.*, p.308.

sufficient evidence, this was a clear signal for Qasim's future policies towards the KDP.⁸¹ Likewise, he banned all activities of the party. This situation led to open hostility towards Qasim on the part of Ibrahim Ahmad and Jلال Talabani.⁸²

The Kurdish revolt against Qasim occurred in 1961.⁸³ According to McDowall, three mutually suspicious Kurdish groups were involved.⁸⁴ First group consisted of tribal Aghas who had experienced loss because of the Agrarian Reform Law. Their aim was to reverse this law. The second group was the Mullah Mustafa and his peshmergas. As I stated above, his problem with Qasim was Qasim's support of rival tribes. The third group was the KDP. When Qasim banned the activities of the party, Jلال Talabani and Ibrahim Ahmad had no other choice but to take part in the revolt.⁸⁵ Qasim's policies towards each of these groups brought them together against him.

In 1962, because of many factors, including Iraq's Kuwait problem⁸⁶ and difficult mountain and climate conditions, rebel Kurds took the most of the Kurdish region in Iraq under their control.⁸⁷ During this revolt, many Kurdish tribes sided with the Iraqi government against Kurdish rebels.⁸⁸ What is more, the KDP sought to create

⁸¹ Entessar, *ibid.*

⁸² McDowall, *ibid.*

⁸³ Entessar, *ibid.*. McDowall, *ibid.*

⁸⁴ McDowall, *ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.310.

⁸⁶ Phebe Marr, *ibid.* p.109

⁸⁷ Chaliand, pp.57-8.

⁸⁸ Entessar, *ibid.*, p.66. McDowall, *ibid.*, p.312.

alliances with other opposition groups in Iraq to oust Qasim from power.⁸⁹ While the ICP rejected the KDP's offer, the Baathists accepted it.⁹⁰ They came to an agreement on the point that "while the army was concentrated on the overthrow of Qasim in Baghdad, the Kurds would not exploit army weakness in the north."⁹¹ This revolt lasted until Qasim's era was brought to a close on February 8, 1963 by the Baathists.⁹² With the overthrow of Qasim, the Kurds started negotiating with the National Council of the Revolutionary Command (NCRC). The government was formed under Nasserist President Abdal Salam Arif and the Baathist Prime Minister Ahmad Hasan al Bakr.⁹³

During these negotiations, Kurds offered their demands to government officials. Kurdish demands were similar to those they had in the 1943 revolt.

Mullah Mustafa demanded an immediate and formal recognition of Kurdish autonomy and that this should cover virtually the whole of the old Vilayet of Mosul including the Kirkuk oilfields, excluding only the city of Mosul itself. Among his demands was an insistence on the creation of separate Kurdish armed forces, and that autonomous Kurdistan should receive two thirds of the national oil revenue, a proportion justified by the location of the oilfields in territories he claimed. Finally, he warned that fighting would recommence if the government did not accede to his demands within three days.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Entessar, *ibid.*, p.63. McDowall, *ibid.* pp. 312-13.

⁹⁰ Entessar, *ibid.*

⁹¹ McDowall, *ibid.*, p.313.

⁹² Entessar, *ibid.*, p.64. Entessar argues that Kurds signed cease-fire with Qasim shortly before he was ousted from power. But other writers agree that this cease-fire agreement was signed between Kurds and Baathists.

⁹³ McDowall, *ibid.* Entessar, *ibid.* Chaliand, *ibid.*, p.58.

⁹⁴ McDowall, *ibid.*, p.314.

But the first Baath government saw these demands as unacceptable. With the rejection of these demands, clashes between government forces and peshmergas resumed. To a lesser or greater extent, with the exception of a short-term 1964 cease-fire accord between the Baathist government and Mullah Mustafa, these clashes lasted until the second Baath government came to power in 1968. Mullah Mustafa's signing of a cease-fire agreement with the Iraqi government following the fall of Baath party in November 1963 without informing the politburo members of the KDP generated great resentment among these members, especially in Ibrahim Ahmed's and Jelal Talabani's group.⁹⁵ As a result of this resentment, Jelal Talabani struggled against Mullah Mustafa in 1966 on the side of Baghdad.⁹⁶

2.1.3 The Kurds and the Baath Regime 1968-1991

With the return of the Baathists to power in 1968, the Kurdish problem in Iraq entered into a new era. This new phase formed the basis for dealing with the Kurdish problem in Iraq until the pacifying of Saddam Hussein with the Gulf War by Allied Forces in 1991.

2.1.3.1 The March 1970 Agreement

When the second Baath regime came to power, it was in a weak position and needed to stabilize the country internally in order to strengthen its position within Iraq. As a result, it had no alternative but to build good relations with the Kurds, even with

⁹⁵ Gunter, *ibid.*, p.23 McDowall, *ibid.*, p. 315. Entessar, *ibid.*, p. 67. Chaliand, *ibid.*, p.59.

⁹⁶ Talabani used tribal nature of Mullah Mustafa's movement as a pretext to legitimize its support for Iraqi government in 1966. Chaliand., p. 60. Also see: Martin van Bruinessen, *Kürdistan Üzerine Yazılar*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1992), p.190., Gareth Stansfield, "Governing Kurdistan: The Strength of Division" in Brendon O'leary, John McGarry, and Khaled Salih (eds.) *Ibid.* p. 197.

other political and ethnic groups, in order to expand its base of support.⁹⁷ In order to show its good will, the Baathist government appointed two Kurds loyal to Barzani as government ministers.⁹⁸ On the other hand, it also supported Talabani as a result of a different strategy aimed at balancing Mullah Mustafa's influence over Iraqi Kurds.⁹⁹ But clashes between the government and the peshmergas continued until March 1970 Agreement, the most comprehensive autonomy agreement in the history of the Iraqi Kurds before Gulf War in 1991.¹⁰⁰ Saddam Hussein, despite some opposition from some members of army, signed an agreement with Barzani on 11th March 1970, which is known as March agreement.¹⁰¹

Entessar provides a brief but sound account of the scope of the agreement:

Major provisions of the March Manifesto included: recognition of the Kurdish language in areas with a Kurdish majority; self-rule; appointment of Kurds to high-level positions in the central government (including Kurdish vice-president); creation of national administrative units in the Kurdish region; monetary and other assistance to help Kurds return to their villages; implementation of a genuine agrarian reform program; promotion of Kurdish cultural rights and educational advancement opportunities; establishment of a Kurdish academy of letters and a Kurdish University; and an amendment to the constitution recognizing the equality of Kurds and Arabs in a bi-national Iraq. In addition, the manifesto required Kurdish rebels to turn in their heavy weapons and all broadcasting equipment used in clandestine radio stations and to desist from carrying out armed aggression against the state.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Chaliand, *ibid.*, p. 60. Entessar, *ibid.*, p. 69. McDowall, *ibid.*, p. 324.

⁹⁸ Chaliand, *ibid.*, pp. 60-1. According to Entessar there were four ministers in the cabinet. It seems that two of them were close to Mullah Mustafa. See for example, Entessar, *ibid.*, p. 69.

⁹⁹ Chaliand, *ibid.*, p. 61. Entessar, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ McDowall, *ibid.*, p.327.

¹⁰¹ Chaliand, *ibid.* Stansfield, *The future of Iraq*, *ibid.*, p. 166.

¹⁰² Entessar, *ibid.*, p. 71. For important articles of this agreement see for example, McDowall, *ibid.*, pp. 327-28.

Saddam established a commission that included two Kurds and two Arabs to implement the decisions of the March Manifesto.¹⁰³ These decisions were to come into force in 1974.¹⁰⁴ In spite of taking important paths towards the implementation of the articles of this manifesto, a number of problems could not be solved. First of all, there was a problem concerning the status of Kirkuk. A census was planned with the aim of determining the status of the Kirkuk.¹⁰⁵ Saddam did not want to add oil-rich Kirkuk to the promised autonomous Kurdish region.¹⁰⁶ In order to achieve his aim, he started to pursue a policy of Arabization of oil-rich regions including Kirkuk and Khaniqin by relocating Arabs from other regions in these oil-rich places and forced Kurds and Turkomans living in Kirkuk to move to other region of Iraq.¹⁰⁷ Mullah Mustafa declared that he would not accept the results of the census if results showed Arabs to be in the majority.¹⁰⁸ In addition to this, the numerous assassination attempts on Mullah Mustafa and his son Idris resulted in the deterioration of relations between both sides.¹⁰⁹

2.1.3.2 The Third Mullah Mustafa Revolt, 1975

In 1974, Saddam proclaimed a unilateral autonomy law. Government gave Mullah Mustafa fifteen days to accept the plan or forfeit any chance of gaining self-rule in the future.¹¹⁰ The negotiations between the Kurds and Baghdad resulted in

¹⁰³ McDowall, *ibid.*, p. 329.

¹⁰⁴ Entessar, *ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁰⁵ McDowall, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ McDowall, *ibid.*, pp.329-30. Entessar, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Bruinessen, *Kurdish Ethno-Nationalism versus Nation-Building States*, *ibid.*, p.55. Stansfield, *ibid.*, p. 167.

¹⁰⁸ Entessar, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Chaliand, *ibid.* p.62.

¹¹⁰ McDowall, *ibid.*, p.335. Entessar, *ibid.*, p.76. Chaliand, *ibid.*

deadlock.¹¹¹ Consequently, this manifesto collapsed in 1975 with the start of Kurdish revolt. Mullah Mustafa heavily relied upon foreign support, especially Iranian financial and arms support.¹¹² According to Bruinessen, if Iran had not provided support for Mullah Mustafa, he would not have ventured to wage a war against the Iraqi army.¹¹³ Mullah Mustafa's dependence on Iranian support was so profound that when Iran cut it off after taking concessions on Shatt al Arab water way from Saddam Hussein at the OPEC conference held in Algiers on 6 March 1975, Mullah Mustafa's revolt collapsed in a very short period of time in 1975.¹¹⁴ Mullah Mustafa called an end to his revolt on March 1975.¹¹⁵

With the collapse of the Kurdish revolt, the Baath government pursued various policies designed to prevent possible future Kurdish revolts. On the one hand, Saddam made economic investments in the North of the country by using the growing revenues of petroleum after the 1974 crisis. By increasing economic welfare of the region, Saddam aimed at preventing Kurdish people from supporting Kurdish fighting forces. It is said that after this economic investment, people who became relatively wealthier than before did not support Peshmergas or Kurdish groups as much as they had before 1975.¹¹⁶

On the other hand, another policy was the deportation of Kurdish peoples from their lands. According to Bruinessen, this deportation policy had three aims. The first was

¹¹¹ Chaliand, *ibid.* For articles of this agreement that caused disagreement see, McDowall, *ibid.*, p.336.

¹¹² Details of these foreign supports will be analyzed in the second chapter.

¹¹³ Bruinessen, *ibid.*, p.55.

¹¹⁴ McDowall, *ibid.* p.338. Entessar, *ibid.*, p.77. Ciment, *ibid.* p. 61. Chaliand, *ibid.*, p. 63. Gunter, *ibid.*, p. 29.

¹¹⁵ Stansfield, *ibid.*, p. 167.

¹¹⁶ Bruinessen, *ibid.*, p. 56.

to decrease the number of Kurds in the northern part of the country. This was the chief motive behind the deportations in the oil-rich Kirkuk and Khaniqin. The second aim was “removing potentially insurgent elements from the rest of the Kurdish population, thereby also working as a deterrent for those staying behind.” The third and last aim was the gradual assimilation of Kurds even though the Iraqi government officially tolerated Kurdish culture.¹¹⁷ The Iraqi government defined this deportation policy as “state-led modernization.”¹¹⁸

Although the March Manifesto concluded badly for the Iraqi Kurds, according to most writers, and even Iraqi Kurds themselves, this manifesto provided the Iraqi Kurds with great experience in terms of dealing with self-rule. According to Sami Abdul Rahman, one of the Kurdish negotiators of the March Agreement, “the 1970-1974 period covered by the March Agreement was a “golden era.” During these years, the Iraqi Kurds acquired the skills of local administration and direct governance, skills that were to prove useful in the 1990s.”¹¹⁹

2.1.3.3 The Kurdish Movement after Mullah Mustafa

Following the collapse of Mullah Mustafa’s movement in 1975, two important transformations took place within the nationalist Kurdish movement in Iraq.¹²⁰ The first one was the establishment of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) by Jela Talabani on June 1, 1975.¹²¹ After the early retirement of Mullah Mustafa upon

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 88.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Stansfield, *ibid.*, p.166.

¹²⁰ A. Sherzad, “The Situation of Kurds in Iraq and Turkey: Current Trends and Prospects”, in Kreyenbroek, Philip G. and Allison C.,(ed.) *Kurdish Culture and Identity*, (London: Zed Books, 1996), pp.

¹²¹ McDowall, *ibid.*, p. 343. Stansfield, *ibid.*, p.168. Entessar, *ibid.*, p78. , Gunter, *ibid.*, p.24.

being defeated by government forces, his sons Mesud and Idris Barzani maintained their position as the leaders of the KDP. But in contrast to their father's unquestioned leadership within the KDP, their positions were challenged by "a new wave of political leaders."¹²² Two political groups emerged shortly after the 1975 defeat: the Maoist-inspired *Komala* (brotherhood), under the leadership of Nawshirwan Mustafa Amin, and the Social Democratic *Bezutnawa* (movement) led by Ali Askari. These two groups came together and established the PUK under the leadership of Jelial Talabani.¹²³

Moreover, a struggle for leadership within the KDP itself took place between Idris Barzani and Sami Abdul Rahman in the late 1970s. Abdul Rahman wanted the KDP to acquire a socialist intellectual dimension. When he understood that he would not be successful in decreasing Barzani's influence over the party, he had no choice but to leave the party with his intelligentsia and form the Kurdistan Popular Democratic Party (KPDP).¹²⁴ In addition to these, Islamic groups including Islamic Movement of Kurdistan established following the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 also increased their base of support. With the formations of these parties, Kurdish political life in Iraq dominated before by the KDP became transformed into multi-party struggle.¹²⁵

The second transformation was the changing nature of Kurdish leadership within the Kurdish nationalist movement. Until the formation of the PUK, tribal leaders dominated Kurdish political life, despite the presence of the weak resistance of

¹²² Stansfield. *ibid.*

¹²³ See footnote 122.

¹²⁴ Stansfield, *ibid.*, p. 169. Gunter, *ibid.* p. 34. McDowall, *ibid.*, p.346.

¹²⁵ Stansfield, *ibid.* Serzad, *ibid.*

urban intellectuals within the KDP. But the PUK provided an appropriate ground for urban Kurdish intellectuals to increase their influence over Iraqi Kurds at the expense of tribally minded leaders.¹²⁶ However, as I will explain in the following part of this chapter, tribal structure and leadership type still dominated the Kurdish movement in Northern Iraq.

The PUK used Mullah Mustafa's failure in 1975 as a means to increase its social base. They accused Mullah Mustafa and his son Idris of insisting on Kirkuk and of having an inability to secure the Kurdish autonomy proposed by March Manifesto.¹²⁷ It seems that this strategy paved the way for what the leadership of the PUK claimed. The KDP's image weakened within the Iraqi Kurds. But when secret relations between the PUK leadership and Baghdad in 1983 came to the surface, the KDP restored his influence again at the expense of the PUK.¹²⁸ By 1985, the powers of both parties were, more or less, equal.¹²⁹

“After the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, “Saddam Hussein seized the opportunity to strike a mortal blow at Iran and regain the territorial concessions given away under the Algiers Agreement of 1975.”¹³⁰ The war between Iran and Iraq began on September 23, 1980, when Iraqi forces invaded Iran.¹³¹ Both Kurdish parties tried to use war conditions in order to augment their power at the expense of

¹²⁶ Serzad, *ibid.*

¹²⁷ Bruinessen, *ibid.*, p. 198.

¹²⁸ McDowall, in Kreyenbroek, Philip G. and Allison C., *ibid.*, p. 33.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

¹³⁰ Stansfield, *ibid.*, p. 169.

¹³¹ Marr, *ibid.*, p. 112. According to Stansfield, Iraqi forces invaded Iran in 22 September, *ibid.*, p.169.

other party by making alliances with Iranian or Iraqi governments. From the beginning the KDP sided with Iran, while the PUK pursued changing tactical paths. For example, at the beginning of the war, the PUK led by Talabani sided with Saddam Hussein with the aim of increasing its influence within Iraqi Kurds. The most important objective of Talabani was to gain concessions from Saddam that had not previously been given to Mullah Mustafa - such as acceptance of Kirkuk as a Kurdish city. In order to do this, Talabani gave extensive support to Saddam Hussein during the early years of the war. But when he understood that Saddam would never accept his demands, he turned his efforts on Iran after 1985. In May 1987, both parties established the Kurdistan National Front (IKF) with participations of the following parties: the Kurdistan Socialist Party (KSP), the KPDP, Pasok, the Toiler's Party, the ICP and the Assyrian Democratic Movement.¹³² The aim of this front was to consolidate power against Saddam Hussein.¹³³

Near the end of the war, Saddam saw Kurdish groups as a Trojan horse as a result of resurgent Iranian/Kurdish activity in the north of Iraq. He wanted to punish them for their attempts to undermine his regime: He authorized the *Anfal* campaign, which planned the systematic depopulation of rural Iraqi Kurdistan in order to remove the peshmergas presence from the region, and to keep Kurdish parties from being able to resurrect and maintain a military presence."¹³⁴ The person playing the key role in pursuing this campaign was Saddam's cousin Ali Hassan Al-Majid, who was appointed as governor of the North in 1987.¹³⁵

¹³² McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, *ibid.*, p. 352. John Bulloch and Harvey Morris, *No Friends but the Mountains: the Tragic History of the Kurds*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.6.

¹³³ McDowall, *ibid.*, pp. 351-52. Bruinessen, *ibid.*, pp. 58-9.

¹³⁴ Stansfield, *ibid.*, p. 169.

¹³⁵ Bruinessen, *ibid.*, p. 90. McDowall, *ibid.*, p. 353.

2.1.3.4 The Anfal Campaign

Ali Hassan Al-Majid pursued three *Anfal* attacks. *Anfal* I started in February 1988 and concluded before the Halabja massacre. This attack was designed to utterly destroy the parts of Sulaimanya that were under control of the PUK.¹³⁶ A week later, Al-Majid started *Anfal* II to destroy villages in the mountainous regions located south of Kirkuk and Sulaimaniya.¹³⁷ He initiated *Anfal* III after the cease-fire agreement signed by Iran and Iraq. This attack was designed to destroy all northernmost Iraq that was under the KDP control.¹³⁸ Al-Majid did not hesitate to use chemical weapons during the *Anfal* campaign.¹³⁹ As a result, he became known as “Chemical Ali.”¹⁴⁰

According to Bruinessen, the *Anfal* campaign had two aims. The first was to effectively destroy peshmerga forces. The second was to force civilian people to move from villages located in mountainous regions in order to cut off the power bases of the peshmergas.¹⁴¹ The Baath government forced these people to settle in newly established towns. “Fifteen new towns, housing between twenty thousand and forty thousand people each, had been established in 1989 alone. The new towns are of the well-known ‘strategic village’ type, and are surrounded by a ring of guard posts.”¹⁴²

¹³⁶ Bruinessen, *ibid.* McDowall, *ibid.*, p. 357.

¹³⁷ Bruinessen, *ibid.*, p. 90. McDowall, *ibid.* p. 358. Ciment, *ibid.*, pp. 61-3.

¹³⁸ Bruinessen, *ibid.* McDowall, *ibid.*

¹³⁹ Ciment, *ibid.*, p. 161.

¹⁴⁰ Stansfield, *ibid.*, pp. 169-70.

¹⁴¹ Bruinessen, *ibid.*, p. 90.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 91.

As a result of these attacks and policies, almost 4000 villages and hamlets were destroyed, and at least 1.5 million people were forcibly resettled.¹⁴³ According to Human Rights Watch, around 50,000 people died during the *Anfal* Campaign.¹⁴⁴ In addition to this, at least 60,000 Kurdish refugees fled across the Turkish border in September 1988.¹⁴⁵ Leaders of the Kurdish political parties had to leave from Iraq. They operated their weakened parties from Iran until the First Gulf War.

By pursuing the *Anfal* campaign against the Iraqi Kurds, Saddam Hussein struck the most mortal blow to the Kurdish nationalist movement in the history of Iraq. These attacks of Iraqi forces, which included the use of chemical weapons, devastated the Iraqi Kurds. They were now at their lowest point.¹⁴⁶ However, conditions after the First Gulf War were to provide the Iraqi Kurds with important opportunities never before available to them.

2.1.4 The Gulf War and Kurds, 1991-2003

As stated above, the history of the Iraqi Kurds has followed a very different trajectory since the 1991 Gulf War. The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq and its consequences provided to Kurds conditions that were to help them further their political aspirations. Saddam Hussein's government had struck a mortal blow to the Kurdish forces with the pursuit of the *Anfal* campaign. However, when American-led coalition forces waged a war against Iraq as a response to its invasion of Kuwait,

¹⁴³ McDowall, *ibid.*, p. 360.

¹⁴⁴ Bengio, *ibid.*, p.175.

¹⁴⁵ Gunter, *ibid.*, p. 45. McDowall, *ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Stansfield, *ibid.*, p. 170.

Iraqi Kurds, who were at their lowest ebb in history, were able to take advantage of an enormous chance to achieve their objectives.

