

Great Powers, Oil and the Kurds in Mosul: (Southern Kurdistan/Northern Iraq), 1910-1925, by Habibollah Atarodi. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003. xix + 216 pages. Bibl. to p. 225. Index to p. 233. Maps to p. 236.

Iraqi Kurdistan: Political Development and Emergent Democracy, by Gareth R.V. Stansfield. London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003. Xvi + 185 pages. Append. to p. 208. Notes to p. 237. Bibl. to p. 255. Index to p. 261. \$80.00.

Reviewed by Michael M. Gunter

The Kurds in general and the Iraqi Kurds in particular have become increasingly important in regional and international politics since the Iran-Iraq War during the 1980s, when each side used the other side's Kurds as fifth columns and thus regionalized the Kurdish problem. The Gulf War and its aftermath in 1991 and now the War to remove Saddam Hussein from power in 2003, have greatly magnified this situation.

Habibollah Atarodi draws a useful historical survey of how the Iraqi Kurds were arbitrarily placed into their current situation in Northern Iraq or what most Kurds refer to as Southern Kurdistan following World War I. He emphasizes the British role, but also discusses the contributions of France, the United States, Turkey, and the League of Nations. Gareth R.V. Stansfield analyzes the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) that arose after the Gulf War in 1991, and which currently is playing such a major role as Iraq moves toward regaining its sovereignty on 30 June 2004. Thus, both of these well-written studies will prove extremely useful for understanding this volatile and continually evolving situation.

Habibollah Atarodi presents a passionate argument that since the world in general and the British navy in particular were converting from coal to oil "the economic value of

the Mosul oil and the British desire to control it was undoubtedly the prime motive behind . . . attach[ing] that *wilayat* to the newly and artificially created state of Iraq” (p. 208). Once this was accomplished, “the policy of maintaining peace and stability tended to serve those who had the upper hand and were pleased with the status quo, not the captive nations who longed for an opportunity to throw off their yokes” (p. 213). The insistence on “stability” by today’s powers remains remarkably the same regarding the Iraqi Kurds, who, concludes Atarodi, have found the oil on their land to be “a veritable curse” (p. 208).

The author overstates his thesis, however, when he refers to “Allenby’s crusaders” (p. 22) during World War I, and “the ultra-nationalist Mustafa Kemal [Ataturk]” (p. xix) after that war. One might also note that the Ottoman Empire officially ended in 1923, not “1919” (p. 1). Most importantly, of course, one should also note that in the future, the water resources of Iraqi Kurdistan undoubtedly will become even more important than its oil.

Gareth Stansfield’s scholarly analysis provides a wealth of factual data and insightful interpretations of the current situation based on his working and living in Iraqi Kurdistan from 1997-2000. During this period, he developed a close personal relationship with most of the main political figures including Massoud Barzani, the president of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Jalal Talabani, the secretary general of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) These close contacts have most usefully enabled him to draw numerous important conclusions not available in other studies, as well as analyze how “Kurdish politicians and civil servants at a variety of levels perceive their system to work” (p. 25). Barring the always-possible unforeseen event such as assassination, for

example, Stansfield identifies Nechervan Idris Barzani of the KDP and Kosrat Rasoul Ali of the PUK as the most likely future leaders of their respective parties.

Most heuristically, Stansfield takes issue with those who view the still-divided KDP and PUK administrations as a weakness and problem. Instead, he argues that “it is dangerous to attempt to develop the political and administrative system too quickly” and that “therefore . . . a possible interim solution would be a variant of a consociational model of multi-party elite, [and] political accommodation within a divided administrative and territorial system” (p. 6). Indeed, Stansfield concludes that “theories of consociational political systems can be considered to be a leitmotif of this book” (p. 20).

In effect, of course, a consociational model is exactly what the Iraqi Kurds have developed with their two opposing administrations engaging in regular coordinated political meetings that permit elite accommodation to occur without fractioning political rivalry. In addition, this consociational situation provides a geopolitical safety valve for those neighboring states such as Turkey, Iran, and Syria that view Iraqi Kurdish unity and possible statehood with fear. Stansfield thus poses the interesting question: “Should we instead be considering ‘federalism’ for the KDP and PUK rather than federalism for Iraq?” (p. 7).

Prefixing his analysis with a survey of political science theory applicable to the study of Kurdish politics, Stansfield moves on to address the physical and human geography as well as the economy of Iraqi Kurdistan. He describes the development of the contemporary political party system, the institutions of government that have developed since 1991, and compares the political decision-making processes of the KDP and PUK. “Whilst the PUK system may be seen to be identical to the KDP on paper, in

practice it is very different” (p. 114). The KDP leadership only changes after a KDP congress, for example, while the PUK’s is much more fluid. The PUK’s apparent “chaotic decision-making process” may actually be “a Kurdish approach to collective decision-making” (pp. 178-79).

Stansfield’s study throughout stresses possible solutions to the various problems faced by the KRG and the dangers of trying to unify the two opposing administrations too quickly. He includes useful charts and tables, a long list of frequently employed abbreviations, extremely well documented notes, an extensive bibliography, and an index. Given such problems as Kurdish infighting, economic corruption, and foreign intervention, Stansfield warns that to hold up the KRG as a possible model for greater Iraq “is ultimately foolhardy and dangerous to Iraqis and to the Kurds themselves” (p. 185).

Put simply, this is the best analysis available in English of the de facto state and government that have arisen in Iraqi Kurdistan since 1991. The fast developing situation since the end of the War in 2003, however, will demand that Stansfield soon write a second edition to his present excellent study.

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