However, it is not to say that the process after the Gulf War was very easy for the Kurds. At the beginning of the war, the Kurds feared that they might become its victims. It is because of this fear that Mesud Barzani rejected outside pressure to open a second front against Saddam's forces. "Barzani's main concern was that if a second front were established, Saddam Hussein might retaliate by using chemical weapons against Kurdish villages as he did in 1988."¹⁴⁷ Notwithstanding Barzani's initial hesitation to open a second front against Saddam Hussein, Iraqi Kurds revolted in March 1991 after the defeat of Saddam's military by the US-led forces in the south.¹⁴⁸ As I explained in detail in the second chapter, the Kurdish revolt in the north and the Shiite revolt in the south were encouraged by the Americans. Entessar argues that "a CIA-run radio station (the Voice of Free Iraq) operating from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, had been encouraging a Kurdish revolt for several weeks, and the Kurds were led to believe that they would receive outside assistance if they led an uprising against the Iraqi government."¹⁴⁹

In the early days of revolt, most of the major cities in Northern Iraq fell with astounding alacrity to the rebels. These early rebel successes led Barzani and Talabani to make victory speeches. Barzani declared, "I feel that the result of 70 years of struggle is at hand now. It is the greatest honor for me. It is what I wanted all my life."¹⁵⁰ After leaving Syria and crossing into Northern Iraq in a triumphal motorcade, Talabani told more than 10,000 cheering Kurds: "This is the first time

¹⁴⁷ Entessar, *ibid.*, p.146.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Gunter, *ibid.*, p. 50.

ever that the whole of Iraqi Kurdistan has been liberated.”¹⁵¹ However, these victory speeches came too soon.

2.1.4.1 Defeat and Refugees

After suppressing the Shiite revolt in the south, Saddam turned his army north. As I stated in the second chapter in detail, American forces did not help the Kurdish rebels against Saddam Hussein’s modern army. Therefore, it was not difficult for Saddam’s forces to suppress the Kurdish rebels. The abortive rebellion quickly led to human tragedy. While the number of the Iraqi refugees arriving in Iran surpassed 1,117 million, 500 thousand Kurdish refugees fled across Turkish borders. This huge number of refugees created significant problems for Iran and Turkey. Both states called for international help and criticized western countries for failing to provide sufficient assistance.¹⁵²

After a while, “initially proposed by Turkish President Turgut Ozal and then picked up and advocated by British Prime Minister John Major, the concept of ‘enclaves,’ later changed to ‘safe havens’ was established.”¹⁵³ The UN established no-fly zones in the north and south of Iraq. With the creation of safe havens, refugees started to return their cities and villages. Both sides were weak. Therefore, negotiations were initiated between Baghdad and the Kurds. Nevertheless, they were unsuccessful. The status of Kirkuk was the biggest obstacle to securing an acceptable peace. In October 1991, Saddam removed all offices of the government from the north and imposed an economic blockade against the Kurds. This decision paved the way for a

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 51.

¹⁵² Entessar, *ibid.*, p.150.

¹⁵³ Gunter, *ibid.*, p. 56.

de facto state in the northern part of the country. “The weakness of Saddam, combined with the desperation of the Kurdish people and the attention of the international community, facilitated the emergence of a Kurdish-controlled region. In effect, the Iraqi Kurds secured their traditional demands for self-government by precipitous and dangerous accident, rather than by conscious and planned design.”¹⁵⁴

2.1.4.2 Elections and Civil War

As it is discussed in chapter two, the main reason behind Saddam Hussein’s decision to remove all government officials from the Kurdish regions in the north and imposing economic blockade was the idea that by this would encourage Kurds to end their resistance and accept Saddam’s conditions. However, this plan did not work. With the help of international community, including neighboring countries, this situation paved the way for a de facto state. In addition, the experience Iraqi Kurds had acquired through local autonomy shaped by the conditions of the March Agreement in 1970 also facilitated this process.

PUK and KDP leaders viewed elections as the solution to all their problems. They organized elections and formed the Kurdistan National Assembly (KNA) in May 1992.¹⁵⁵ The results of the elections directly reflected the divisions that had been endemic within Iraqi Kurds since the mid-twentieth century. Votes were almost equally divided between the KDP and the PUK, with both parties securing close to 50 percent of the seats in the KNA, while the Assyrians were allocated the remaining 5 of 105-seat assembly.¹⁵⁶ The key executive positions of government were shared according to the results of the election. While Talabani and Barzani

¹⁵⁴ Anderson and Stansfield, *ibid.*, p.172.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

held no governmental position, they acted as arbiters of the political system.¹⁵⁷ This system had a dangerous structural instability because it was directly dependent on the relations between the KDP and the PUK.

Many factors prevented the maintenance of cooperation between these parties. First of all, both parties had mutual antipathy that had ideological and socio-cultural grounds. In the process, these differences created mistrust between the parties. The second factor was the distribution of resources. The KDP had more of an advantage than the PUK in terms border revenues. These revenues were increasing the KDP's economic power. The final factor was the competition between Mesud Barzani and Jelal Talabani for the leadership position of the Kurdish movement in Iraq. Both leaders saw themselves as worthy of being leader of the Iraqi Kurds. These competing factors between both parties made the new system dysfunctional. As a result of this, a civil war broke out between the peshmerga forces of both parties in 1994.

During this civil war, both groups formed different alliances. While the KDP obtained the support of Saddam's forces, the PUK was supported by Iran. However, these alliances were not explicit. Both sides accused each other of having secret alliances. While the PUK accused the KDP of maintaining a secret dialogue with Baghdad, "Barzani was increasingly concerned by the alleged the PUK-Iran link and lodged a series of appeals with the U.S. administration to ensure the security of the KDP."¹⁵⁸ In this atmosphere, Iraqi forces invaded the city of Arbil on August 31, 1996. The activities of the KDP peshmerga were in coordination with Iraqi forces during these operations. In a very short period of time, the KDP peshmerga, supported by Iraqi forces, forced the PUK peshmerga out of Northern Iraq.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p.176.

However, with Saddam's forces having withdrawn, the PUK launched a counterattack and regained the control of Sulaimaniya. "The subsequent cease-fire line between the two-which ran southwest to northeast from Koysinjag to Haji Omran - became an established feature on the political map of Northern Iraq."¹⁵⁹ The last fight between both parties took in 1997 but did not have any consequences.

With the beginning of the oil-for-food program under the UN Security Council Resolution, which allocated 13 percent of Iraqi oil-export revenue to the northern governorates, living standards on both sides facilitated peace between them. In 1998, both sides were brought together in Washington, where they signed the Washington Agreement.¹⁶⁰ "This agreement called for increased cooperation between the KDP and the PUK with a future focus on multiparty elections to unify the two administrations."¹⁶¹ With this agreement, both sides institutionalized their administrations. There was a cabinet in Arbil under the premiership of Nechervan Barzani, and in Sulaimaniya under the premiership of Barham Salih. This division was changed after the invasion of Iraq by American and British forces.

2.1.5 The American Invasion of Iraq and Kurds, 2003-present

The American invasion of Iraq in 2003 brought a new era for Kurdish politics in Iraq. Kurdish groups have been one of the fervid supporters of the American invasion. Peshmerga forces acted in coordination with American and British forces. When the invasion was completed, Kurdish groups appeared as the strongest and the most organized political groups within Iraq. They have dominated all negotiations and legal debates in the country.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p.177.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

After the invasion, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) established the independent electoral commission of Iraq as the exclusive electoral authority in Iraq on May 31, 2004. It was at this time that sovereignty was transformed from the US-led coalition to the Interim Iraqi Government. The Iraqi National Conference (INC) selected a national assembly to act as a parliament until elections were held. In January 30, 2005 elections were held.¹⁶²

The Shiite alliance took 128 of the 275 seats, 10 short of an outright majority. While the combined list of the KDP and the PUK took 53 seats, the Kurdistan Islamic Union took 5 seats. Sunni groups have 44 seats in the new parliament. In the new political system of Iraq shaped after this election, the president, vice-president and minister of foreign affairs are Kurds.

As for regional elections, both parties again received almost the same proportion of votes. In May 2006, both Kurdish governorates that have been institutionalized since 1996 were unified. Except for four, all ministries were unified. There are two different ministers (one from the KDP and other from the PUK) for each of four ministries: the ministries of interior, defense, economy, and justice. It must be noted here that there is a regional coalition government that includes all political groups in the Northern Iraq. In other words, there are no Kurdish groups in the regional parliament that are outside the regional government. After the many long years of struggle, betrayal and revolts, Iraqi Kurds are now at the pinnacle of political power in Iraqi politics. I will discuss the recent perceptions of the Iraqi Kurds towards these new developments in the third chapter. In the following pages, I deal with some socio-cultural traits of the Kurdish movement in Iraq.

¹⁶² Iraq Elections Timeline, <http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/iraqelect/timeline.htm>

2.2 The Socio-political Aspects of the Kurdish Problem in Iraq

In the first part of the chapter, I gave the historical background of the Kurdish issue in Iraq with an eye at placing the matter into historical context. As for this part of the paper, I will critically analyze the socio-political features that have come to prominence during historical evolution of the problem. In the following pages, I will emphasize eleven aspects of the Kurdish movement in Iraq.

First, in contrast to the Kurds of other states, Iraqi Kurds have been in a roughly constant state of revolt ever since the establishment of Iraq after World War I. It is possible to say that the main reason for this situation was the artificial establishment of Iraq by Britain by combining three former Ottoman *vilayets*: Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra.¹⁶³ The British created the Iraqi state without taking the geopolitical and geo-cultural realities of the region into consideration. From the geopolitical point of view, the Iraqi state that includes these three *vilayets* did not exist in one form or another in history prior to its establishment following World War I.¹⁶⁴ This situation has paved the way for a legitimacy problem in the eyes of the Iraqi people, especially the Kurds and Shiites. From a geo-cultural point of view, Britain brought three large ethnic and religious groups in the region (the Kurds, the Shiites, and the Sunnis) together by creating an Iraq politically dominated by the Sunnis instead of constituting a just political system in which these groups would be able to represent themselves. As a result, stability has been in short supply in Iraq ever since its establishment.

¹⁶³ Gunter talks about three reasons including the proportion of the Kurds to other ethnic and religious groups in Iraq, the legitimacy problem of Iraqi state, and lastly Sunni-Shiite Muslim division not present in Turkey and Iran. See for example, Gunter, *ibid.* p. 1. However, it is possible to say that the type of formation of Iraqi state by Britain comprises three of these reasons. As a result, I find it enough to mention only the creation of the Iraq as the main reason of the Kurdish revolts. See for example, Stansfield, *ibid.*, pp. 162-3.

¹⁶⁴ Gunter, *ibid.*

Second, as I have pointed out, Britain created an Iraq that was an entity contrary to the geopolitical reality of the region. However, via the historical process, the Iraqi state has become a geopolitical reality. As a result, the protection of territorial integrity of the Iraqi state has become a requirement for the new reality. The notion of an independent Kurdish state is mostly based on the reality of a century ago. But conditions have changed and today, this idea does not correspond to the contemporary geopolitical reality of the region. It is because of this situation that neighboring states place great importance on the territorial integrity of Iraq.

Third, looking at the history of the Iraqi Kurds, there remains a constant – that of the dream of an independent state and the reality that does not allow this dream to come true. It is because of this situation that some writers chose names for their books that reflect this picture. For example, Gunter and Chaliand entitled their books, respectively: “The Iraqi Kurds: Tragedy and Hope” and “The Kurdish Tragedy.” Kurds hope for an independent state when conditions are suitable. But when their hopes are frustrated, these hopes transformed into tragedy for them.

Stansfield, points out another dimension of this picture. “The Iraqi Kurds may be seen in two ways. The first and most common way is to view the Kurds as victims, both of the central government and neighboring countries. The second, almost opposing, position is to see them as an *agent provocateur*, acting as proxy forces for states opposed to the incumbent Iraqi regime.”¹⁶⁵ It is possible to say that there is adequate evidence that can be used to support both positions.

Fourth, in contrast to writings of Kurds themselves,¹⁶⁶ it is possible to say that early Kurdish revolts in Iraq were not nationalist in character. It seems that the main motives behind these movements, including Sheikh Mahmud and Sheikh Ahmed’s

¹⁶⁵Stansfield, *ibid.* s. 155.

¹⁶⁶For example, Mesud Barzani defines all Kurdish movements in Iraq extending from Sheikh Mahmud to current movements as nationalist movements. Barzani, *ibid.*

revolts and Mullah Mustafa's revolt in 1943, were tribal or religious concerns, since nationalism was a new trend for that time and most of Kurds were not sufficiently aware of this ideology. However, we see that the movements that followed these revolts acquired nationalistic character in the historical process.

Take, for instance, Sheikh Mahmud's revolt; it seems that his revolt was mostly based on religious and tribal concerns. For example, in his propaganda letters that were later obtained by the British, there was no mention of Kurdish nationalism. By writing these letters, Sheikh Mahmud aimed at encouraging Kurds to fight in the name of Islam.¹⁶⁷ According to Jwaideh, making references to Islam and Jihad in these letters was a tactical step aimed at getting support of people who were more religious but unaware of nationalism.¹⁶⁸ In other words, Jwaideh claimed that although Sheikh Mahmud had nationalist views, he used Islamist discourses for practical purposes. On the other hand, Gunter also sees Sheikh Mahmud's activities as tribal in character: "It would be a mistake, however, to see the activities of the sheikh as exercises of Kurdish nationalism. At the height of his appeal, he never exceeded the primordial bounds of tribalism."¹⁶⁹

Tribal concerns were also chief motive behind Sheikh Ahmed's revolt in 1933. As I stated in the first part of the chapter, there are various claims regarding the reasons for Sheikh Ahmed's revolt. For example, the British decision to settle Assyrians in lands belonging to the Barzan tribe is a widely accepted rationale for it. It is quite obvious that this corresponds to the tribal dimension of Sheikh Ahmed's revolt because it pertained to the interests of the Barzan tribe.

¹⁶⁷ Jwaideh, *ibid.*, p. 352.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 352-53.

¹⁶⁹ Gunter, *ibid.*, p. 3.

As for Mullah Mustafa's movement in 1943, from the outset, it was also based on tribal concerns. As I have previously stated, his escape from Sulaymaniya stemmed from his personal problems. When he arrived in the Barzan region, he established fighting forces and started to attack police stations. Everything is normal up to here. But when we take his initial demands to the Iraqi government into consideration, it is quite obvious that he did not have a nationalist view that covered all parts of the Kurdish region. His demands were mainly concerned with the Barzanis and Barzan region.

In the process, under the influence of nationalist Kurdish parties, he extended his demands to include all the Kurdish regions of Iraq.¹⁷⁰ It is because of this extension that his revolt in 1943 acquired a nationalist perspective. According to McDowall, nationalists played an important role in influencing Mullah Mustafa to extend his demands, which were originally confined to the Barzanis and Barzan region: "It seems that, rather than Mullah Mustafa choosing nationalism, the nationalists chose him. They did this because of his proven tactical skills, and his successful embarrassment of the government."¹⁷¹ Jwaideh also pointed out the role the nationalist Kurdish parties, including Heva, Shores, and Rizgari, had in instilling a nationalist dimension to Mullah Mustafa's revolt of 1943.¹⁷² Based on Hewa's support for Mullah Mustafa, Gunter says similar things: "for the first time in his career, Barzani began to rise above his tribal origins and assume a role as a Kurdish spokesman."¹⁷³ The Kurdish movements following these three revolts have had nationalist characters.

¹⁷⁰ Jwaideh, *ibid.*, p. 451.

¹⁷¹ McDowall, *ibid.*, p. 293.

¹⁷² Jwaideh, *ibid.*, pp. 464-471.

¹⁷³ Gunter, *ibid.*, p. 9.

Fifth, whether or not early Kurdish movements in Iraq had a nationalist character, an interesting similarity exists between the evolution of nationalist Kurdish movements and Miroshlav Hroch's theoretical approach. It seems that this approach provides an explanatory framework within which the emergence and progress of nationalist Kurdish movements in Iraq can be understood. According to Hroch, three steps are required for the emergence of nationalism. First, a primordially existing community starts to support its cultural and linguistic inheritance. Second, a number of leaders come on the scene for the purpose of constituting a required ground for nationalist struggle. Third, and lastly, mass support is created for the movement.¹⁷⁴

When we evaluate the emergence of nationalist Kurdish movement in Iraq in the light of this approach, it is possible to say that this movement, to a lesser or greater extent, has followed these steps. The early demands of Sheikh Mahmud and Sheikh Ahmed regarding Kurdish culture and language can be seen as the things that correspond to first step of Hroch's approach. It can be said that by stressing these demands the Iraqi Kurds started to support their cultural and linguistic inheritance. After a while, a number of leaders, such as Mustafa Barzani, Jelal Talabani, Ibrahim Ahmed, Hamza Abdullah, appeared. What these leaders later did corresponds to second step. They established appropriate ground for nationalist struggle. Lastly, after lengthy struggles, these leaders became successful in gaining mass support for their movements, similar to what Hroch contends to be the third phase in acquiring a nationalistic character.

Sixth, in the historical process, two different and conflicting social strata have arisen within Kurdish nationalism: one growing out of the "tribal milieu" and the other out of the "urban educated classes."¹⁷⁵ These two social strata are conflicting because their social and political projects are completely different and diametrically opposite

¹⁷⁴ Hakan Ozoglu, *Osmanlı Devleti ve Kurt Milliyetçilği*, (Istanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2005), p.13.

¹⁷⁵ Bruinessen, *ibid.*, p. 199. Stansfield, *ibid.*, p. 160.

to each other. The first group places great importance on tribal relations and a balance of power among tribes in order to maintain existing power structures that provide an appropriate ground for continuation of tribal system. Their resistance to central authority has generally stemmed from government interference.¹⁷⁶

As for the urban educated classes, the most important thing that set these people apart from those arising out of the tribal milieu is their aim to replace tribal structure with modern social classes modeled along the line of those found in western societies.¹⁷⁷ They have regarded tribal structure as the biggest barrier to national independence.¹⁷⁸ According to Bruinessen, “these were people aware of modern political ideologies, who witnessed the development of Arab and Turkish nationalism into vigorous political movements. They were eager for a political role of their own.”¹⁷⁹ However, as I indicated before, in a society where tribal structure is entrenched, nationalist urban intellectuals can find no wider ground where they can carry out their social and political projects. Therefore, they have taken the opportunity to collaborate with tribal leaders for the purpose of increasing their influence and achieving their nationalist projects. Lastly, it is possible to say that they have not succeeded in breaking the influence of tribal structure over Iraqi Kurds.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Bruinessen, *ibid.*, p. 27. McDowall, *ibid.*, p. 287.

¹⁷⁸ McDowall, *ibid.* Stansfield, *ibid.*, p. 164.

¹⁷⁹ Stansfield, *ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Martin van Bruinessen, *Kürdistan Üzerine Yazılar*, *ibid.*, p.181. During my field research, I realized that these tribal structures are still in effect within the Kurdish society in northern Iraq.

Seventh, it is a widely shared notion that while the KDP represents the tribal milieu, the PUK is the party of urban educated intellectuals.¹⁸¹ This idea seems completely valid for the situation before the Gulf War in 1991.¹⁸² The PUK, in particular, accused and still accuses the KDP of being tribally structured. As I explained under the sixth aspect, members of this party viewed tribal structure within the Kurdish society as an enormous barrier to national independence.¹⁸³ They believed that in a tribal system, people give priority to their tribal loyalties instead of supporting national movements based on modern nationalist ideologies.¹⁸⁴ When Talabani sided with Baghdad against Mullah Mustafa in 1966, he tried to legitimize his action by accusing Mullah Mustafa of being tribally minded. On the other hand, the KDP members label themselves as the real representative of Iraqi Kurds and accuse the PUK leaders of arrogance. In addition to this, they indirectly hint that the PUK does not represent Iraqi Kurds.¹⁸⁵

Eighth, political struggle between these two parties also corresponds to a different division among Iraqi Kurds, the division between Sorani-speaking and Kurmanji-speaking regions. Sorani and Kurmanji are two major dialects of Kurdish. While Sorani is widely used in the southern parts of the Northern Iraq that are dominated by the PUK, Kurmanji is used in the northern parts that are dominated by the

¹⁸¹ Bruinessen, *ibid.*, p. 190. When I asked this to a high-ranking member of the KDP, he said that in a society based mostly on tribal relations, it is not a negative situation for a party to become the representative of these people. In addition to this, he also pointed out that the most of politburo members of the KDP have PhD. degrees in various fields.

¹⁸² After 1991 these two parties have started to resemble to each other in terms of their social power bases.

¹⁸³ Bruinessen, *Kurdish Ethno-Nationalism versus Nation-Building States*, *ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁸⁴ Brendan O’Leary and Khaled Salih, “The Denial, Resurrection, and Affirmation of Kurdistan” in Brendan O’Leary, John McGarry, and Khaled Salih, *ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁸⁵ See explanations in the footnote 168.

KDP.¹⁸⁶ There are cultural and linguistic differences between these regions. Tribal structures are much clearer in Kurmanji-speaking regions than Sorani-speaking ones. In addition to this, the Sorani-speaking region has been the center of intellectual activities, including publishing Kurdish books, journals, and newspapers and producing intellectual Kurdish discourses, throughout the last century. Consequently, Sorani-speaking regions are, culturally and economically, more developed than Kurmanji-speaking ones.¹⁸⁷ According to Bruinessen, political clashes between these two parties also deepen the gap between these two regions.¹⁸⁸ As for their perceptions regarding each other, Bruinessen says, “The Sorans often find the Kurmanj primitive and fanatical in religious affairs, but they acknowledge their fighting prowess; the Kurmanj often see the Sorans as unmanly, unreliable, and culturally arrogant.”¹⁸⁹

Ninth, according to Wimmer, there is a “political culture of mistrust” between actors in Northern Iraq, especially between the KDP and the PUK.¹⁹⁰ Because of this mistrust, alliances between these actors are generally short lived.¹⁹¹ When these actors make alliances, both groups suspect the other of inherent tendencies for betrayal.¹⁹² As Wimmer rightly points out:

¹⁸⁶ Bruinessen, *ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, s.200.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, S.27.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, s. 200.

¹⁹⁰ Andreas Wimmer, “From subject to object of history: the Kurdish movement in Northern Iraq since 1991.” <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/wimmer/B48.pdf>, March 18, 2006.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² Bruinessen, *ibid.*, p. 200.

...We see a very complex and ever changing structure of relationship, of tactical alliances, factional fissions and fusions, we are confronted to an endless history of betrayal and renewed friendship, peace talks and party fighting, of clandestine agreements and surprising changes of sides, all this happening sometimes in front of some times behind curtains.¹⁹³

Tenth, related to ninth point, as a result of this “political culture of mistrust,” the Iraqi government has always found supporters among Kurds for its struggle against Kurdish nationalists. As I stated many times in the first part of the chapter, there has always been some tribes and urban politicians to side with Baghdad in fighting against Kurdish rebels. Consequently, two important concepts have emerged. The first is *jash* (little donkey).¹⁹⁴ Kurdish rebels have used this concept to insult the Kurds who have propped up the Baghdad government. The second is *fursan* (knights), which has been used by Baghdad to honor the Kurds who have been labeled *jash* by Kurdish rebels.¹⁹⁵

Last, taking the history of Iraq, there has been an unchanging strategy of Baghdad in dealing with Kurds. When the central authority is in a weaker position, it gives many cultural and political rights to Kurds. On the contrary, when it gains enough strength, it neglects these rights and tries to exert its power over Kurds by using all means, including military attacks.¹⁹⁶ The events occurred after the coming of the second Baath government to the power in 1968 can be seen as the best example of the implementation of this strategy. Its early days, the Baath government gave Kurds many cultural and political rights, including an autonomous Kurdish region, through the March Manifesto. But in the process, when the Baath regime consolidated his

¹⁹³ Wimmer, *ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ For more information for this concept see, Izady Mehrdad R., *The Kurds*, (Washington, DC: Taylor&Francis, 1992).

¹⁹⁵ McDowall, *ibid.*, p. 312.

¹⁹⁶ Stansfield, *ibid.*, p. 158. Chaliand, *ibid.*, p.57.

position within Iraq, it was understood that the Baath government did not want to implement the decisions of the March Agreement.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ Bruinessen, *ibid.* p.55.

CHAPTER 3

3. INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION OF THE ISSUE

Internationalization of an ethnic conflict stems mainly from the interventions of foreign powers who are motivated by variety of reasons ranging from political and economic benefits to pure humanitarian concerns. In both cases, “almost inevitably foreign powers will be tempted to intervene in a state torn by internal minority problem.”¹⁹⁸ The fall of the Iraqi Baathist state is not an exception, and is in fact a prime example of such foreign intervention. Since the establishment of the Iraqi state the Kurdish issue was seen as a foreign policy asset for regional and global actors who sought to force the Iraqi state to behave in accordance with their interests. There has rarely been a time historically where foreign powers have not attempted to meddle in Iraqi Kurdish affairs.

In this chapter I will critically examine the internationalization of the Kurdish issue in Iraq. From the outset, it can be argued that international reverberation of this issue can be better understood by analyzing it from within wider international context of the Middle East. In other words, without taking into consideration the main cultural, political and economic features of the Middle East stemming from mainly its colonial past, it will be difficult to understand in its entirety the internationalization of the Iraqi Kurdish issue. In order to elaborate on its international dimension, one must analyze the main features of the region. In short, the three aims of this chapter are:

¹⁹⁸ Michael Gunter, *The Kurds of Iraq: Tragedy and Hope*, (New York: St. Martins Press, 1992), p.4.

1. Provide a brief overview of the internationalization of the Iraqi Kurdish issue including the structural features at play.
2. Critically analyze the regional dimension of the issue by specifying the policies of neighboring states towards the Iraqi Kurds including Israel,
3. Critically analyze global dimension of the issue by focusing on policies of the global powers towards the Iraqi Kurds.

3.1 Understanding the International Relations of the Middle East

It is widely accepted that the international relations of the modern Middle East have been shaped mainly by the conditions created by global powers in the post-war era. This argument is shared by many leading scholars.¹⁹⁹

Looking at the region's history, we see that three foreign powers asserted their authority over the Middle East during the modern period: the Ottoman Empire, Great Britain, and the United States respectively. The Ottoman Empire governed much of the region for six centuries. Their system of government was based on the *eyalet* system, which referred to the political regions that recognized Ottoman authority and as a result paid taxes to empire's central government. In other words, the Ottoman Empire was decentralized and organized through heterogeneous forms of indirect rule.²⁰⁰ For example, the Shi'i majority city of Basra in Southern Iraq,

¹⁹⁹ Efraim Karsh, in his book, gives names and references from studies of these scholars: "Arnold Toynbee, 'The present Situation in Palestine', *International Affairs* (1931), p.40; Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East: 2000 Years of History from the Rise of Christianity to the Present Day* (London, 1995), pp.342-3; George Lenczowski, *The Middle East in World Affairs*, (Ithaca, NY, 1980), pp. 58-9, 79-87; Roger Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (London, 1992), especially Chapters 1 and 4; André Raymond, 'The Ottoman Legacy in Arab Political Boundaries', in Carl Brown (ed), *Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East* (New York, 1996), pp.115-28; David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York, 1990), pp. 17, 19, 565." See Efraim Karsh, *Rethinking the Middle East* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), p. 68.

²⁰⁰ Michael Gunter, 'Turkey's New Neighbor, Kurdistan', in Brendon O'Leary, John McGarry, and Khaled Salih (eds.), *The Future of Kurdistan in Iraq*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), p.222.

Sunni Arab dominated Baghdad and the Kurdish dominated city of Mosul were run in this manner. By paying taxes to central government, these *eyalets* enjoyed internal autonomy in regards to cultural issues. Urban or rural ethnic groups were recognized as social units within the empire. The Empire's ethnic groups were defined by the Millet system.²⁰¹ This system was a sophisticated one which was sensitive to the geopolitical and geocultural traits/reality of the region, and the Ottoman lands enjoyed relative political stability in comparison with other parts of the pre-modern and modern Middle East.

3.1.1 The Colonial Legacy

With the advent of European imperialism in 1798 with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt,²⁰² the Middle East underwent a substantial structural transformation. This structural transformation has shaped internal and international politics of the region. Under the direct influence of European colonialism, new states with artificial and arbitrary borders were formed. These borders were dictated mainly by the political and economic interests of the colonial powers instead of the geopolitical and geocultural traits of and desires of indigenous peoples of the region.²⁰³ It is because

²⁰¹ Leonard Binder, 'The International Dimensions of Ethnic Conflict in the Middle East', in Binder (ed.) *Ethnic Conflict and International Politics in the Middle East* (Gainesville, 1999), p.11

²⁰² Fred Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation, Religion and Politics in the Middle East*. (London, New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1996) p.22.

²⁰³ Gareth Stansfield, 'The Transition to Democracy in Iraq: Historical Legacies, insurgent Identities and Reactionary tendencies' in Alex Danchev and John MacMillan (ed.) *The Iraq War and Democratic Politics*, (London: Routledge, 2005),p.137; Adeed Dawisha, 'The Assembled State: Communal Conflicts and Governmental Control in Iraq' in Leonard Binder (ed.), *Ethnic Conflict and International Politics in the Middle East*, (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 1999), p.61; Mary Ann Tetreault, 'International Relations' in Deborah J. Gerner, (ed.), *Understanding The Contemporary Middle East*, (London: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 2000), p.133; Gareth Stansfield, Liam Anderson, *The Future of Iraq*, (The United State of America: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p.162-63. Efrahim Karsh, *ibid.* Mesut Ozcan, *Sorunlu Miras Irak*, (Istanbul: Kure Yayinlari, 2003), p.121.

of this design that new states with borders that were drastically different from their historical form emerged. The emergence of these new states corresponded to devastation of the geopolitical and geocultural reality of the region at that time. As a result of these arbitrary regulations, “three or four very different states have come out of an area that for most of its history had been quite similar in culture and resources.”²⁰⁴ This devastation naturally paved the way for the problems that we are very familiar with today. For example, with only 8 percent of the world’s population, the Middle East has been the site of approximately 25 percent of the world’s armed conflicts since 1945.²⁰⁵ In this way, European colonialists laid the foundations for the domestic and international politics of the contemporary Middle East.

According to Fred Halliday, “it was the World War One, for all its contradictions, that established the state system of the Middle East as it has emerged today.” He also argues that except for Iran and Turkey, the region fell under colonial rule and consisted of three groups of states:

The States of the Maghreb, or North Africa, all already subjugated before World War One, comprised three French colonies (Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia), one Italian (Libya) and two British colonies (Egypt and Sudan). In the Arabian Peninsula, Britain maintained control over six distinct administrative entities around the coast (Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the Trucial Oman States, Oman and Aden or, as it later became known, South Arabia. It was in the third Arab region the east, or Mashrik, that the territories taken from the Turks were parcelled out as five distinct entities between Britain and France.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Deborah J. Gerner, Philip A. Schrodt, ‘Middle Eastern Politics’, in Gerner (ed.), *ibid.*, p.83.

²⁰⁵ Saad Eddin Ibrahim, ‘Ethnic Conflict and State Building in the Arab World, in Geoffrey Kemp and Janice Gross Stein (ed.), *Powder Keg in the Middle East: Struggle for Gulf Security*, (London: Rowman&Littlefield Publishers, 1995), p.45.

²⁰⁶ Halliday, *ibid.*, p.26.

When we look at existing situation in the Middle East, it seems that the most problematic group of states is the last those located in the Mashrik. The substantial problems (Arab-Israeli conflict, Kurdish issue in Iraq, problems between Iraq, Iran, Kuwait and Syria) in the Middle East occur mainly in this region. The key to understanding the root cause of the situation lies in understanding the colonial policies of Britain and France including the formation of states with arbitrarily drawn borders.

While Britain preferred to establish allied monarchies in the lands under its colonial rule (such as Iraq, Jordan, and Egypt), France established republican regimes in Syria and Maghreb states, which were under its rule. The most important and common feature of these states, particularly those in the Mashrik, are their artificial and conflicting borders and the existence of illegitimate regimes. “Decisions made during the colonial era had some effects that persisted to this day and continued to influence the Middle East’s political development well after the formal colonial systems themselves had disappeared.”²⁰⁷ As was explained in the first chapter, the formation of the Iraqi state is the best indication of this situation. Because of its political, economic and military interests, Britain preferred to create Iraq by combining former Ottoman vilayets (Basra, Mosul and Baghdad).

In summation, by examining the region’s history it becomes clear that three important aspects of international politics of the Middle East were shaped by the colonial legacy: state formation and establishment of conflicting and artificial borders, the existence of illegitimate regimes, and oil resources.²⁰⁸ These three main features have been the cause of many of the internal and international problems in the region at large and particularly in the Mashrik. In the discussion to follow, these

²⁰⁷ Gerner, Schrod, *ibid.*, p.82.

²⁰⁸ Transnational ideologies such as pan-Arabism and political Islam are important characteristic of international politics of the region as well. But because of scope and aim of this thesis, I will only deal with conflicting borders, illegitimate regimes and oil-rich resources that directly related to main concern of this thesis.

three legacies will be analyzed with particular attention being paid to the case of Iraq.

3.1.1.1 Artificial and Conflicting Borders

Before elaborating on the conflicting and artificial borders of the Middle East it will be useful to discuss how borders between countries are established and understand different types of borders in order to better understand the current borders in the Middle East. According to some academicians there are four steps in establishing a border between two countries: 'historical precedents', 'delimitation', 'demarcation', and 'characterization'.²⁰⁹ The first level, 'historical precedents' refers to previous attempts (failed or annulled) of people in a given region to establish a boundary. The second level 'delimitation' corresponds to the establishment and ratification of treaties that deal with the subject. In this political process, negotiators from both countries decide how the boundary line will be traced between the two nations. During the third level, 'demarcation', demarcators of both sides try to interpret on the terrain the intensions of the delimiters. This is a technical and application level. In the last level, 'characterization,' new marks are erected in order to meet the necessities of population growth along the borders.²¹⁰ For a stable and peaceful border, each level must follow its predecessor.²¹¹

Generally speaking there are two types of border.²¹² The first type is a natural border that depends on geographic or ethnic peculiarities.²¹³ According to Krukoski,

²⁰⁹ Wilson R. M. Krukoski, 'Frontiers and Boundaries', <http://www.info.Incc.br/wrmkkk/artigo.html>, November 13, 2006.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Özcan, *ibid.*, p.36.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p.37., Krukoski, *ibid.*

²¹³ Özcan, *ibid.*

“Among the first type are the Hidric boundaries, or watercourses, and the orographics, or dry boundaries, being those, water dividers, mountain ranges and other natural landmarks.”²¹⁴ These borders generally do not pave the way for any border conflicts because of the presence of a mutual pleasure stemmed from geographic realities. The second type of border is an artificial border. This type of border depends on neither geographic nor ethnic traits. These borders are generally established by “acts of human decision or fiat, to laws or political decrees, or to related human ognitive phenomena.”²¹⁵ As a result, border clashes are widely common along this type of border.²¹⁶

Considering the borders of the Middle East in general, the Iraqi borders in particular do not reflect geographic and ethnic realities of and the desires of people living in the region instead; they reflect the interests and decisions of the colonial European powers. Taking this into consideration, it is clear that most of the borders in the Middle East are artificial. Further, when Britain and France established these borders, they did not follow the aforementioned four levels of border establishment and also did not take geographic and ethnic realities of the region into account. As a result, many internal and international conflicts have stemmed from these artificial and conflicting borders. This does not mean that all domestic and international conflicts, which occurred in the region, stemmed from territorial disputes. However, these artificial borders played a very important role in the majority of modern conflicts in the Middle East. It needs to be stated here that some conflicts arose equally from forces located within the diverse societies of the Middle East themselves.²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Krukoski, *ibid.*

²¹⁵ Barry Smith, ‘On Drawing Lines on a Map’, <http://wings.buffalo.edu/philosophy/faculty/smith/articles/drawing.html> , *May 12, 2006*,

²¹⁶ Özcan, *ibid.*

²¹⁷ Halliday, *ibid.*, p.17.

Conflicting and artificial borders are perhaps the most evident feature of the region. When Middle Eastern conflicts, including the Arab-Israeli conflict, Kurdish issue, Iran-Iraq War, Iran-Kuwait crisis, are considered, it becomes clear that the main factor lying behind these conflicts has been the arbitrary-drawing of borders between these states. As has been stated before, these borders did not reflect the historical reality. In the words of Deborah Gerner and Philip Schrodt:

In many cases the boundaries, imposed by European powers had little correspondence to the distribution of ethnic groups on the ground- most notably in the division of the Kurdish region between Turkey, Iraq and Iran- or created states whose legitimacy could be called into question, as with Iraq's claims on Kuwait or Syria's claims on Lebanon. The colonial empires are gone, yet their effects not only linger but have substantial influence.²¹⁸

For example, the arbitrary nature of state boundaries coupled with high levels of cultural integration, which arise from common religious, historical, and linguistic roots, seems to encourage boundary violations by neighboring states.²¹⁹

Iraq can be regarded as a small prototype of the post-colonial Middle East. Its borders are the best example of the arbitrary nature of state creation as practiced by Great Britain and France. Iraq is home to almost all the major Middle Eastern ethnic groups. However, its borders were created without taking ethnic and geographic peculiarities into account despite the presence of some natural borderlines between Iraq and Iran and Iraq and Kuwait.²²⁰ This resulted in many of Iraq's problems since its establishment date. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the tension between Iran and Iraq can be seen as products of this situation.²²¹ The Iraqi state itself is an

²¹⁸ Gerner, Schrodt, *ibid.*, p.84.

²¹⁹ Mary Ann Tetreault, *ibid.* p.133.

²²⁰ Özcan, *ibid.*, p.49.

²²¹ Geoffrey Kemp and Janice Gross Stein, 'Enduring Sources of Conflict in the Persian Gulf Region: Predicting Shocks to the System', in Kemp and Stein, *ibid.*, pp.19-20.

artificial one that never existed historically with this name encompassing the same territory as it does today.

Because the nature of the region's borders do not correspond to the distribution of the region's ethnic groups, nationalist Kurdish movements can maintain their paramilitary activities towards states such as Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran because they can ensure all needed logistical support from Kurdish regions located on the other side of the border. Thus, this situation provides them with big opportunities to continue their activities. The best example of this is the maintenance of relations between Kurdish parties in Iraq and Iranian Kurds. When the Kurdish Peshmerga were forced to cross the border because of the Iraqi army they did not face any difficulties in rehabilitating their condition and to recruit more militiamen amongst the Iranian Kurds.

3.1.1.2 Oil Resources

When the economic structure of the Middle East is examined, what first that comes to mind is the regions large oil resources. These resources of the region are of course not a result of its colonial past. However, these resources have played an important role in shaping the policies of colonial and global powers towards the region. With the discovery of large oil reserves in the region, the colonial powers wanted to secure them through a variety of means. Two primary ways were to unite oil-rich lands (Iraq) or divide these regions into smaller states (Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates.). As has been stated in the first chapter, the British decision to join the oil-rich *vilayet* of Mosul with Baghdad and Basra to form Iraq is a primary example of these policies.²²² With this decision, the British wanted to secure the large oil reserves of Mosul against possible Turkish influence in the future.²²³

²²² Gareth Stansfield, Liam Anderson, *The Future of Iraq: Democracy or Division*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), pp.162-63.

Moreover, the large oil resources of the region have been attractive historically to global and regional powers.²²⁴ Thus oil has played a decisive role at the intersection area of geopolitics and political economy, two important areas of encounter in modern international politics.²²⁵ After discovery of oil, lands that were regarded as barren and unimportant before became central in the geo-strategic interests of foreign powers. The oil region's new geo-strategic importance became one of the principle parameters of the international relations arena.²²⁶ This parameter created a relationship of dependency between the international position of the Middle East and its domestic structural transformation.²²⁷

As a state with multi-ethnic population and large oil reserves, Iraqi state has been affected very much by this dependency relation between international position of and domestic structural transformation of the Middle East resulted from exploration of oil. All global and structural changes occurred within the region, naturally, has affected Iraq. As being second big state producing oil among OPEC members, it has been undergone foreign interventions in its internal issues since ever its creation by Britain. Looking from this angle, large oil reserves of the country played important role in shaping of its future.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ahmet Davutoglu, *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiyenin Uluslararası Konumu*, (İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2002), p.333.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

3.1.1.3 Illegitimate Political Regimes

As it has been touched on before, in order to secure their colonial interests, Britain and France pursued a number of policies. In addition to creating artificial states, they appointed loyal but illegitimate regimes to rule them. They did not take the desires of the people or the ethnic structure of these newly formed states into account when they decided to appoint regimes. The only exception was holding a number of referendums that did not go beyond formality. These regimes did not have the consent of the majority of their people and, in many cases, their social power bases depended on ethnic groups that were actually in the minority within countries in which they lived. This state of affairs paved the way for a crisis of confidence between people and regimes. Consequently, many internal conflicts that destabilized domestic politics occurred in these countries throughout the historical process.

Moreover, these regimes have not been successful in terms of developing good relations with each other. Lack of confidence has been the basic feature of their relations as well. Because of this situation, these states have had to face inter-state problems and conflicts in addition to internal ones. All of these internal and inter-state conflicts and tensions have provided a basis for political instability in the region. As a result of this image, the Middle East has been regarded as a region consuming security. Ghassan Salame says,

The connection between the three concepts of security, legitimacy, and stability cautions against abstractions such as 'Iraq,' 'Iran,' or 'Saudi Arabia.'... Western analysts are overly interested in the concept of 'national interests' and do not pay adequate attention to what I have called *raison de regime* (let alone *raison de famille*), which too often supersedes the better-known *raison d'état* in the rulers' mind and policies. By 'raison de regime' I mean political and military calculations which aim at ensuring the political survival of the rulers rather than the general welfare and future destiny of a given society. A careful study of many 'irrational' decisions made by Mideastern rulers would demonstrate that some-if not all- of these decisions are much more rational and much less arbitrary when the survival of the ruler and the regime is the crucial objective.²²⁸

²²⁸ Ghassan Salamé, 'Assesing Alternative Future arrangements for Regional Security', in Kemp and Stein, *ibid.*, p.65.

It can be argued that Iraq strongly reflects this image of the Middle East. It bears all the structural characteristics of the Middle East, extending from artificial borders to illegitimate regimes having weak social power bases. Historically, all of the Iraqi regimes, from the Hashemite monarchy to the former Saddam Hussein regime, had a legitimacy problem and were dependent on an ethno-religious group (Sunni Arabs) that did not make up the majority of the Iraqi people. For example, it is members of an Arab Muslim Sunni minority (35 % of the population) who, since 1968, have dominated all other ethnic groups, including the Shiite Muslims, who account for about 45 % of Iraq's total population.²²⁹

And it is also possible to say that what Salame means by *raison de regime* fits the Iraqi case. Survival of their regimes has been the main concern of Iraqi rulers – from the Hashemite monarchy to former Saddam's Baath regime. In fact, this behavior is understandable for regimes that do not have legitimacy in their people's eye because all political groups and initiatives led by people are regarded as threat by these regimes. As a result, this understanding paved the way for huge crimes against humanity.

3.2 Regional Dimensions

Considering the regional dimension of the Kurdish issue in Iraq, it is obvious that the main aspects of international politics of the region explained previously have played important roles in the internationalization of the issue. While conflicting and artificial borders, illegitimate and rival regimes, and rich oil reserves have led to a number of clashes between the states in the region, especially among the Mashrik states, the Iraqi state has been mainly at the center of these clashes. Its oil-rich resources and problems with neighboring states have inevitably led these states to intervene in the ethnic conflict in Iraq. It is because of this situation that Iraqi Kurds

²²⁹ Ibrahim, *ibid.*, p.57.

have been seen by some regional states as a means of forcing Iraq to behave in line with their interests.²³⁰

From the beginning, it must be said that the Iraqi Kurds have not been strategically important to neighboring states. On the contrary, Kurdish parties in Iraq have been used against Baghdad by neighboring and regional states tactically in order to weaken or get concessions from Baghdad. When they have had problems with Iraq, they have provided support to Kurds. However, once their problems have been solved, they cut off their support without delay. Gregory Gause defines the direct intervention of a state in the domestic politics of other states as “a technique of Middle Eastern statecraft.”²³¹

Before elaborating on the policies of regional states towards Iraqi Kurds, it will be appropriate to touch upon the main characteristics of the regional dimension of the issue. According to Wimmer, there are three groups of actors in Northern Iraq: Kurdish parties including the KDP and the PUK, NGOs, and neighboring states. These three different groups of actors rely on different power bases, pursue different political strategies, and hold different views of the same reality.²³²

Upon the basis of historical records, Kurdish parties in the Northern Iraq have always needed foreign support to maintain their struggle against the central government in Baghdad. In other words, “The Kurdish parties have to secure outside support through international relief agencies and through the governments of surrounding states in order to nourish the clientalist pyramids they have extended

²³⁰ James Ciment, *The Kurds: State and Minority in Turkey, Iraq and Iran*, (New York: Facts on File Inc., 1996), pp.25-6.

²³¹ F. Gregory Gause, III, ‘Sovereignty, Statecraft and Stability in the Middle East, *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.45, No.2, Winter 1992, p.450.

²³² Andreas Wimmer, ‘From Subject to Object of History: The Kurdish Movement in Northern Iraq Since 1991’ <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/wimmer/B48.pdf>, March 18, 2006.

their rise to power.”²³³ To this aim, they have made numerous and changing alliances with neighboring states, especially with Iran.²³⁴ It is mostly because of this situation that they have been seen as an “*agent provocateur*,” acting as proxy forces for states opposed to the incumbent Iraqi regime.²³⁵

As for support of neighboring states, according to Wimmer:

All the neighboring states of Northern Iraq have one strategic interest in common, namely to prevent Northern Iraq from developing into a fully independent nation-state of the Kurds, which would have spill-over effects on their own Kurdish population and the different Kurdish guerilla forces. On the other hand, neighboring governments want the Kurds in Iraq to be strong enough to be a useful pawn in fighting against Saddam’s regime in Baghdad.²³⁶

When we look at the history of Northern Iraq, we will probably see a very complex and ever- changing nature of alliances, fragmentations, an endless history of betrayal and renewed friendship.²³⁷ According to Wimmer, there are three reasons for this outcome. The first is that there is great number of actors having different and opposed strategic goals in the political field. In addition, each actor has more than one possible alliance partner. As a result, short-run tactical alliances have been common among these actors. Related to first one, the second reason is that there is a “political culture of mistrust” between these actors. It is because of this that while actors in this region are masters of short-term tactical thinking, they are amateurs in

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Martin van Bruinessen, ‘The Kurds between Iran and Iraq’, in Bruinessen, *Kurdish Ethno-Nationalism Versus Nation Building States: Collected Articles*, (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2000), p.198.

²³⁵ Gareth Stansfield, Liam Anderson, *ibid.*, p.155. I asked this to Kurdish politicians, academics and journalists, they mainly say that Iraqi government did not leave a chance for Kurds but to take outside support. For more information, see Chapter 3.

²³⁶ Wimmer, *ibid.*

²³⁷ *ibid.* Gareth Stansfield shares this view as well. See for example, Stansfield and Anderson, *ibid.*, p.161.

developing long-term strategies. The third and last reason is that the Kurdish parties in Iraq depend on outside resources. Lacking access to international credits and intergovernmental aid, they depend on alliances with outside governments.²³⁸ In turn, sponsor governments can shape policies of these parties in this way.²³⁹

Wimmer wrote his article before the removal of Saddam Hussein, and what he says is mainly about conditions that appeared after the First Gulf War in 1991. But it can be said that these opinions can be extended to conditions arising after the Iraqi War in 2003. It is true that Iraq is experiencing a structural transformation now. But it is also true that we don't yet know the results of this transformation. In the light of existing information, we see that Kurdish parties still need outside support and the political culture of mistrust is still going on.

According to Bruinessen, when we examine the policies of neighboring states towards the Kurds, we see that there are two kinds of foreign policy behavior. First, it is in the common interest of these states to suppress separatist/nationalist Kurdish movements in the region.²⁴⁰ Therefore, they want to keep nationalist Kurdish movements under control with the aim of preventing possible spill-over effects on

²³⁸ Wimmer, *ibid.* Leonard Binder applies this situation to Middle East in general and counts four reasons. According to him, "international conditions within the Middle East were not conducive to long term, effective alliance formation because (1) states were not able to help one another (due to lack of resources, long distance, pressure from former colonial powers, etc.); (2) states did not trust one another (there was no common principle of legitimacy); (3) it was easy to foment domestic unrest because the great powers could easily intervene, provide friends with arms, and embargo the sale of arms to troublemakers; and (4) it was relatively easy to bolster the defenses of buffer states or punish those who threatened buffer states." Binder, *ibid.*, p.13.

²³⁹ Bruinessen, *ibid.* Bruinessen also points out the need of Kurdish parties for foreign support and the roles of outside powers in shaping of their policies. See for example, Martin van Bruinessen, 'Diversity and Division Among the Kurds', Bruinessen, *ibid.*, p. 29.

²⁴⁰ Bruinessen, *ibid.* interestingly some Kurdish writers and foreign experts regard Saadabad Pact (1937), and the Baghdad Pact (1955) as the agreements between states including Kurds within their territories in order to construct a common policy against Kurdish separatism without making references to any decisions of these pacts. See for example, Bruinessen, *ibid.* Mesud Barzani, *Barzani ve Kürt Ulusal Özgürlük Hareketi*, vol. I, (Istanbul: Doz Yayınları, 2005), p.431. Michael Gunter, *The Kurds of Iraq: Tragedy and Hope*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), p.25.

their own Kurdish population.²⁴¹ Second, when clashes occur between these states, they do not hesitate to support an uprising among each other's Kurds.²⁴² For example, Kurdish rebels in Iraq received periodic assistance from the Iranian government during the early 1970s and the Iraq-Iran War²⁴³, as will be explained in detail in the following section. These two diametrically opposed behaviors result in two incongruous situations. While the first behavior does not leave living space in which nationalist Kurdish movements can maintain their activities, the second behavior provides vital support to these groups. After the American invasion of Iraq and the new political developments currently experienced, it is not clear yet how these two foreign policy behaviors will be affected. In the following parts, specific policies of Iran, Turkey and Israel towards Iraqi Kurds will be discussed.

3.2.1 Iran and Iraqi Kurds

Historically, among the states in the region, Iran has undoubtedly been the most eager to intervene in the Kurdish issue in Iraq. Of course, there are some reasons for this. First, a rivalry over the Persian Gulf has existed between the two states.²⁴⁴ Both states have wanted to increase their influence over this region. Second, there has been an ongoing struggle between these two states for the control over Shatt al Arab waterway. This is a border dispute that stems from colonial legacy.²⁴⁵ Third, Shiite Muslims constitute the majority of the Iraqi state. As a result, while Iran, as a Shiite state, has been regarded by Iraq as a big threat because of its Shiite population, Iran

²⁴¹ Bruinessen argues that "the Kurds constitute the major topic of discussion in the regular tripartite meetings between Turkey, Syria and Iran." See for example, Bruinessen, *ibid.*

²⁴² *ibid.*

²⁴³ Tetreault, *ibid.*, p.145.

²⁴⁴ Oleg M. Smolansky & Bettie M. Smolansky, *The USSR and Iraq: The Soviet Quest for Influence*, (USA: Duke University Press, 1991), p.158. Özcan, p.85.

²⁴⁵ Özcan, *ibid.*

has seen Iraq as its political *lebensraum*, i.e., sphere of influence. While these three reasons have paved the way for problems between both states, it must be said that there is no Iranian claim on territorial integrity of the Iraqi state apart from Shatt al Arab waterway.²⁴⁶ However, when clashes have occurred between them, Iran has not hesitated to support the national Kurdish movement in Iraq in order to force Baghdad to behave in a way that in its interest.²⁴⁷

As it has been stated before, Iran has used the Iraqi Kurds as a tactical instrument of foreign policy – one that it has been able to use against Iraq when problems occur between them. Hence, Iranian support of the Iraqi Kurds has been cyclic and transient. Whenever Iran has reached its goals by receiving concessions from Iraq, it has immediately cut off its military and financially support to the Kurdish parties in Iraq. Consequently, the importance of the Iraqi Kurds to Iran has been sporadic and tactical rather than constant and strategic.

From 1963-75, Iran gave increasing financial and military support to the Iraqi Kurdish movement led by Mullah Mustafa Barzani.²⁴⁸ In the 1960s, Barzani established relations with Iran, and received gradually increasing support. The Shah of Iran provided this support because he had an interest in weakening the Iraqi government and he saw Kurds as a useful means for achieving his aim.²⁴⁹ The events of the following years made the mutual dependence of the Shah and the Iraqi Kurds stronger. When the British withdrew their last troops from the Gulf area in

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Bruinessen, *ibid.*

²⁴⁸ Bruinessen, 'Kurdish Society and the Modern State: Ethnic Nationalism Versus Nation-Building', in Bruinessen, *ibid.*, p.55. Ciment, *ibid.*, 26.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

1971, the Shah wanted to fill the power vacuum and hence, occupied a few of the islands in the Strait of Hormuz.²⁵⁰

In addition to this, relations between Iran and Iraq deteriorated as a consequence of cross-border violations and military incidents occurring at that time.²⁵¹ The situation worsened with over hundred casualties resulting on the two sides and both parties requesting the dispatch of United Nations observers to the frontier area.²⁵² During these circumstances, Iran saw the Iraqi Kurds as a big opportunity to get its demands accepted by Iraq. Because of these conditions, Iran gave great support to Kurdish rebels in Iraq.

However, the support provided by Iran was also transient and tactical rather than enduring and strategic. When the Shah and Saddam Hussein concluded an agreement on an old border dispute (Shatt al Arab) in 1975 at the OPEC conference in Algiers, the Shah stopped giving support to the Kurds.²⁵³ Under this agreement, Iran received important concessions from Iraq. Therefore, the Shah left the Iraqi Kurds alone.²⁵⁴ “Barzani’s movement had become so dependent on Iran that it collapsed within days.”²⁵⁵ As stated in the first chapter, according to Bruinessen, if intensive support by the Iranians had not existed, Mullah Mustafa would not have ventured to fight with the Iraqi army in the 1975 revolt.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Marion Farouk-Sluglett & Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship*, reprinted, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), p.168.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Bruinessen, *ibid.*, p.56. Stansfield and Anderson, *ibid.*, p.167.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p.55.

The support provided by Iran was not limited to the 1963-75 period. After the Iranian Revolution the new regime in Iran continued this policy. During the Iraq-Iran war, Iran used the Kurds against Saddam Hussein as well. At the beginning of this war, the KDP established good relations with the Iranian government. Because of its rivalry with the KPD, the PUK wanted to develop its relations with Saddam Hussein and Iranian Kurdish groups. When in 1983 and 1984, Iran opened two fronts in Northern Iraq, it brokered peace between the KDP and the PUK. From then on, these two Kurdish parties fought on the side of Iran against the Iraqi Army.²⁵⁷

However, the same scenario reappeared. When Iraq and Iran agreed to a cease-fire and entered into peace negotiation in 1988, the Iraqi Kurdish parties were left alone again.²⁵⁸

The Iraqi army immediately launched an offensive against the remaining Kurdish peshmerga. Hundreds of villages were destroyed and their populations resettled in other parts of the country...valleys held by the KDP were bombed with chemical weapons. Unknown numbers died, around seventy thousand people fled in panic across the Turkish border. Areas under the control of the PUK were apparently also bombed with poison gas, but these are too far from the Turkish border. Little is known as yet of the people who fled into Iran.²⁵⁹

When we look at Iranian policy towards the Iraqi Kurds from Gulf War onward, it is possible to say that Iran supports territorial integrity of Iraq. It is definitely against an independent Kurdish state in Northern Iraq. On the other hand, it also wants to maintain its relations with Iraqi Kurds. The best indication of this policy is that an Iranian official participated in the ceremony organized for the unification of two separate Kurdish administrations of Sulaymaniya, under the control of the PUK, and

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p.58.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p.59.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

Arbil, under control of the KDP, on May 7, 2006.²⁶⁰ For the Iranian part, it seems that a Shiite-dominated but federal Iraq is the best choice.²⁶¹

3.2.2 Turkey and Iraqi Kurds

The main concern of Turkish foreign policy with respect to Iraqi Kurds is preventing a possible independent Kurdish state in Northern Iraq that could possibly encourage its own Kurdish population. Upon the basis of historical record, we see that Turkey has not attempted to support Iraqi Kurds against Baghdad. In other words, Turkey largely considered the Kurds of Iraq as an internal problem for Iraq and thus was not a matter of direct concern until the 1980s.²⁶² In addition to this, among Iraq's neighboring states, Turkey has been the vocal in supporting the territorial integrity of Iraqi state, despite periodic and far-fetched internal debates on the historical status of Mosul and Kirkuk.²⁶³

Turkish foreign policy has generally been western oriented. Turkey's membership in NATO and its great effort obtain full membership in the EU are good examples of this orientation.²⁶⁴ However, in the 1990s, there was an increasing focus on regional problems in Turkish foreign policy.²⁶⁵ Some regional developments changed Turkey relations with Iraq in general and Iraqi Kurds in particular: a large outflow of

²⁶⁰ The Hewler Globe, May 9, 2006.

²⁶¹ Kamran Taremi, 'Iranian Foreign Policy Towards Iraq 2003-2005', in Fuat Aksu and Nursin Atesoğlu Guney (ed.), *Proceedings of the International Conference on The New Iraq*, March 22nd, 2005 Istanbul, organized by the Foundation for Middle East and Balkan Studies (OBIV).

²⁶² Gunter Michael, *ibid.*, p.223.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.222.

²⁶⁴ George Harris, 'Republic of Turkey', in David E. Long and Bernard Reich, (ed.), (USA: Westview Press, 2002), p.36.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.41.

Kurdish refugees across the Turkish borders because of Iraqi pressure in 1980s, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and especially the Gulf War.²⁶⁶ These events did not leave any other choice for Turkey but to contact Kurdish groups in Iraq.

A half-million Kurdish refugees fled to the Turkish border in 1991 after their failed uprising against Saddam Hussein, which had been encouraged but not supported by the U.S.²⁶⁷ This unexpected human tragedy transcended Turkey's capacities and resources compelled Turkey to find a solution. While western countries were previously uninterested in this tragedy, British Prime Minister John Major and Turkish president Turgut Ozal proposed "safe havens" within Iraq in order to protect refugees and to secure their return to their homeland.²⁶⁸ What is more, Turkey made its bases available to the U.S., UK, and France to use in enforcing the "no-fly zone" to secure these safe heavens.²⁶⁹ As a result, "these events left Turkey as one of the key protectors of the autonomous Kurdish entity in Northern Iraq, a relationship that reversed long-standing Turkish opposition to anything that could possibly encourage Turkey's own Kurdish population."²⁷⁰

The first contact between Turkey and the Kurdish groups in Iraq took place on 8 March 1991, when Turkey received representatives of two major Kurdish parties, Mohsin Dizai from the KDP and leader of the PUK, Jelial Talabani.²⁷¹ In addition to

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Gunter, *ibid.* 223. According to Stansfield and Anderson, 1 million Kurds, not half million, had reached the Turkish border. See for example, Stansfield and Anderson, *ibid.*, p. 171.

²⁶⁸ Gunter, *ibid.* Stansfield and Anderson, *ibid.* Gareth R. V. Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan: Political Development and Emergent Democracy*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), p.96.

²⁶⁹ Gunter, *ibid.*

²⁷⁰ Harris, *ibid.*, p.41.

²⁷¹ Gunter, *ibid.*, p.223.

this, in order to maintain their relations, the Kurds of Iraq had two representatives in Ankara, one for the KDP and the other for the PUK.²⁷² During the early 1990s, there were good relations between Turkey and Kurdish groups in Iraq, particularly with the KDP. These relations bore fruit when the KDP supported operations of Turkish Armed Forces against the PKK in 1992.

However, these good relations were a short-lived experiment.²⁷³ There were a number of factors contributing to the deterioration of relations between Turkey and the Kurdish groups in Iraq. First, after establishment of safe havens in the Northern Iraq, Iraqi Kurds started to enjoy a state-like autonomous administration in Northern Iraq. Second, with the power vacuum occurring in Northern Iraq after the Gulf War and the closing of the Kerkuk-Yumurtalik pipeline, the PKK found a way to increase its power base in the southeast of Turkey, where economic conditions had worsened during and after the Gulf War. These developments led key Turkish politicians and military officials to regard the autonomous entity evolving in Northern Iraq as a threat because it set dangerous precedents for their own Kurds.²⁷⁴

Because of these reasons, Turkey's Iraq policy has presented significant continuity since the Gulf War of 1991.²⁷⁵ Securing the territorial integrity of Iraq is the main concern of Turkey.²⁷⁶ It has been further emphasizing this policy since the Iraqi War of 2003.²⁷⁷ However, according to Altunisik,

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid. p.224.

²⁷⁴ Bruinessen, *ibid.*

²⁷⁵ Meliha Benli Altunisik, 'Turkey and Iraq: Challenges of Transition', in Fuat Aksu and Nursin Atesoğlu Guney, (ed.) *Joint Conferences Series N.3, The New Iraq*, March 22nd 2005, İstanbul: OBİV.

²⁷⁶ Ibid. Gunter, *ibid.*225.

²⁷⁷ Altunisik, *ibid.*, Kemp and Stein, *ibid.*, p.28.

Within the context of this general framework, there have been slight changes in the policy. For instance, Turkey at the beginning adamantly opposed federalism in Iraq, believing that a loose federalism could be a transition to the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in the North and the disintegration of Iraq. But later Turkey readjusted its position to support a form of administrative federalism, making the argument that a federal structure could be in fact the most feasible way to maintain Iraq's territorial integrity.²⁷⁸

It is obvious that the main concern of Turkey is still the integrity of Iraqi state. However, there has been a slight change in terms of how to best foster it.²⁷⁹

As for Turkey's existing Iraqi policy, according to Altunisik, there are four main concerns of Turkey regarding Iraq in transition. These are (1) the nature of federalism and the status of the Kurdish region within this federalism; (2) the issue of how to integrate the Sunni Arabs into the political system; (3) the relationship between state and religion; and (4) making the transition to developing a common vision for Iraq's future workable.²⁸⁰ When we look at these four points/challenges, the fourth one summarizes Turkey's main aim: building an Iraqi state that includes a workable common vision of the future for all ethnic and religious groups within the country that will secure the territorial integrity of Iraq. In other words, Turkey wants to prevent the emergence of undesired conditions that will led to the disintegration of the Iraqi state, namely an independent Kurdish state in the northern part of the country.

²⁷⁸ Altunisik *ibid.*

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

3.2.3 Israel and Iraqi Kurds

Israel does not have common borders with Iraq. However, for a number of reasons, it has been interested in Iraqi internal affairs, especially those concerning the Kurds, ever since its establishment in 1948. Most academicians say that Israel has provided periodic military and financial support to Kurdish groups in Iraq.²⁸¹ It is obvious that what underlies Israeli support for Iraqi Kurds has been the desire to maintain a Kurdish problem in Iraq so that Baghdad's troops would be tied down at home and make it less likely that Iraq would enter the Arab-Israeli conflict anytime in the future. This paralleled American justification for support of the Kurds during the 1970s.²⁸² In other words, by supporting Iraqi Kurds, Israel aimed at diverting Iraqi resources and antagonism away from itself.²⁸³

As for existing conditions, according to Sophie Wanche, Israel is the only country in the region that might benefit from the establishment of a Kurdish state. Tel Aviv might view an independent Kurdish state as a potential bulwark against perceived threats from Iran, especially if an anti-ballistic missile system could be positioned there.²⁸⁴ She also says, however, that "Israel has generally prioritized its alliance with Turkey. Regional conditions are highly unlikely to favor a new Kurdish state in the foreseeable future."²⁸⁵

²⁸¹ Bruinessen, *ibid.*, p.88., Gunter, *ibid.*, pp.30-31. Sophie Wanche, 'Awaiting Liberation: Kurdish Perspectives on a Post-Saddam Iraq', in O'Leary, McGarry, and Salih, *ibid.* p.189.

²⁸² Stansfield and Anderson, p.180.

²⁸³ Gunter, *ibid.*, p.30.

²⁸⁴ Wanche, *ibid.*, p.189.

²⁸⁵ *ibid.*

According to Bruinessen, Israel provided advisers assisting the Kurds during insurgency in 1970s.²⁸⁶ In addition to this, Ciment says that Israel has supported both Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish rebels with arms and intelligence. It is likely that Israeli support for the Iraqi Kurds is continuing. There are many justifications for this support. Israeli's main concern is that a possible Iranian influence on new Iraqi state through Shiite population of the country will create a major threat to its existence.²⁸⁷

According to Seymour Hersh, Israeli intelligence and military operatives are now quietly at work in Northern Iraq, providing training for Kurdish commando units and, most important in Israel's view, running covert operations inside Kurdish areas of Iran and Syria. Israel feels particularly threatened by Iran, whose position in the region has been strengthened by the war.²⁸⁸ These activities of Israel pave the way for Turkey's annoyance. Hersh quoted a Turkish official as saying to him, "Before the war, Israel was active in Northern Iraq, and now it is active again. This is very dangerous for us, and for them, too. We do not see Iraq divided, and we will not ignore it."²⁸⁹ It seems that Israel is experiencing contradiction in terms of its geopolitical security concerns.

3.3. Global Dimensions

The global dimension of the internationalization of the Kurdish issue in Iraq can be best understood by putting it into the general position of the Middle East in world politics. From the outset, it is safe to argue that Iraqi Kurds have never had strategic

²⁸⁶ Bruinessen, *ibid.*88.

²⁸⁷ Seymour Hersh 'Plan B, Israel backs Iraqi Kurds', http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/06/28/040628fa_fact, July 26, 2007,

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

importance to global powers. However, these powers have sometimes used the Kurdish card as a way to reach their wider strategic goals in the Middle East. As a result, it is obvious that the global dimension of internationalization of the Kurdish issue in Iraq is directly related to the Middle Eastern policies of global powers. Therefore, it will be appropriate to briefly discuss the place of the Middle East in international politics.

Historically, the Middle East was once a center of world politics, economy and cultures. However, over the last two centuries, it has been turned into a periphery of the western-dominated world system.²⁹⁰ Its geo-strategic location linking Europe with Asia and Africa, large oil reserves, and symbolic and religious importance have made the region central to world politics. Global powers, inevitably, have been interested in the Middle East. Therefore, the political, economic and cultural structures of the region have been shaped by these powers. Even these interests of global/super powers have created the picture that for a superpower to dominate world politics, it has to prove its military, political, economic and intellectual capacity by implementing them first in the Middle East. As a result of this, global powers dominating the Middle East have shaped the region in accordance with their own design. As emphasized in the first part of this chapter, the Ottoman Empire and colonial powers took different courses.

Although two superpowers (the US and the Soviet Union) following British hegemony in the region have exerted great influence in the region, it is obvious that the British colonial design remains in place in the Middle East. The most important reason behind this continuation is that there was a balance of horror between these two superpowers during Cold War era. Therefore, they mostly preferred to secure the status quo in some key regions in order to avoid direct confrontation. The

²⁹⁰ Raymond Hinnebusch, 'Introduction: The Analytical Framework', in R. Hinnebusch and A. Ehteshami (ed.), *The Foreign Policies of the Middle East States*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002), pp.1-27.

Middle East was one of these regions.²⁹¹ Hence, the efforts of Soviets and Americans to maintain the status quo in the region resulted in the continuation of the British design.

Examined from this perspective, it is clear that the Iraqi Kurds have not been of strategic importance to global powers. During the Cold War, when Iraq attempted to undermine the status quo at the expense of one side, the US and Soviet Union provided financial and military support to the uprising of Iraqi Kurds in order to force Baghdad to conform to the existed status quo. However, this support was also short term and only tactical. Once they had assured the status quo, they also stopped providing assistance. In other words, the importance of Kurds to the global powers was no more than tactical.

On the other hand, because of this situation, Iraqi Kurds attitudes have changed, depending on the global support they receive. In other words, they have pursued different, sometimes conflicting policies, in different international settings. For example, they relied on Soviet support when Iraq was not on the side of the Soviet Union. During this time, most Kurdish elites referred to themselves as communist. However, according to Mesud Barzani, this reflected more a posturing vis-à-vis British imperialism than sincere feelings.²⁹² In contrast, when Iraq signed a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union in 1972²⁹³, they turned their focus to Shah of Iran, who was backed by the United States.

According to Ciment, the involvement of the major powers in Kurdish politics stems from the geopolitical location of the Kurdish region. While it may not be the geographical heartland of the Middle East, it does lie adjacent to it. Moreover, its

²⁹¹ Gause, *ibid.*

²⁹² Barzani, *ibid.*, 456.

²⁹³ Bruinessen, 'Kurdish Society and the Modern State: Ethnic Nationalism Versus Nation-Building', in Bruinessen, *ibid.*, p.55.

own oil fields and its proximity to some of the richest reserves in the world, has made the region important for major powers.²⁹⁴ Upon the bases of these facts, Ciment also argues that the Kurdish region therefore has historical strategic value. However, it is possible to say that what we witnessed until the 2003 Iraqi War demonstrates that that this region has a geopolitical but not a strategic importance for global powers.²⁹⁵ When we look at the policies of major global and regional powers towards Iraqi Kurds, we see that they have provided support when they have some claims over Iraq as a whole. Ofra Bengio also says that Kurds are not considered a strategic asset by the United States or Britain.²⁹⁶ She also adds “it is perhaps to redress this weakness that the Kurds are now raising the stakes by demanding the inclusion of oil-rich Kirkuk, which they claim as one of their historical and sacred cities”²⁹⁷

3.3.1 Britain and Iraqi Kurds

Considering the involvement of the global powers in the Kurdish issue in Iraq, we see that mainly three powers have intervened in the Kurdish issue. The first was, of course, the British. As it was explained in the first chapter, the British were given a

²⁹⁴ Ciment, *ibid.*, p.26

²⁹⁵ For example, Iraqi Kurds also believe that they did not have a strategic importance to Western powers in the past. But they now say that they have gained a strategic importance since Iraqi war in 2003. For example, Rebwar Wali, a well-known Kurdish journalist in the Northern Iraq, quotes from Henry Kissinger in order to show this change. According to Wali, Kissinger once said that Kurds could neither contribute to nor damage our interests in the Middle East. However, Wali argues that Kurds can now either contribute to or damage American interests in the region. He wants to mean that Kurdish support to the American invasion is vital in terms of the success of the American plans in the Middle East. However, he also says “We the Iraqi Kurds will never have a strategic importance to the United State as much as Turkey has.”

²⁹⁶ Ofra Bengio, ‘Autonomy in Kurdistan in Historical Perspective’, in O’Leary, McGarry, and Salih (ed.), *ibid.*, p.181.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

mandate over Iraq during the peace conferences following World War I.²⁹⁸ They employed a number of means to make their colonial rule easier and to avoid more financial costs. These include, for instance, strengthening the local tribal structure by financially supporting the tribal leaders and promising them an independent Kurdish state, which had the effect of enhancing their influence over them. The goal, of course, was to maintain British control over Kurdish territory.²⁹⁹ Because of a set of factors, which have been emphasized in the first chapter, a decade later, with the formation of a pro-British regime in Baghdad, the British abandoned their Kurdish allies, giving exclusive control of the new state to the Arab majority.³⁰⁰ This decision of the British paved the way for century-long problems between Kurds and central authorities in Baghdad.

It is safe to argue that, historically, the British pursued three different policies within their colonial policy towards the Iraqi Kurds. The first policy involved securing the unity of Iraq once it had been created. In the event that this was not achieved, the British knew that their political and economic interests would be at stake. What is more, they regarded Kurdish uprisings as the most dangerous threat to the integrity of Iraq. As a result of this, they provided military support to Iraqi governments to suppress such periodic Kurdish uprisings as the Sheikh Ahmed Revolt in 1931 and the Mullah Mustafa Revolt in 1945. It is because of this situation that Iraqi Kurds considered British imperialism responsible for their problems.³⁰¹ It seems that this perception has had an influence on the distribution of American and English soldiers in Iraq during war in 2003. For example, while Northern Iraq was under responsibility of American soldiers, British soldiers were generally responsible for

²⁹⁸ Ciment, *ibid.*

²⁹⁹ Stansfield and Anderson, *ibid.*, p. 163.

³⁰⁰ Ciment, *ibid.*, Bengio, *ibid.*, p.173.

³⁰¹ Barzani, *ibid.*, 456.

the southern Shiite-dominated part of the country. This is because Iraqi Kurds do not have positive feelings towards British.

However, with British imperialism in the Middle East coming to an end for the most part after World War II, and completely in 1971, Britain began pursuing a second policy towards Kurds. During Cold War era, the British belonged to the Capitalist Bloc, which pursued a policy that was in the line with American policies. For example, when the Baath regime built organic relations (Treaty of Friendship in 1972) with the Soviet Union, the Capitalist Bloc supported an uprising of Iraqi Kurds in order to create domestic political instability in Iraq. The British provided ballistic experts for Iraqi Kurds during the 1970s.³⁰² This policy was mainly shaped by Cold War parameters based on a bipolar international system.

As for the third British policy, since the disintegration of the Soviet Bloc and the Gulf War in 1991, British policy towards Iraqi Kurds has been mainly shaped by humanitarian concerns. As it has been stated before, Britain was one of two states, together with Turkey, that proposed “safe havens” within Iraq in order to secure living spaces for Iraqi Kurds in the northern, and for the Shiites, in the southern part, of the country. As a key member of the European Union, it is possible to argue that this policy of Britain can be affected by European Union’s main approach to international and regional conflicts.³⁰³

As for existing British policy, Britain has been a devoted ally of the United States since the war waged on Iraq in 2003, which, by the way, was done so without the authorization of the United Nations Security Council. This war is reminiscent of

³⁰² Bruinessen, *ibid.*, p.56.

³⁰³ There is a widespread belief that the European Union (EU) is a novel kind of power not only in its own institutional set-up, but also in its external relations. It is said that it relies on civilian rather than military means, and to pursue the spread of particular norms, rather than geographical expansion or military superiority. See for example, Ian Manners, ‘Normative Power Europe: a contradiction in terms?’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 40, issue 2, pp. 235-58.

British policy during the colonial era. However, nothing is clear yet. On the other hand, when existing British policy towards Kurds, in particular, and Iraq, as a whole, is taken into consideration, it is possible to say that it supports a federal Iraqi state and an autonomous Kurdish region in Northern Iraq. In addition to this, it also supports territorial integrity of the Iraqi, at least at the level of discourse.

3.3.2 The Soviet Union and Iraqi Kurds

Taking into consideration the relations between the Soviet Union and the Iraqi Kurds, it is clear that they had two dimensions. The first dimension was based on emotional relations derived from Mullah Mustafa's Soviet experience, which lasted 12 years between 1946 and 1958. As it has been explained in the first chapter, Mullah Mustafa was forced by Iran and Iraq to make a difficult retreat to the Soviet Union, together with his some tribal men (around 400), after the destruction of the Mahabad Republic in 1946.³⁰⁴ During this period, he built good relations with high-ranking Soviet politicians. In addition to this, most of his friends who came to the Soviet Union with him married Russian women.³⁰⁵ When Mullah Mustafa returned to Iraq in 1958, he tried to use his good relations many times as way to force Qasim and the Baath regime to accept the demands of the Kurds. But it seems that these attempts did not produce desired results for Mullah Mustafa. As for the second dimension, it was based completely on *Reel Politik*. The Soviet Union regarded Iraqi Kurds, in particular, and all Kurds, in general, as a tactical card to be used against states that did not belong to Soviet Bloc. This was a continuation of an old Russian policy dating back to beginning of the twentieth century.³⁰⁶ According to Jwaideh,

³⁰⁴ Nader Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*, (Colorado, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992), p.56.

³⁰⁵ During my field research in Northern Iraq, I met many students that their grand mothers were Russian and they still had close relations with their Russian relatives living in Russia.

³⁰⁶ Wadie Jwaideh, *Kürt Milliyetçiliğinin Tarihi*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1999), p.232.

when Russia invaded Iranian Azerbaijan in 1910, they expanded their control over Kurdish territories by controlling the Kurdish cities of Urmiya and Maku-koy, which are now located within Iranian borders. Here, Iraqi Kurds, including the Sheikhs of Barzan and the leaders of the Jaf tribe had contact with Russians for the first time.³⁰⁷

During the Cold War, the Middle East was, along with the Balkans, the most important region in the world in terms of risk of superpower encounter. Both superpowers sought to expand their spheres of influence there. As a result, they worked hard to obtain the support of regional states. Because of this state of affairs, the Iraqi Kurds were successful in receiving at least some Soviet support.

However, the changing nature of Soviet support for Iraqi Kurds demonstrates that the Kurds were never more than a tactical instrument for the Soviet Union. For example, Mullah Mustafa was promised by the Soviet Union that it would provide him with arms for the Kurdish uprising in 1961. Contrary to expectations, the Soviets were unable to do so because of a number of difficulties they were experiencing. Nevertheless, they did provide money to Iraqi Kurds so that they could buy arms from arms dealers.³⁰⁸ This aid was halted in the 1970s when the Baath regime of Iraq grew closer to the Communist Bloc. Thereafter, the survival of the Baath regime in Iraq became the main concern for the Soviet Union.³⁰⁹

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, its main successor state, Russia emerged in a greatly weakened geopolitical position.³¹⁰ Boris Yeltsin, president at the time, pursued a policy towards Iraq that was in line with that of the United States.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., p.233.

³⁰⁸ Barzani, *ibid.*

³⁰⁹ Bruinessen, *ibid.*, p.55.

³¹⁰ Robert O. Freedman, 'Russian Foreign Policy Towards the Middle East Under Yeltsin and Putin', *Jun 30, 2006*, <http://www.jcpa.org/jl/vp461.htm>

However, with the coming to power of Vladimir Putin, Russia has changed its Iraqi policy and has begun pursuing an active foreign policy in the Middle East in order to promote Russian interests there.³¹¹ With the United States poised to attack Iraq, the policy-making elite in Russia is grappling with the dilemma posed by the Bush administration's unilateralist foreign policy. Most Russian governing elite believed that a war with Iraq would seriously damage Russian interests.³¹² As a result, as a permanent member of Security Council, Russian politicians, including President Vladimir Putin, declared their own position against the war many times. In addition to this, it is safe to conclude that Russia supports territorial integrity of the Iraqi state.

3.4. The US and Iraqi Kurds

From the outset, it must be said that the United States did not see Iraqi Kurds any differently than regional and global powers did. In other words, Iraqi Kurds did not have strategic importance to the United States either. But it is also possible to argue that with the new initiative of the US regarding Middle East starting with the Iraq War in 2003, the Kurds acquired a strategic position within the new US initiative. This view is also shared by Iraqi Kurds.

Undoubtedly, the United States has been the dominant global power in the Middle East since the end of British colonialism. Nonetheless, it has not been able to implement its own design in the region due to the presence of the Soviet Union as a second superpower. Therefore, the United States sought to maintain its dominant position through the existing structure created by British colonialism. During the

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Igor Torbakov, 'Split Develops in Russia Policy towards Iraq Crisis', www.eurasianet.org, *March 18, 2003*.

Cold War, we see that the US also used Kurds tactically against the pro-Soviet Baath regime in Iraq.

Iraqi Kurds received aid from the US for the first time in the 1970s. The initial contact between them and the United States took place in 1972. When Baath government signed a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union in 1972, Mullah Mustafa was invited to Tehran by the Shah of Iran the same year. There was also a border dispute between Iran and Iraq at that time. In Tehran, Mullah Mustafa met the American Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who promised him substantial military aid.³¹³ Having secured American and Iranian aid, Mullah Mustafa decided to fight with Baath regime, which had no intentions of enforcing the March Agreement.

Based on classified official documents, Gunter says that there were four reasons behind the American decision to support Iraqi Kurds.³¹⁴ The first was that as a staunch ally, Iran demanded American support for its intention to use Kurds against the Baath regime as part of the solution to its problem with Iraq. The second was the Cold War. A continuation of Kurdish insurgency would undermine the strength of Iraq, a Soviet ally. The third reason for the US support of the Kurds was to keep the Iraqi army busy with Kurdish insurgency in order to keep Iraq from entering any future Arab-Israeli conflict. Kissinger would say in his memoirs that “the benefit of Nixon’s Kurdish decision was apparent in just over a year: only one Iraqi division was available to participate in the October 1973 Middle East War.”³¹⁵ The last and fourth reason was the Iraq Petroleum Company, which had just been nationalized. By supporting Iraqi Kurds, according to Gunter, the United States might have helped

³¹³ Bruinessen, *ibid.*

³¹⁴ Gunter, *ibid.*, p.26.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

solve the oil and energy problem it was facing at the time.³¹⁶ Gunter also quoted very interesting statements made by Mullah Mustafa during negotiations held with American officials to receive American support. For example he said, “I was ready to become the 51st state.”³¹⁷ In addition to this, he also said that “the United States could look to a friend in OPEC once oil-rich Kurdistan achieved independence.”³¹⁸ However, when Iran received concessions from Iraq in the Algiers Agreement in 1975, America and Iran cut their support to Iraqi Kurds. It was not difficult for the Iraqi army to suppress the Kurdish revolt in a few days.

When the Shah was ousted from power by the Islamic revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini, relations between Iran and the United States deteriorated. With this revolution, the US lost one of its staunchest allies in the Middle East. When Iraqi forces invaded Iran in 1980, the Iran-Iraq war began. During this war, the United States supported Iraq in order to prevent the expansion of Islamic revolution in the Middle East. Hence, American support to the Iraqi Kurds was not even an issue. It was Iran that provided them with aid.

The Gulf War was accompanied by the disintegration of the Soviet Union, which resulted in the United States remaining as the only superpower in the world, in general, and the Middle East, in particular. Consequently, the United States set its sights on shaping the Middle East along the lines of its own interests rather than those based on the British colonial design. The initial signal of this intention was the First Gulf War in 1991. During this war, the Kurds, despite their limited forces, were an ally of the United States. Shortly after war, “father” Bush encouraged the Shiites and the Kurds to rise up against Saddam Hussein. They responded to the American call for uprising on 4 March. Within a short period of time, major Kurdish cities fell

³¹⁶ Ibid., 28

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

under the control of Kurdish groups. However, the triumph was short lived. After controlling the Shiite uprising in the south of the country, Saddam moved the Republican Guard, heavy weapons and tanks into the north.³¹⁹ The expected support from the US-led coalition did not appear for the Kurds, and, on 28 March, Kurdish forces were forced out of Kirkuk, and then Arbil, Dohuk, and Zakho. The result of the return of the Republican Guard was the exodus of approximately 2.5 million people to the mountains bordering Iran and Turkey.³²⁰ This was the second time Iraqi Kurds were disappointed by expected American support not forthcoming.

With the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, relations between the United States and the Iraqi Kurds have assumed a new dimension. During the last war, the Iraqi Kurds were the key ally of the United States in the region. Examining the American invasion of Iraq, it can be argued that the United States was intent on reshuffling the cards in the Middle East. It seems that the Iraqi Kurds are important to the United States in this reordering. Bush administrations and their supporters show Northern Iraq as an evidence of their success in Iraq. I personally heard this claim from an American who is supporters of Republican Party. While most Iraqi Kurdish intellectuals, including journalists, politicians, and academicians, believe that they have acquired strategic importance within the new American project³²¹, nothing is clear yet and only time will tell.

³¹⁹ Gareth Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan: Political Development and Emergent Democracy*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), p.95.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ For more information, please see Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 4

4. THE PERSPECTIVES OF IRAQI KURDS TOWARDS CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

As stated in the introduction, this chapter is the most important part of the thesis. This is because it attempts to answer the research questions of this thesis, which are: How do the Iraqi Kurds see the existing political structure in Iraq? What are their perceptions of their leaders Talabani and Barzani, who are considered to represent all Northern Iraqi Kurds? Undoubtedly, the perceptions of the Iraqi Kurds will be influential in shaping both the domestic and international affairs of Iraq in the future. Therefore, this work aims to shed light on the perceptions of Iraqi Kurds.

In order to achieve this goal, analyses within this chapter are based on the results of interviews and inquiries made with Iraqi Kurds from different social and political groups. In the first two chapters, the internal and international dimensions of the issue are critically analyzed with the aim of providing a meaningful context in which the analysis conducted in this chapter can better be understood. In the first chapter, we analyzed how internal factors played important roles in the escalation or conciliation of the Kurdish issue in Iraq, with a chronological order of Kurdish revolts having been provided. In the second chapter, we discussed which factors led to the internationalization of the issue and the main policies of regional and global powers towards the Iraqi Kurds. In this chapter, we will focus on the perspectives of Iraqi Kurds regarding current situation in Iraq, in general, and Northern Iraq, in particular.

This chapter consists of four parts. In the first part, I will briefly touch the concept of perception the second part includes the methodology that I followed during my fieldwork in Northern Iraq. In other words, in this part, I clarify the main points, including the interviewee selection criteria and the reasons for conducting inquiries with students. In the third part, interview and inquiry results are analyzed. This part reflects the perceptions of Iraqi Kurds. Interview results are critically analyzed in terms of specific issues. In the fourth part of the chapter, the general points inferred from interviews and inquiry results and observations during fieldwork are touched upon.

4.1. Theoretical Reflections

I in this part of the chapter, I want to clarify what I understand by using the concept of perception. I will touch on a theoretical debate in the literature of international relations theory in order to clarify my treatment of the concept. In the mentioned literature, there is a debate on the nature of reality. In other words, this debate is about how political actors (states, international organizations, individuals and so on) perceive their environment. While some of theoretical traditions argue that actors can perceive the environment surrounding them objectively others took an opposite stance and argue that the nature of reality is subjective. In other words, because of some factors including belief systems and norms actors perceive their environment subjectively. In order to illuminate this debate, I want to briefly touch on the differences between realist and constructivist schools.

According to realist school, individual actors will perceive and interpret the same stimuli similarly. Namely, actors perceive environment objectively. Where as in constructivist theory, they filtered through beliefs system, identities, norms, images, or other heuristic that often vary across actors and states.³²² These two theoretical

³²² Brian Rutbun, "Uncertain about Uncertainty: Understanding the Multiple Meaning of a Crucial Concept in International Relations Theory," p. 30.

approaches also differ from each other in terms of “predictions about how states cope with asymmetric and incomplete information about the intentions of other in an anarchic setting.”³²³ In order to understand the views of these two theories regarding the nature of reality, we have to look at their understanding of the concepts of learning and signaling.

According to realism, states can perceive their environment objectively but perfect information every time is not possible to be reached in the anarchic international system. For the realists, reducing uncertainty is not adding information to existing data, but increasing the power capabilities. Therefore, learning means not to look for new information in the lack information but to be aware of dangers of the international system. In addition to this, states are skeptical in the process of selecting information because of the fear derives from uncertainty. According to Rutbun, “realists have no real notion of learning as an accumulation of information about the strategic situation. States learn that they must be skeptical about the intentions of others and that only the accumulation of power provides security.”³²⁴ As for signaling, realists do not give importance to signaling. Whatever states say about their intentions, realists argue that “states can never be certain about the intentions of other states.”³²⁵

As for constructivism, as it is said before, it views the nature of reality as subjective. In the constructivism, meaningful behavior or action is possible only within an intersubjective social context. Actors develop their relations with, and understanding of, other through the media of norms and practices. In the absence of norms,

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ John Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions”, *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Winter, 1994-1995), p.10., Rutbun, *ibid.*

exercises of power, or actions, would be devoid of meaning.³²⁶ For constructivists, “virtually everything, at least potentially, is uncertain for political actors, in the sense that perception and interpretation are a function of socially constructed understanding.” Therefore, information earns meaning only through norms. Namely, information is intersubjective.³²⁷ In constructivism, “subjectivity means that information and actions have no intrinsic meaning or standing absent human interpretation in a social context. This is because human beings require identities and norms in order to know how to act towards objects and others.”³²⁸ My treatment of the concept of perception is closer to the constructivist school of thought. In other words, this thesis agrees with the constructivist argument that views nature of reality as subjective.

4.2. Methodological Reflections

Before elaborating on the analysis of the interview results, it will be helpful to go over the methodology that I followed during my fieldwork in Northern Iraq. Obviously, it is impossible to obtain the perceptions of all Iraqi Kurds regarding existing developments in Iraq. Neither the scope of this thesis, nor time allows such a study. In addition to this, Iraq and northern part of it are undergoing a very sensitive political process stemmed from American invasion. Conditions are not appropriate enough for a secure platform to contact and learn the perceptions of the ordinary people in the streets. Generally, people stay away from any questions about political developments and leadership. As a result, making interviews and inquiry with ordinary people in streets might have had undesirable consequences. In this

³²⁶ Ted Hopf, ‘The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory’, *International Security*, vol.23, no.1, 1998, pp.171-200.

³²⁷ Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy is what States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organization*, Vol.46, No. 2 (Spring 1992), p.396. p. 397.

³²⁸ Rutbun, *ibid.* p.27.

sensitive environment, the most likely problem that researchers can face is being seen as a member of the intelligence services. As a result, ordinary people avoid expressing their real views. I faced such problems in early days of my fieldwork.

4.2.1 Interviews and Inquiries

Based on this fact, I tried to choose people who would represent the perceptions of the wider masses within Iraqi Kurds. As a result, I conducted nine interviews with four groups of people: politicians (4), journalists (2), and academicians (3).

In all societies politicians represent and also shape the perceptions and ideas of their people. Based on this reality, I interviewed four politicians from different political parties in the Northern Iraq. Despite the short experience of self-rule, there are over twenty political parties in the Kurdish region. However, most of them appear just on paper and are lacking bases of support. Therefore, I tried to conduct interviews with the representatives of biggest parties that have the strongest support among Iraqi Kurds. I interviewed four politicians in Arbil and Salahaddin that is a small province of Arbil. I interviewed Sadi Ahmad Pire who is the representative of the PUK in Arbil on 23rd May, 2006, Sefin Dizai who is the representative of foreign affairs of the KDP in Salahaddin on 7th May, 2006; Ferec Ahmad who is the vice-president of the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) on 12th May, 2006; and Zirek Kamal who is the secretary of the Kurdistan Communist Party (KCP) on 15th May, 2006.

I also carried out two interviews with Kurdish journalists with the aim of understanding the perceptions of these people who are well familiar with the perceptions of Iraqi Kurds. These journalists are Rebwar Wali, the editor of the newspaper the *Hewler Post*, and Jewad Qadir, the editor of the *Hewler-Globe*. During my fieldwork, I benefited from these journalists very much, especially in terms of making contact with politicians. I interviewed Wali and Qadir in Arbil on 5th and 20th May, 2006 in Arbil.

The third group of interviewees included academicians. I conducted interviews with three academicians from the departments of economics and political science. These academicians are well aware of historical and current developments occurring within Iraq and the Kurdish region. As a result, the interviews made with them provided very helpful analytical data that were compatible with the aim of this research. These academicians are Dr. Mustafa Ahmad Habib from the Department of Economics at the University of Salahaddin-Arbil; Dr Cafer Ahmed from the Department of Political Science at the University of Salahaddin-Arbil and Dr. Mutasim Tatahi from the University of Kurdistan-Hewler, one of founding members of this newly established British-style University. I interviewed them on 21st, 14th and 22nd May 2006 in Arbil.

As for technical information about interviews, I carried out structured interviews in order to find answers of my research questions. Therefore I asked almost same questions to interviewees. During these interviews, I used a digital recorder to tape my interviews. I carried out these interviews in three languages: Turkish, English and the Sorani dialect of Kurdish. For interviews carried out in Sorani, I got help of a translator. It must be noted that Sorani dialect functions as an official language in the region. Therefore, intellectuals generally prefer to speak Sorani.

All of my interviewees are males. I did not intentionally choose them all from males. There are some reasons behind this. First and the most important reason is that I choose them through snowball method. Before going to region, I contacted a student at the University of Salahaddin in Arbil. He connected me with my first interviewee Rebwar Wali who is the editor of Hewler Post. Then Rebwar Wali and my contact at the Salahaddin University connected me with other interviewees. Second and last reason is that women are not effective in the social life in the region. It is possible to say that region has a male dominated social, political and economic life. There are almost no women occupying high positions in the political and economic life.

I must say that it was not easy to contact interviewees and to create reliability. In the early days of my field study, I had big difficulties in terms of contacting people for interviews. My first interviewee helped me very much. As a well-known journalist in the region, he connected me with politicians with whom I made interview. His involvement in these connections created reliability.

In addition to this, I had a letter from my thesis advisor showing the aim of my trip to the region. This letter facilitated my job in terms of contacting academicians. When I tried to reach academicians, they avoided accepting my demand for interviews. They asked me about an official letter from their university that allows me to make interviews with them. My advisor's letter facilitated for me to get that required letter. After getting that letter, I wanted to interview two academicians that were Arab and Turkoman at the Salahaddin University. However, they kindly rejected my demand. Therefore, I just interviewed three Kurdish academicians. These academicians are fluent in English. Three of them spent many years in European countries. They joined many international conferences. Dr. Mutasim Tatahi was an academician in economics department at London University before coming to the University of Kurdistan-Hewler.

As for other journalist Jewad Qadir who is the editor of the Hewler Globe, my student contact connected me with Qadir through one of his friend works as a correspondent in that newspaper. However, I had to wait many days in order to be able to talk to Jewad Qadir. He postponed meeting two times without any convincing reasons. It seemed that he could not be sure about my intention. These two journalists are young and the members of preeminent Kurdish families in the region. Jewad Qadir completed his education in Europe. During interview, he gave many examples from European countries in order to strengthen his views.

It was not easy for me to contact the representative of the Kurdistan Islamic Union, which has a serious potential to challenge the dominant positions of the KDP and the PUK. I attempted many times to meet one of the representatives of this party.

However, I could not reach any members of that party because according to my student contact it was enough to talk to the representatives of the PUK and the KDP. This party was important for the aim of this thesis because it is the third biggest party in Northern Iraq in terms of the votes that they received in the last regional elections. At the end, I found a chance to meet the vice president of this party with the help of Rebwar Wali.

As for inquiries, they consist of ten questions and include multiple-choice and yes-no answers. I handed out 30 inquiries but received 20 of them. I prepared questions in English. However, one of students that I knew when went to region translated these questions into the Sorani dialect of Kurdish. In these inquiries I asked direct questions that I did not prefer to ask in the interviews. For instance, I asked the question regarding the positions of both leaders Barzani and Talabani. I could ask this question to the students because as a student it was easy to create reliable atmosphere. On the other hand, in contrast to politicians, journalists and academicians, students were more relax when they talk about negative things within northern Iraq. The students with whom I carried out inquiry are from various departments such as economics, political science, English language and literature and so on.

It must be noted here that these interviews and inquiry results do not represent Iraqi Kurds as a whole. However, they are important in terms of learning some clues about existing ideas in the region. In addition to this, the degree of reliability between interviewee and researcher affects the results of the interview. Looking from this angle, it must be stated that another researcher can reach different results by interviewing same people. This is more likely if the research field is undergoing very sensitive political process like Iraq. I will analyze the results of inquires together with interviews if it is applicable.

4.3. The Evaluations of Interview and Inquiry Results

In this part of the chapter, I evaluate the empirical materials produced by interviews and inquiry. This is done under seven headings that cover, in general, the currently witnessed political, economic and cultural developments in Iraq and Kurdish region. Under each heading, I analyze the views of politicians, journalists and academicians, respectively. I will also add the results of the inquiry made of students if it is applicable.

4.3.1 Perceptions of the Political Situation in Iraq

During my interviews, I asked all interviewees the question “Do you believe that Iraqi politicians will be successful in bringing different ethnic and religious groups together in a democratic system.” I received very interesting and different responses. As will be apparent, their responses are shaped by their positions.

According to politicians, the existing situation is moving in a positive direction despite the presence of substantial problems waiting to be solved. In other words, the existing political process is making headway. The most striking point politically is that representatives of two biggest Kurdish parties (the KDP and the PUK) have parallel discourses with Bush administration. They view American invasion as necessary and successful. Sadi Ahmad Pire from the PUK says, “I am sure that Iraq will be successful in the achieving democracy.” He also continues to say that for the first time in the Iraqi history, the country will be governed in a way that is compatible with its cultural and political nature. Other politicians from different parties generally share this view. For example, Sefin Dizai from the KDP says that the existing constitution, without doubt, is the best constitution Iraq has ever had since its creation. Ferec Ahmed from the IMK also says that the most positive feature of Iraq is that its constitution has been created by consent of its people.

However, Kamal Zirek from the KCP does not share the positive view other politicians have of the current situation in Iraq. For example, he says that in contrast to Kurdish parties, the majority of Arab parties within Iraq do not want Iraq to be a democratic state because they see democracy as a threat to their interests. Democracy can be achieved in Iraq if Britain and the US force these parties to accept the democratic system.

When I reminded them that the current chaotic situation in Iraq is contrary to the positive view they have of it, they make references to past and the formation of Iraqi state in order to explain the current negative features of the country. For example, Dizai says that this picture is the real face of Iraq. According to him, earlier regimes, from formation of Iraq to removal of Saddam Hussein, did not reflect the reality of Iraq. These regimes had little support from the Iraqi people and suppressed all cultural and political demands towards a more democratic Iraq. But since the ousting Saddam from power, the real features of Iraq that had been suppressed for decades have become apparent. Ahmad also shares this view; he says that when Iraqi state was formed, the ruling elites appointed by British did not take the cultural and ethnic traits of the country into account when they governed country. Iraqi regimes maintained their power through violence and suppression. As a result of this way of dealing with internal affairs, the Iraqi people have been fragmented and polarized in terms of ethnic and ethno-religious characteristics. Consequently, they say that it will not be easy to overcome this bad legacy in the short-run. In other words, they regard the existing chaotic situation and the difficulties being encountered in constructing a democratic Iraq as a result of the legacy of the way the Iraqi state was formed. Despite the presence of negative factors, they believe that Iraq is on the right way.

Moreover, Pire and Dizai both say that Iraq needs a new system. According to them, what is required is a federative structure. They argue that federalism is the only way to maintain the territorial integrity of Iraq. As for democracy, they say that

democracy is a culture that requires many decades to become well established.³²⁹ They also say that they have to construct a culture of democracy that is compatible with the ethnic and ethno-religious structure of Iraq. For example, Dizai says that Swedish democracy cannot be implemented in Iraq because this type of democracy is not suited to the socio-cultural and socio-political structure of Iraq. The socio-political and socio-cultural features of Iraq are totally different from Sweden. Therefore, the type of democracy established in Iraq must be compatible with its nature. Pire also says that Democracy is a culture. No state can become democratic in a short period of time. In addition to this, Pire claims that in the Iraqi parliament, the most experienced and successful members are Kurds because they have fifteen years experience of self-rule, which is in sharp contrast to the other members of the Iraqi Parliament. It must be noted here that there is an understanding among Kurdish politicians that the Iraqi Kurds are the only group within Iraq that want Iraq to be a democratic state. Based on this view, they argue that they deserve to be supported by the international community. However, within Kurdish politics there are many signals indicating that that Kurdish groups use democracy as a pragmatic tool within the existing political milieu. I will touch on this point in detail in the following pages.

The perceptions of journalists are different from those of politicians. According to Rebwar Wali, the editor of the Hewler Post, there is a big contradiction between discourses and praxis in terms of democratization. At the discursive level, all political groups within Iraq support a democratic Iraq. However, in praxis they are in a struggle for power within Iraq that threatens the democratic process. In other words, he says, “on the one hand, they say that we are enjoying a democratic process; on the other hand, they want to solve all problems with unanimity.”

³²⁹ Dizai and Pire, Dizai also gives Turkish democracy as an example of this situation, he says, “Turkey has a democratic tradition for 60 years. Despite presence of big achievements, it is not also possible to say that Turkish democracy is perfect. This is a culture and requires decades for being successfully established.”

According to Wali, this is a big contradiction. Departing from this picture, he claims that the democratization of Iraq will be very difficult, if not impossible.

Jewad Qadir, editor of the *Hewler-Globe*, has the most radical view regarding the future of Iraq. According to him, everything is obvious. The current picture shows that a democratic structure able to bring different ethnic and religious group together cannot be achieved in Iraq due to the incompatible and conflicting agenda of these groups. He claims that the best solution for Iraq is to divide country into three separate and independent states according to ethnic and religious characteristics.

In addition to this, according to him, the US currently does not want Iraq to be divided. Although the US is trying to shape the region along the lines of its own design, it seems that the territorial integrity of Iraq is still compatible with American geopolitical concerns. However, in the long run, nobody knows what will occur. For example, he says that if Kurdish peshmerga want to enter Kirkuk, they can easily do this. But the US has a standing warning for the Kurds regarding Kirkuk. It wants Kurdish groups to avoid any actions that may threaten the territorial integrity of Iraq.

As for academicians, it is possible to say that their views regarding future of Iraq are more sophisticated and analytical than those of journalists and politicians. In other words, far away from any political concerns, they create a wider analytical framework within which the current and future situation of Iraq can be better understood. According to Dr. Mutasim Tatahi, there is a possibility for the democratization of Iraq. And this possibility depends on three important factors that have to be taken into account in order to better comprehend the future of Iraq. The first factor is that the US needs to be successful in Iraq in terms of democratization. Iraq is a first step for the wider American plan regarding the Middle East. He says that if America is unsuccessful in Iraq, its failure will negatively affect the entire American plan in the Middle East. The second factor is related to Iraq itself. Tatahi says that how Iraqi political groups deal with security and democratic issues is equally important. The third and last factor is the policies of neighboring countries

towards Iraq, especially Iranian attitude. According to him, “if we think about and discuss these three factors, we will come to conclusion that it is very difficult to say what will happen in the future.” He regards Iran as the most important factor that can affect positively and negatively the democratization of Iraq. He was not clear about this point. I think by saying this, he wanted to mean possible manipulations of Iran towards the internal affairs of Iraq through Shiite population.

According to Dr. Cafer Ahmed, from one perspective, it is likely to say that the democratization of Iraq will be easy because Iraqi people, including all ethnic and religious groups, want to get rid of dictators. However, from another perspective, it seems that the democratization of country is very difficult because of different ethnic and religious groups that have incompatible agenda. He claims that the best solution is to divide country into three separate regions under a decentralized federal government to allow these three regions to improve their democracies. Otherwise, in a uniform and centralized Iraq, it will be very difficult to construct a democratic structure. In addition to this, he argues that the experience of Kurdish region serve as a model for Sunni and Shiite regions. Here again we witness the idea that the Iraqi Kurds are more predisposed to democratic values within Iraq. This view is very common among Iraqi Kurds.

Dr. Mustafa Habib Ahmed has a positive view of the current picture of Iraq with respect to democratization. He calls attention to an interesting point. He says that the majority of members of Iraqi parliament or people who want to be MP lived in western countries as refugees for many years. They have had significant contact with and are well aware of democratic societies in the world. This is a big advantage for Iraq. On the other hand, he says that “as we experienced in the past, we will also experience chaotic situations in the future because we have oil-rich resources and rich agricultural and human capital.” But interestingly, without referring to the

manipulation by global powers, he only mentions that the manipulation by neighboring countries as the real factor behind the chaotic situation in Iraq.³³⁰

As for the perceptions of students, as I stated above, I conducted twenty interviews, each containing ten questions, with students. The first question asked was, “Will Iraqi politicians be successful in bringing different ethnic and religious groups together in a democratic federal structure?” The table below illustrates their responses.

Table 1: Student responses to the question: “Will Iraqi politicians be successful in bringing different ethnic and religious groups together in a democratic federal structure?”

Answer	Frequency	% of Responders
Yes	5	25
No	15	75
No response	0	0
Total	20	100%

As this table shows, while 25 % of students respond in the affirmative, 75 % of them believe that democratization of Iraq will fail. It seems that these rates reflect the general perceptions of students because during my fieldwork in region, I had personal contact with many students and the majority of them also had negative views vis-à-vis the current situation in Iraq. It must be noted here that among those whom I interviewed, the views of students reflect the real perceptions of the ordinary people in Northern Iraq. In contrast to other groups of people, they expressed their ideas freely, without reservation. This will be apparent in the following sections.

³³⁰ I inferred from my personal contacts that Kurdish students in Northern Iraq neither care about nor support democratization of Iraq. Their main concern is their region and it is also possible to say that they regard Northern Iraq what they called “Kurdistan” as a separate state from Iraq. Therefore it will be helpful to take this fact into account when interpreting inquiry results that will be analyzed in this chapter.

In summary, with respect to the perceptions of Iraqi Kurds towards current developments in Iraq, it can be said that apart from politicians, the majority of interviewees and students think that the democratization of Iraq will be very difficult, if not totally impossible.

4.3.2 Perceptions towards Northern Iraq

As it was stated in the previous chapters, the Kurdish region in the Northern Iraq has enjoyed an autonomous status since the Gulf War in 1991. Through the historical process, this region has become an entity having a state-like administrative and institutional structure. One of the main concerns of this chapter is to reveal the perceptions of Iraqi Kurds towards this state-like entity. Therefore, during my interviews I asked some questions regarding how they saw this entity, including its future status.

From the outset, it must be stated that the perceptions of politicians towards the status of Northern Iraq, what they called “Kurdistan,” differ from other groups of interviewees. It seems that their political concerns shape their responses. According to them, they want to live in a federal democratic Iraq. If such a system can be achieved within Iraq, there is no need for Iraqi Kurds to live in an independent Kurdish state. On the other hand, they have a belief that their fifteen years experience of self-rule can contribute to the democratic well being of Iraq at large.

Dizai and Pire commonly say that they (Iraqi Kurds) will work with other ethnic and religious groups to construct a democratic system in Iraq. However, they also say that if other groups do not want to do this, there is no choice for Iraqi Kurds but to go down their own path. Pire interestingly says that the current political situation in Iraq resembles a marriage. In a marriage, if partners have harmony, that marriage will continue. If there is a lack of harmony, it is inevitable that partners will divorce. He applies this analogy to the current situation in Iraq. By doing so, he means that

Iraqi Kurds will go in their own direction if any problems develop while attempting to work together with other groups. What he means is that they will establish an independent Kurdish state despite the fact that they do not openly say this.

Kurdish politicians say that it makes more sense for Iraqi Kurds to live in a federal structure than in an independent Kurdish state. There are rational and pragmatic reasons for this position. For example, Pire says that “we, the Iraqi Kurds do not want to be a small Kurdish state like small Gulf States, where their conditions are imposed by foreign powers.” In other words, he means that it is best for them to live in a strong federal Iraq. He also adds, “If we declare an independent Kurdish state, we will face more challenges than what we face today.”³³¹ It is possible to say that they prefer to live in a federal Iraq because of pure rational and pragmatic concerns.

Sefin Dizai openly states this case. According to him, a clear distinction must be made between the ideas of the ordinary people and those of politicians. People in the streets may have a desire for an independent Kurdish state. Kurdish politicians may also have such aims. However, politicians have different responsibilities that are greater than those of ordinary people. They must make a distinction between reality and sentiments. By saying this, he comes to the conclusion that the existing geopolitical reality does not lend itself to the establishment of an independent Kurdish state by Iraqi Kurds. He also says that existing reality makes a federal democratic Iraq the best choice for Kurds. He also adds, “We currently support the territorial integrity of Iraq. However, who knows what will happen in ten years.”

Ferec Ahmed also wants the Kurdish region to be a part of a federal Iraq. But his reasons are different from Pire and Dizai. He says that when we look at the world, there are fifty-four federal states. And these states are the most developed states of the world. Therefore, if they establish a well-designed federalism in Iraq, it will be

³³¹ This view is a widely held view within Iraqi Kurds. During my field research, I found possibility to contact Kurds from different social groups. They also mention this trade off among challenges.

the ideal system for Iraqi Kurds in particular and for Iraqi people in general. It seems that he does not take the geopolitical realities of the region into account when he expresses his view regarding federalism. He believes that federalism will contribute to the well-being of the country.

According to journalists, without doubt, the majority of Iraqi Kurds want to live an independent Kurdish state. Both Wali and Qadir make references to the Kurdish Referendum for Independence held in January 2005. In this referendum, ninety-nine percent of Iraqi Kurds voted for independence. According to them, this referendum reflects the reality of Northern Iraq.

According to Rebwar Wali, it is possible to talk about three generations in Northern Iraq. The first generation includes Kurdish people who have experienced the difficulties incumbent in the area but have not benefited from any or the political or economic development occurring after 1991. The second generation is composed of the people who are familiar with pre-1991 conditions but have also experienced the current autonomous status of the Kurdish region. The third generation consists of the new generation, which does not have any memories of the Saddam regime. He says that the last two generations share a common position, which argues that existing conditions in the Kurdish region of Northern Iraq be secured. In other words, whether it takes the form of federalism or an independent state, Iraqi Kurds wish that the current political and economic features of the Kurdish region be maintained and developed. Jewad Qadir also shares these views. He takes one step further to say that Iraqi Kurds are only interested in the emergence of independent Kurdish state.

As for academicians, it is possible to say that they regard federalism as the most plausible option capable of satisfying Kurdish demands given existing geopolitical reality, despite the demands of people for an independent state. For instance, Mustafa Ahmad Habib says, “we must think and behave in conjunction with what happens in the world. For example, while the Bask people in Spain previously demanded an independent state, they are now happy with autonomy.” He also claims

that it is best for Kurds to live in a democratic Iraq because Iraqi Kurds have neighboring countries that never understand their situation. They must be realist because it is very difficult to establish a Kurdish state under the current conditions. In other words, he makes a clear distinction between short-run and long-run thinking. According to him, it is logical to stay in a federal Iraq in the short term. However, in the long term, nobody knows what will happen. It is the latter that is the most widely held view among Iraqi Kurds.

Dr. Cafer Ahmed also shares this position. While he defines independence as the ideal solution, he sees a federal and democratic Iraq as the best choice for Kurds given current conditions. Dr, Ahmed claims that while Kurds have the same right of self-determination as other nations, under the current states of affairs, it is very difficult to achieve this aim. However, he does not hesitate to add that if political groups are unable to establish a functional federal system within Iraq that satisfies the demands of all groups, Kurds will be entitled to exercise their right of self-determination. As a result, it is possible to say that he pragmatically supports a federal system for Iraq even though he views independence as the best choice for Kurds.

Students are also in favor of an independent Kurdish state. I directly asked students, “In which type of Northern Iraq do you want to live.” The table below shows their responses.

Table 2: Student responses to the question: “In which type of Northern Iraq do you want to live?”

Answer	Frequency	% of Responses
Completely independent	13	65
Federal	7	35
Autonomy	0	0
Blank	0	0
Total	20	100%

As can be seen, 65 % of the students want to live in an independent Kurdish state. It must be taken into consideration that none of these students is familiar with the conditions of Iraq before the Gulf War in 1991. They have received their education from primary school through university in Kurdish. Unlike the older generation, the majority of the younger generation does not know Arabic. Even so, 35 % of them would prefer to live in a federal Iraq. In addition to this, none of them wants to live in an autonomous Kurdish region in Northern Iraq. Of course, this is not to say that these results represent reality 100 %. It is possible for a different picture to emerge in other studies.

4.3.3 Perceptions towards Kurdish Leadership

One of the main objectives of this thesis is to reveal the perceptions of Iraqi Kurds towards their leaders Mesud Barzani and Jلال Talabani, who are considered to represent all Northern Iraqi Kurds. The first thing that can be deduced from my observations and the results of interviews and inquiries is that these two leaders do not have the full support of their people. Interview and inquiry results show that there is an increasing opposition to the parties of these two leaders, the KDP and PUK. As it has been stated before, there are more than twenty parties in Northern Iraq although few of them have strong bases of support. However, it must be noted that the PUK and the KDP have their own military powers (e.g., the peshmerga forces) in contrast to the other parties. Therefore, they are still able to maintain their control over Iraqi Kurds.

As for interview and inquiry results, for a number of reasons, I avoided asking such a direct question as “do you think that Talabani and Barzani represent all Iraqi Kurds?” In such a sensitive environment, this kind of question could make the work of researchers difficult. As a result, I tried to understand the perceptions of politicians, journalists and academicians by asking circumlocutory questions, such as “how do you evaluate the success of parties apart from the KDP and the PUK in the elections?” On the other hand, I asked the question more directly in the inquiry and received very interesting results.

During my interviews, I saw that the representatives of other political parties such as the IKM and the ICP avoided talking negatively about Talabani and Barzani, even when they explained how they were different from the PUK and the KDP. On the contrary, they thanked Talabani and Barzani for their efforts in the past. However, they also put an emphasis on the corruptions that have taken place under the administrations of both parties. For example, Ferec Ahmad from the KIU says, “we cannot deny the efforts of both leaders and parties in the past in favor of well-being of Kurdish people. However, it is not to say that we will tolerate their mistakes, including widespread corruptions.”³³² Zirek Kamal from the KCP has a similar stance. He also emphasized corruptions although he also thanks both leaders and parties for their past efforts.

According to journalists, Iraqi Kurds like both leaders very much. Therefore, they have great expectations of them. But journalists also stress corruption. For example, when I asked the question “how do you evaluate success of the KIU in the last

³³² Ahmed ibid. IMK is the third biggest Kurdish party in the Northern Iraq. They received two hundred thousand votes in the last elections. What is more, this party was the second party in the Sulaimaniya under control of PUK and Dohuk under control of KDP. In other words, it received more votes than KDP in Sulaimaniya and more votes than PUK in Dohuk. It also has a TV channel that generally blames PUK and KDP for corruptions in the Northern Iraq in their news. It is possible to say that IMK is the biggest opposition group in the Northern Iraq against KDP and PUK. However, in contrast to them, it does not have its own peshmerga forces.

elections,” Rebwar Wali makes a connection between corruptions and the success of this party. According to him, the KIU used corruption effectively in their party propaganda during elections. As a result, it was successful in attracting people’s attention. On the other hand, Jewad Qadir sees the positions of both leaders as unquestioned. In addition to this, he does not characterize the election results for the KIU as successful. According to him, it would be an exaggeration to see the KIU a serious challenge to the PUK and the KDP. It must be noted that the regional Kurdish government financially supports journalists and newspapers. In other words, there are no totally private newspapers. Therefore, journalists were very careful when they responded to these questions.

It is possible to say that academicians also see the positions of both leaders and parties as unquestioned. During their analysis, they do not touch on other Kurdish political parties or their positions in Northern Iraq. In other words, they make predictions or analysis through both Kurdish parties. When I reminded Dr. Mustafa Ahmad Habib of the election results for the KIU and its success in Sulaimaniya and Dohuk, I received a very interesting response from him. In his opinion, “the problem is that Kurdish people are part of a Muslim society. And there are illiterate people in this society like all nations in the world. These illiterate people just believe in Allah and the Kur’an. That’s it. Therefore, they gave their votes to this party. But this situation will change.” In other words, he tries to make a connection between illiteracy and the success of the Kurdistan Islamic Union in the last elections. By doing this, he wants infer that this party cannot be seen as a serious opposition to the PUK or the KDP. However, it would be analytically incorrect to argue that the bases of support of the PUK and the KDP consist mostly of the literate.

According to Dr. Cafer Ahmed, the election success of the KIU must not be exaggerated. Interestingly, he draws an analogy between small American parties and the IKM. He argues that even in the United States these parties sometimes receive relatively high votes in elections. But they cannot challenge the dominant positions of the Republican and Democratic Parties in the political system of the US.

Similarly, Talabani and Barzani will dominate political life in Northern Iraq despite some periodic election success of other Kurdish parties.

As for inquiry results, it seems that students think differently from some of the journalists and academicians I talked to.

Table 3: Student responses to the question: “Do the KDP and the PUK represent all Iraqi Kurds?”

Answer	Frequency	% of Responders
Completely	3	15
Partially	9	45
Poorly	8	40
Blank	0	0
Total	20	100%

Students gave very interesting responses to the question “Do the KDP and the PUK represent all Iraqi Kurds?” As table 3 illustrates, only 15 % of students say that the PUK and the KDP represent Iraqi Kurds completely. In addition to this, while 45 % of students say “partially,” 40 % of them say “poorly.” According to the table, students are unlikely to say that both parties, namely the ones headed by Talabani and Barzani, represent all Iraqi Kurds, which is completely contrary to widespread belief. However, it can be said both leaders have unquestioned control over the economic and political environment in Northern Iraq thanks to their peshmerga forces.

On the other hand, it seems that corruption also plays important role in shaping of the perceptions of students towards both parties and leaders. For example, there is an appealing parallelism between the perceptions of students towards the PUK and the KDP and corruption. Table 4 illustrates this parallelism very well.

Table 4: Student responses to the question: Is there a corruption in Northern Iraq?

Answer	Frequency	% of Responses
High	15	75
Poorly	5	25
Do not	0	0
Blank	0	0
Total	20	100%

For example, the majority of the students I talked to (75 %) believe that there is a high level of corruption in Northern Iraq. While 25 % of the students say the parties represent Northern Iraqi Kurds poorly, no one believes that the parties do not represent them at all. The presence of corruption in Northern Iraq shapes the perceptions of Iraqi Kurds towards the PUK and the KDP, the two major Kurdish parties. In addition to this, as illustrated in table 3, the students (15 %) who believe that Talabani and Barzani completely represent all Iraqi Kurds also believe that there is corruption in Northern Iraq, to a greater or lesser extent.

4.3.4 Perceptions towards Kirkuk

Kirkuk is one of the key issues that comes to mind when the Kurdish region, in particular, and Iraq, in general, is discussed. Therefore, I wanted to uncover the perceptions of Iraqi Kurds towards this highly disputed issue. From the beginning, it must be said that almost all Iraqi Kurds argue that Kirkuk is a part of the Kurdish region geographically, culturally and historically. For example, it is likely to see many slogans written on the mountains saying that “Kirkuk is the heart of Kurdistan.” In addition to this, according to Jلال Talabani, Kirkuk is the Jerusalem of the Kurds.

Moreover, in the history of Iraqi Kurds, this city has played very important roles in shaping relations between Baghdad and the Kurds. Because of its oil-rich resources, it has been very important to Iraqi governments. In order to secure these rich resources, the Baath regime used all means, including the Arabization of the city achieved by forcing Kurds and Turkomans to emigrate from the city. Since ever the creation of Iraq by the British, the Kirkuk issue has been at the center of debate. We are currently witnessing the same picture. Kurdish leaders insist on declaring Kirkuk to be a Kurdish city. Some academicians argue that this persistence is economically motivated since the city is rich in oil resources.³³³ However, Kurdish leaders reject these claims and argue that their insistence stems from the Kurdish character and not from economic concerns. The similarity between their use of the concept the Kurdish character of Kirkuk and the use the concept of the Jewish character of the Jerusalem by the Jews is very striking. It must be noted that there is a common and strong tendency among Iraqi Kurds to view themselves as the Jews of Iraq in all respects. They are innocent. Their cultural demands have been suppressed for a long time, and they tend towards democracy and high values of humanity more than other ethnic and religious group within Iraq.

During my interviews, before asking about the status of Kirkuk, I reminded the interviewees of the events that took place in 1970s. As it has been explained in the first chapter, Iraqi Kurds were given a restricted autonomy with the March Manifesto in 1970. However, Kirkuk was not included in this autonomous Kurdish region by the Baath regime. Mustafa Barzani rejected the proposal because of this. As a result, a Kurdish revolt primarily based on foreign support broke out in 1975. But, in a matter of days, the Iraqi army suppressed this revolt, due to many reasons already having been explained in detail in the second chapter. After this failure,

³³³ Ofra Bengio, "Autonomy in Kurdistan in Historical Perspective" in Brendon O'leary, John McGarry, and Khaled Salih (eds.), *The Future of Kurdistan in Iraq*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), p.181. Bengio also argues that one of the reasons behind this insistence is that Kurdish leaders want to increase their strategic importance to the global powers.

many other Kurdish politicians, including Jلال Talabani, blamed Mullah Mustafa and his son Idris for their insistence on Kirkuk.³³⁴

Based on this historical fact, I asked in my interviews, “If such a situation were to occur again, would Iraqi Kurds insist on Kirkuk at the expense of existing economic and political gains in Northern Iraq?” Responses are different and interesting. According to the representatives of the PUK and the KDP, Kirkuk is the red line of the Iraqi Kurds. They say that their desire is to solve the Kirkuk problem peacefully. If this issue is not solved in a peaceful manner, they will not hesitate to struggle for this city militarily. In addition to responses, most of interviewees make reference to a permanent constitution in order to clarify the position of the Kirkuk. According to this constitution, a referendum will be held in Kirkuk in 2007, through which the final status of Kirkuk will be clarified. What I have inferred from the attitudes of Iraqi Kurds is that they seem sure that result of this referendum will be in favor of Kurds.

According to Dizai, they will not give any concessions regarding Kirkuk. He also makes references to the referendum. He says that according to article 149 of the permanent constitution (article 58 of Transitional Law (TAL)), this referendum will be held after the “normalization of situation” in Kirkuk Province.³³⁵ They will wait for results of this referendum. On the other hand, Sadi Pire claims, “We did not lose the war, but rather the battle in 1975.” Then, he adds that Kirkuk is the red line of Kurds. He argues that the importance of Kirkuk to Kurds does not stem from its oil-

³³⁴ Mesud Barzani himself mentions this situation in his book. See for example, Mesud Barzani, *Barzani ve Kürt Ulusal Özgürlük Hareketi*, (trans.), vol. II, (Istanbul: Doz Yayınları, 2005), pp.24-5.

³³⁵ Turkomans and Arabs demand explanation for “normalizing situation” in Kirkuk. They have anxieties ambiguous meaning of this article. For example Sheikh Wasfi Al-Assi, the head of the Arab Tribes Council in Kirkuk told a newspaper that “we need a complete clarification for the implementation of project. But we do not know what’s meant by it, yet, there are some who mean this as if it is a call for immigrating Arabs from Kirkuk while some others see it as a control of one ethnicity over another.” See for example, *Hewler Globe*, May 9, 2006.

rich resources. According to him, the best indication of this situation is that they do not have any claims on the oil-rich resources in the southern Iraq. He also touches on article 149 of the permanent constitution for the solution of the issue.

As for other politicians, Ahmad says, “Kirkuk is a part of Kurdish region geographically and according to official documents of the United Nations. We (the KIU) do not say that Kirkuk is a Kurdish city. There is an urgent need to establish a system in Kirkuk in which all ethnic groups within city are represented.” He also says that there is a need for a system that does not allow one ethnic group to another. Zirek Kamal from the Communist party interestingly says that “Kirkuk is not a Kurdish city but a city of Kurdistan. We cannot say a Kurdish city because there are Arabs and Turkomans living there. But it is part of Kurdish region geographically.”

According to journalists, conditions have changed since the 1970s. They believe that Iraqi Kurds will not face a dilemma between Kirkuk and existing gains in Northern Iraq, as was the case in the past. However, Wali says that if such a situation occurs, Kurdish leaders will not insist on Kirkuk at the expense of existing developments in the Kurdish region. According to him, it seems that Kurdish leaders have learned their lesson from historical experiences. For example, the Kurdish peshmerga entered Kirkuk in 2003, but they immediately withdrew after American warnings. They try to conform to American policies. He also says that Kirkuk is not an Iraqi or Kurdish issue but rather a Middle Eastern one due to its oil-rich resources. As a result, in order to reach a permanent solution, multilateral satisfaction is needed.

On the other hand, Jewad Qadir argues that since the 1970s, we have witnessed very important changes in the world and in the region. As a result, there is currently nothing that can threaten the existing political, economic and cultural improvements of Iraqi Kurds. He claims that the international community will not permit such threats to persist even if they arise. According to him, Kurds are not an absolute majority in Kirkuk. There are Arabs and Turkomans living in this city. He also

argues that it is difficult to solve this issue in the short run. However, this issue can be solved only through a compromise among these three ethnic groups in the city.

As for academicians, they also make reference to article 149 of the permanent Iraqi constitution. In addition to this, they argue that under the Saddam Hussein regime, Kirkuk underwent a process of Arabization, whereby Kurds were moved from Kirkuk and Arabs were settled in their place. They also argue that the importance of Kirkuk to Kurds does not stem from its oil-rich resources. For example, Dr. Habib argues that “the importance of Kirkuk to Iraqi Kurds is a result of its cultural and geographic characteristics. There are, he says, some other regions that have oil resources in Kurdish region other than Kirkuk. By saying this, he wants to mean that Iraqi Kurds do not need the oil of Kirkuk. In addition to this, he argues, “Saying that Kirkuk belongs to the whole of Iraq is out of question. It is very obvious that the former regime made demographic changes in Kirkuk at the expense of the Kurds. These policies cannot change the fact that Kirkuk is a Kurdish city.”

According to Dr. Cafer Ahmed, the solution of Kirkuk issue is quite obvious in the permanent constitution of Iraq. He argues that a special article of this constitution says that the majority of any area can decide what region it wants to be a part of. This is not only the case for Kirkuk but also for the whole of Iraq. In addition to this, he also mentions article 149 of the Iraqi constitution, which he believes provides the basis for the solution of the issue. Similar to other interviewees, he also puts an emphasis on former Saddam Hussein regime’s policies towards Kirkuk. According to him, there is no doubt; Kirkuk underwent a process of Arabization. Therefore, the normalization of the situation in Kirkuk is a prerequisite for solving the issue.

4.3.5 Perceptions towards Foreign Support

As it has been repeated several times in previous chapters, the Kurdish issue has been dominated by foreign interventions historically. It would not be incorrect to

argue that most of the global and regional powers have viewed Iraqi Kurds as a foreign policy asset that could be used in order to force Iraqi governments to behave in line with their own interests. As the second chapter comprehensively discusses, whenever these powers have received concessions from Baghdad, they have cut off their support to the Kurds, leaving them on their own against Iraqi military forces. There are a plethora of examples of this seen in previous chapters.

During the most recent American invasion of Iraq, the Kurds have been an ally of the US-led coalition forces. Nobody knows what the future of this alliance will be. The aim of this part of the chapter is to indicate what the perception of Iraqi Kurds is towards this alliance. Of interest is whether or not they are shaped by the long experience of friendship and betrayal. Historically, there are many reasons why Iraqi Kurds might be skeptical about this alliance. However, I inferred from interviews that they have a very positive perspective of their alliance with the US.

Iraqi Kurds, including politicians, journalists and academicians have common view that most things have been changed since the First Gulf War. According to them, there are substantial differences between foreign support in the past and existing support and alliances. According to this view, the alliances formed before the First Gulf War and those formed afterwards must be distinguished from each other. The most important difference, according to them, is that the international community is now more interested in the Kurdish problem in Iraq than ever before. As a result of this view, they do not see anything wrong with the alliance between them and the US that results in grievances in the region.

It must be stated that politicians are more optimistic than most in terms of the future of the existing alliance between Iraqi Kurds and the US. In order to clarify the changing characteristics of international support for Iraqi Kurds, Dizai gives an example from the past. According to him, when Barzani went to London in 1989, he could meet only one of the low-ranking British diplomats - and not in the British Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but rather in a café. However, in 1992, he was able to

meet British Prime Minister John Major. Dizai also points out Barzani's recent trip to the United States. He says that the American president accepted Barzani in the White House and praised him as a brave man. What he wants to say is that while before the Gulf War no state leader saw Barzani as their collocutor, they now see Barzani as a political leader. In addition to this, Dizai says that the central government in Baghdad is not as strong as it was before and will never become as powerful as it was in the past. Hence, the central government is not in any position to threaten the Kurds even if no foreign state supports them.

Sadi Ahmet Pire from the PUK interestingly answered the question "Have Kurdish leaders learned from their historical experience with foreign support." According to him, Iraqi Kurds have not run against the wind but with it. It seems that he does not see anything wrong with the alliances made in the past. On the contrary, he views them as necessary and appropriate. He also believes that Iraqis have not lost anything because of their support of the coalition forces. Instead, they were able to oust Saddam Hussein from power with this support. Surprisingly, he does not mention the increasingly worsening conditions in Iraq. In his opinion, the US is staying out of the affairs of Kurdish leadership. He goes one step further and argues that the Kurdish region in Northern Iraq has the most independent administration in the region.

Other politicians I interviewed have similar views. Although Ferec Ahmed from the KIU characterizes the American presence in Iraq as an invasion (in a negative sense), he says that they have to force the US to work for the well being of Iraqis, not for its own. Zirek Kemal, the representative of the Communist Party, argues that Kurds will be taken into account by regional and global powers in all big changes in the region from now on. He believes that Iraqi Kurds have now a strategic importance to global powers. He also supports the American presence in Iraq. When I reminded him about how ironic it was for both the Islamist and Communist parties in Northern Iraq to support the US invasion, in contrast to other Islamist and

Communist parties around the world, he said that they did not behave ideologically but rather pragmatically – in line with their interests.

Journalists also make a distinction between the past and present. According to Rebwar Wali, the most important difference between past and present support is that while the former was secret and made through informal promises, the latter are provided through complex diplomatic relations between Iraqi Kurds and global powers. In order to clarify his views, he says refers to a letter Mullah Mustafa received from Henry Kissinger in 1970s that included secret promises of aid from the American government. This is in contrast to the present, where Mesud Barzani is accepted as a political leader by many states. He also gives Barzani's meeting with George Bush in the White House as an example of this change. It seems that this meeting is viewed as an enormous victory by Iraqi Kurds – so much so that that they have postcards in their offices and houses picturing Bush and Barzani shaking hands in the White House. Jewad Qadir from the *Hewler Globe* shares these ideas. He places an emphasis on the changing character of relations between Kurdish leaders and other states, mostly Western ones.

As for academicians, it seems that they also share the point that a distinction must be made between past and present foreign support in the sense that present support is more diplomatic and robust. Dr Ahmad believes that democratic states support Kurds because of their strong commitments to democracy. What is interesting is that he uses western discourses to differentiate Iraqi Kurds from the rest of the Iraq. According to this view, while Iraqi Kurds are more democratic and peaceful and are not involved in terrorist activities, the remaining parts are not democratic or peaceful. That's why, according to him, western states support Kurds. Therefore, there is no need to fear foreign support. However, while he makes these arguments, he does not offer a convincing reason as to why present support is any trustworthier than before.

Dr. Tatahi also makes a distinction between the past and present. In his opinion, Kurds did not as much weight in the past as they do now. He emphasizes the interest-based nature of the relations between Iraqi Kurds and western states. According to him, this is something like “giving something to someone and getting something from someone.” He thinks that Kurdish leaders have learned lessons from the past. As a result of this, they play the game as an experienced player. They have good relations with western countries and political groups within Iraq. However, he does not mention anything about relations between Iraqi Kurds and neighboring countries. It is possible to say that they place more importance on relations with western countries than neighboring ones. Dr. Cafer Ahmed shared very similar views on this matter.

4.3.6 Perceptions towards Turkey

When I went to the region, the thing that surprised me the most was the cultural and economic presence of Turkey. It is possible to say that Turkey is the most influential country in the region in terms of culture and economy. Turkey is culturally dominant because Turkish television is very popular in the region. Turkish culture is spread through television programs. For example, it is possible to see many people who can speak Turkish despite their not having been to Turkey. Turkish singers are very famous. The taxi driver who gave me a ride from Arbil to the Turkish border played songs for me by one of the most famous Turkish pop stars. It seemed that he was proud of this. In addition, whenever they found out that that I was from Turkey, I was asked many curious questions about Istanbul. It seems that Istanbul’s image in the region resembles New York’s image in the world. Some of them shared some pleasant narratives of their relatives who have been to Istanbul before.

As for economic impact, Turkish companies have a large business capacity – over a billion dollars - in the region. It is possible to see many Turkish products, ranging from electronic appliances to foodstuffs. What is more, Turkish construction

companies are thriving. The names of Turkish companies are present on all the signs of buildings under construction. These buildings include new governmental buildings, big shopping malls and business centers.

However, interview and inquiry results show that Turkey's strong economic and cultural presence in the region has not produced a positive political image. I asked directly the question "How do you see Turkey as a neighboring country?" Results are shaped by the position of interviewees. While politicians emphasize the importance of Turkey for them, journalists, academicians and students have very negative perceptions.

Generally speaking, politicians put an emphasis on the integration of Turkey into the European Union, with special reference to the political and economic importance and effects of this integration on the region. In addition, they point out that Turkey is the best regional model for them in terms of democracy and development. Dizai says that they benefit from Turkey's economic and democratic capacity. He says that Turkey helped them before against Saddam Hussein but they have greater expectations from Turkey. He also points out that when Turkey becomes one of the full members of the EU, they will be neighbor of the EU. This process will automatically contribute to their economic and political well-being. They are against all oppositional organizations that want to damage the interests of neighboring countries. When I asked whether the PKK was included or not, he replied that it was.

In addition to this, he argues that Turkey's fear concerning recent developments in the region is unfounded. He argues that they do not want to damage interests of neighboring countries. In addition to this, Turkey's conditions are quite different from Iran or Iraq because Kurds in Turkey are strongly integrated through migration and marriage. There are millions of Kurds who live in western cities of Turkey. He interestingly asks, "Would Ibrahim Tatlis or Halis Toprak agree to live in Diyarbakir or other Kurdish cities?" The point he wants to make through this

question is that Turkish Kurds, unlike Kurds of Iran and Iraq, are not perfectly concentrated in a geographic region and they are happy to live in western cities of Turkey. He argues that the Kurdish problem in Turkey will be solved automatically after Turkey becomes a full member of the EU. Lastly, he says that if Turkey takes a step towards them, they will take two steps towards Turkey.

Other politicians have similar views. They also regard the process of the European integration as a big chance for them. They believe that this process will contribute to their well-being, too. Sadi Pire says that Turkish businessmen bring billion dollars to Turkey through economic relations. He also says that both sides have to develop a mechanism to deal with common problems because “we know each other better than anyone else.” In addition to this, he makes a distinction between civilian and military authorities in Turkey in terms of their approaches towards Northern Iraq. While the military is stricter, civilian authority is more flexible. In order to reach a peaceful and permanent solution, the approach of the civilian authority is needed.

Journalists, too, emphasize the difference between the military and civilians. They believe that the Turkish government wants to pursue a flexible foreign policy towards Northern Iraq. However, they cannot do this because of some internal concerns.³³⁶ Jewad Qadir believes that Turkey is more moderate than ever before. According to him, there are two reasons behind this. First, Barzani and Talabani avoid escalating tension with Turkey. Second, Turkey has realized that Northern Iraq has the potential of being a good neighbor for Turkey. What I inferred from his speech is that he believes that Northern Iraq will be an independent state sooner or later. He argues that Turkey also knows this and realizes that Northern Iraq will be a better neighbor than Syria, Iran or Iraq. However, it seems that he cannot read internal debates in Turkey because recent signals have shown that Turkish foreign

³³⁶ Wali says that he views Turkey’s support for Turkomans as normal. He points out that “we (Iraqi Kurds) receive supports from many countries from past to present, it is very normal for Turkomans to be supported by Turkey.”

policy towards Northern Iraq is becoming more stringent because of PKK presence in the region.

Academicians also share the idea that there is a big division between politicians and military elites in Turkey. According to them, if the EU process ends successfully, Turkey will follow a moderate policy towards them. However, military elites follow a very hawkish policy. They argue that Turkey is only state that Iraqi Kurds take as a model for themselves in terms of democratic and economic developments. They also believe that Turkey will be happy to see a democratic regional government in Northern Iraq.

The contradiction between Turkey's strong economic and political presence and its political image in the region is quite obvious in the results of inquiry. Kurdish students are very interested in Turkish culture, especially in Turkish music and Istanbul. They kept asking me about the beauty of Istanbul. However, results show that they view Turkey as a hostile neighboring country. The response of students to the question "How do you see Turkey as a neighboring country" illustrates the paradox between the economic and cultural presence of Turkey and its negative political image in the region.

Table 5: Student responses to the question "How do you see Turkey as a neighboring country?"

Answer	Frequency	% of Responses
Hostile	17	85
Neutral	3	15
Friend	0	0
Blank	0	0
Total	20	100%

As can be seen, while 85 % of the students view Turkey as a hostile neighbor, just 15 % of them see Turkey as neutral. However, none of them label Turkey as friendly.

4.4. General Observations

A number of concluding remarks concerning my research questions will be made in what follows. First, in contrast to the general tendency to see Barzani and Talabani as the leaders representing all Iraqi Kurds, I inferred from my interviews, inquiry and observation that there are serious challenges to both leaders and their parties. Because of their financial and military powers, they can now suppress these challenges. However, it seems that these challenges will affect the positions of both leaders in the future. Because of high rates of corruptions, both leaders are losing their credibility in the eyes of Iraqi Kurds.

Second, Iraqi Kurdish politicians and intellectuals do not see any problems with their current alliance with American forces in Iraq. According to them, the existing alliance between Kurds and American forces cannot be compared with the foreign support received in the past. They argue that they have now a strategic importance to the US. They also claim that their current relations with foreign powers are more diplomatic, complex and reliable. As a result of this, they say that they will not confront the kinds of bad experiences that did in the past.

Third, it seems that Iraqi Kurds, for the pragmatic purposes, want to live within a unified Iraq, at least for now. What I inferred from my observations is that there is a common understanding that if they remain as part of Iraq, they will have more security. The main logic behind this idea is that if they stay within Iraq, they will struggle with ethnic and religious groups which are weaker, rather than with neighboring countries, which are stronger than they are. It does not mean that they

do not have a desire for an independent state, but they pragmatically view being a part of Iraq as the most appropriate strategy given the present conditions.

Fourth, there is a parallelism between the discourses of Kurdish leaders and the spokesman of the American government about current conditions in Iraq. Kurdish politicians also have very optimistic views about democratization in Iraq despite all negative indicators. They also argue that their own experience in Northern Iraq can contribute to the democratization of Iraq if other ethnic and religious groups try to benefit from their experiences.

Fifth, while Turkey's economic and cultural involvement in the region is very influential, it cannot transform its strong economic and political involvement into a strong political impact. Therefore, while it is possible to say that Turkish companies dominate economic life in the region and Turkish televisions reach a big part of the Iraqi Kurds, as inquiry results show, the majority of Iraqi Kurds views Turkey as an enemy. This shows that there is great paradox exists between the economic and cultural influence of Turkey and its political image in the region.

Sixth, there are high rates of corruption in the region. Therefore, opposition groups use the existent of corruption as an effective tool in increasing their base of support. It must be noted that Islamic Union of Kurdistan is the one of the groups that is most effective in using corruption as weapon against the KDP and the PUK. They emphasize corruption everyday on their television channel. When I asked representatives of the KDP and the PUK about corruption, they agreed that it existed but tried to defend themselves by saying that all countries in the Middle East have problems with corruption.

Seventh, when we compare the PUK and the KDP, the former is more enthusiastic about territorial integrity of Iraq. This is quite clear when one visits the administrative regions of both parties. While there are no Iraqi flags in the places under the control of the KDP, the PUK administrative regions use them. When

asked the representatives of both sides about this, KDP representatives said that they were against the current flag because it reminds them of Saddam Hussein's regime. They argue that if this flag were changed, they would use the new flag. However, for PUK representatives, it is just a flag. It was Saddam Hussein who massacred them; not this flag. Therefore, they have no problem using this flag.

Eighth, according to Kurdish intellectuals and journalists, nationalist feelings are in decline. New generations are not nationalistic. I also observed this during my fieldwork. People are generally interested in their economic conditions. For example, one of students I talked to said that the Kurdish students coming from neighboring countries are very nationalist and interested in political issues but they, the Iraqi Kurdish students, are mostly interested in love, poems, and literature rather than politics or nationalism. The majority of Iraqi Kurds are not interested in elections and referendums. It seems that this situation make Iraqi Kurdish politicians very concerned about future position of existing Kurdish autonomy in Northern Iraq. To increase the nationalistic feelings or sense of Kurdishness, they use a number of means, including TV campaigns.

CHAPTER 5

5. CONCLUSION

It is obvious that Iraqi Kurds have acquired a very important strategic position in Iraqi politics, economics and military after the American invasion. There is no doubt that they will play very key roles in the future of Iraq. Therefore, this thesis focused on the perceptions of Iraqi Kurds towards current political developments in Northern Iraq and Iraq at large. As I mentioned before, it is difficult to study the perceptions of Iraqi Kurds because of the sensitive conditions of the region that create big obstacles in front of the researchers. For instance, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to carry out interviews or inquiry with ordinary people in the streets. The most likely problem is that researchers can be viewed as the members of intelligence services. People may avoid expressing their real feelings. It is because of these reasons that I only had a chance to interview journalists, politicians, academicians and students. It must be noted that my interviews and inquiry do not represent the perceptions of Iraqi Kurds as a whole, but they give important clues about existing ideas in the region.

In order to contextualize the main aim of the thesis, which is to understand the perceptions of Iraqi Kurds regarding the current developments in Iraq I discussed the internal and international dimension of the issue respectively in the first two chapters. In the first chapter, I discussed the nature of the Iraqi Kurdish movement and its internal evolution. I examined the international dimension of the issue by dividing into five historical phases: The Kurds and Hashemite Monarch, 1920-1958, the Kurds and the republican regime, 1958-1968, the Kurds and the Baath regime, 1968-1991, The Kurds and the Gulf War, 1991-2003, the Kurds and the American invasion of Iraq, 2003-present. By doing this, I aimed to show the structural transformations of Iraqi state and their influences on the Kurdish movement because

these historical periods also correspond to the historical turning points of the issue in particular and Iraq in general. What is common in these phases is the constant state of revolt in terms of the Kurdish movement.

In the first chapter, I also emphasized the key roles of Barzani family in the nationalist Kurdish movement in Iraq. Their influence starts with Sheikh Ahmed Barzani in 1930s and still continues recently with Mesud and Nechervan Barzani. Historically, there are two important factors behind their influence over Iraqi Kurds: the religious authority stemmed from Naqshbandi Sufi order, and the secular authority stemmed from tribal leadership. However, it seems that existing members of the family want to transform this influence into a modern political leadership.

In addition to this, I also, in the first chapter, stressed the transformation of the Kurdish movement after Mullah Mustafa. Two important results appeared after the defeat of the Mullah Mustafa in 1975. First, there was a one party the KDP domination before 1975 defeat. However, the PUK and other small Kurdish parties were established as a reaction to this defeat. In other words, multi-party struggle has emerged in Iraqi Kurdish movement. Second transformation was about the nature of leadership. Through these new parties, especially through the PUK, Kurdish leftist intellectuals have gained more power against tribal leaders.

In the second chapter, I discussed the international dimension of the issue. I try to focus on the main reasons behind the internationalization of the Kurdish issue in Iraq. I stressed that the international dimension of the issue cannot be understood without taking into account the international relations of the Middle East. Therefore I focused on the three results of the colonial legacy in the region: artificial and arbitrary borders, oil-rich resources, and the illegitimate political regimes. Because of this legacy, region has a political instability. This instability facilitated the internationalization of the issue because the global and the some of regional powers saw Kurds as a foreign policy asset that can be used against Baghdad in order to force Iraqi regime to act in the line of their interests. When they reach their aims,

they cut off their support to the Iraqi Kurds and left them alone against Iraqi military. In other words, Iraqi Kurds was used many times as a tactical tool against Baghdad.

In order to clarify this point, I also examined the policies of individual global and regional powers towards Iraqi Kurds. Under the heading of the regional powers I emphasized the policies of Turkey, Iran and Israel. I tried to show how different reasons play important roles in shaping of the policies of these states. As for global powers, I focused my attention on the policies of Britain, the US, the Soviet Union and Russia as the global powers that have important interest in the region. What is common for the policies of these states they lesser or greater extend used Iraqi Kurds as a tactical tool against Baghdad. It must be noted that Iraqi Kurds have never had strategic importance to these states.

As for the last chapter, I focused on the perceptions of the Iraqi Kurds of the current political developments in Iraq. As it is stated before, this chapter is the most important chapter because it includes the answer of the research question of this thesis. I aimed to understand the perceptions of Iraqi Kurds towards six different issues: the new political developments in Iraq, the future of Northern Iraq, Kirkuk, the position of Kurdish leadership, foreign supports and Turkey.

In order to find out about these perceptions, I carried out nine interviews and twenty inquiries with politicians, academicians, journalists and students. This is not representative of all Iraqi Kurds' perceptions, but it is still important. It focused its attention on the perceptions of the people that represent wider masses in Northern Iraq. Looking from this angle, the perceptions of these people can be applied to the wider masses in Northern Iraq in order to get a sense of existing ideas and perceptions.

As for results of the interviews and inquiry, overwhelming majority of the people with whom I carried out interviews and inquiries think that Iraqi political leaders

will not be successful in bringing all ethnic and religious groups in country together in a democratic way. However, Kurdish politicians have same discourses with Bush administration regarding the future of Iraq. According to them, Iraq is on the right track.

Again majority of interviewees has an ideal towards an independent Kurdish state. However, it seems that because of pure rational and pragmatic reasons Iraqi Kurds want to live in a federal Iraq. The main logic behind these ideas is that by living within a federal Iraqi state they believe that they will not face the threats of the neighboring countries. It seems that this idea is very common in the region. They also believe that they have a democratic political structure. According to them if other groups in Iraq want to benefit from Kurdish democratic experiences, this experience of Iraqi Kurds will definitely contribute to the democratic developments of Iraq.

The Kurdish politicians are very rigid about Kirkuk. According to them Kirkuk is a red line for them. What is interesting is that Iraqi Kurds uses same discourses with Israelis. For example, they argue that Kirkuk is the Jerusalem of the Kurds. In addition to this, they emphasize the Kurdish character of Kirkuk. It resembles the discourse of Jewish character of Jerusalem used by some Israelis. Kurdish politicians argue that they will fight for Kirkuk if it is needed. Time will tell what will happen about Kirkuk.

There is a very negative political image of Turkey among Iraqi Kurds. As it is so obvious in the results of interviews and inquiry the majority of interviewees view Turkey as a hostile neighboring country to themselves. In contrast to this negative political image, Turkey's economic and cultural presence in the region is so strong. Turkish televisions are very popular among Iraqi Kurds. In addition these Turkish companies have big business contract in the region.

According to interview and inquiry results, Talabani and Barzani do not have absolute control over Iraqi Kurds. There are some challenges to both leaders and their parties. However, the peshmerga and economic forces of both parties are enough today to suppress these challenges. It seems that in the future challenging groups will play important roles in Kurdish politics in Northern Iraq. In addition to this, high corruption rates are also weakening authorities of both leaders.

Last but not least, the perceptions of Iraqi Kurds towards foreign support, especially their alliance with the US, are very interesting. According to interviewees, current foreign support and relations must not be compared with the past ones. Iraqi Kurdish politicians and intellectuals strongly believe that they have strategic importance to the United States compared to what was their tactical importance previously. In addition to this, they believe that their relations with global powers have become transformed from an individualistic, unofficial and simple form into a complex, institutional and more diplomatic one. That's why, they are sure that they will not face any bad experience that they faced many times in the past.

In conclusion, there are many conflicting arguments, perceptions and ideas about the future of Iraqi Kurds in particular and Iraq in general. However, nothing is clear yet with the exception of chaotic political environment in Iraq and relatively stable political environment in Kurdish populated northern part of the country. It must be stated that the political behaviors and the perceptions of the Iraqi Kurds will definitely play important roles in the future of Iraq and the Middle East at large. It seems that Iraqi Kurdish leaders face a dilemma between their political aims and geopolitical, geocultural and geoeconomic realities of the region. In addition to this, based on interview results and my observations in the region, Iraqi Kurdish leaders will also face a growing challenge of other Kurdish groups in Northern Iraq. Their performance about how to manage these challenges will determine the future of Iraqi Kurds. Time will show what will happen.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: QUESTIONARY SURVEY

1. *Will Iraqi politicians be successful in bringing different ethnic and religious groups together in a democratic federal structure?*

YES () NO ()

2. *Is there a democratic political system in Northern Iraq?*

Completely () Poorly () Partially ()

3. *Which type of Northern Iraq do you want to live?*

Completely independent () Federal () Autonomy ()

4. *Are there any differences between KDP and PUK?*

Many () Partially ()

5. *Do these parties represent all Kurdistan people?*

Completely () Poorly () Partially ()

6. *Is there a corruption in Northern Iraq?*

Highly () Poorly ()

7. *Who is the biggest enemy of the Northern Iraq?*

Neighbouring countries () Kurds themselves () Corruption ()

8. *Does tribal structure dominates social and political life in Northern Iraq?*

Completely () Poorly () Partially ()

9. *How do you see Turkey as a neighbouring country?*

Enemy () Neutral () Friend ()

10. *Is media free in Northern Iraq?*

Yes () No () Partially ()

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. What is your name?
2. What is your position in Northern Iraq?
3. Do you think that Iraqi politicians will be successful in bringing different ethnic and religious groups together in a democratic federal structure?
4. Do you believe that there is a democratic political system in Northern Iraq? Please explain it.
5. Which type of Northern Iraq do you want to live?
6. Are there any differences between KDP and PUK? Do these parties represent all Kurdistan people?
7. What do you think about corruption? Is there a corruption problem in Northern Iraq?
8. Does tribal structure dominates social and political life in Northern Iraq?
9. How do you see Turkey as a neighboring country?
10. Is media free in Northern Iraq?
11. How do you evaluate recent unification of two Kurdish administration; is it a short-run tactical step or long-run strategic one?
12. What is the importance of Kirkuk for Iraqi Kurds?
13. When you look at the historical experiences of the Iraqi Kurdish leaders, do you think that they learn many things from these experiences?