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From Ally to Foe: The Iraqi Communist Party and the Kurdish Question, 1958–1975

JOHAN FRANZÉN*

ABSTRACT *In the modern history of Iraq, the period from the 1958 Revolution until the Ba'th Party's consolidation of power by the mid-1970s stands out as an exceptionally eventful era. Not only did it witness a revolution that overthrew the British-installed monarchy, it also saw the revolutionary regime's own downfall a few years later in a bloody coup. That putsch was later followed by many similar military interventions. In addition, the epoch witnessed phases of internal warfare between the Kurdish minority and the central government. Throughout this period the future of the new Iraqi republic was 'up for grabs', and various disparate groupings and political parties struggled for power and to win over the general population to their respective causes. Besides the Ba'th Party, which eventually seized power in 1968, the two major political players during this period were the Iraqi Communist Party and the Kurdistan Democratic Party. Most academic studies have downplayed the role played by the two latter organisations during this period and none have explicitly looked at the changing relationship between them.*

Introduction

It is the contention of this article that the key to understanding the successful consolidation of power by the Ba'th Party since coming to power in 1968, which later enabled Saddam Husayn to emerge as the sole autocrat from 1979 onwards, lies in the decision by the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) leadership to switch allegiances from the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) to the Ba'th Party in the early 1970s. Without the ideological and political support of the ICP, the Ba'th Party would have found it much harder to subdue the Kurdish rebellion of the mid-1970s, and had the KDP and the ICP joined together in concerted action against the Ba'thist regime, the very survival of that regime might have been put in jeopardy. But instead the ICP chose to turn its back on the Kurds, whom they had been allies with since the 1958 Revolution and in 1973 decided to pledge their allegiance to the Ba'th Party—a party that 10 years earlier had been in charge of a massacre that saw as many as 5000 of the ICP's members and supporters killed. Why did the ICP make such an, on the face of it, incomprehensible u-turn?

This article argues that the shift was brought about by a combination of changing political circumstances combined with rigid ideological dogmatism.

*School of Political, Social and International Studies, University of East Anglia (UEA), Norwich, NR4 7TJ, United Kingdom. E-mail: j.franzen@uea.ac.uk

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The inflexibility of communist ideology proved to be the ultimate downfall of the ICP. The absolute necessity for the ICP to conceive of other political groupings as being either 'progressive' or 'reactionary' meant that its policy on the ground, where circumstances were much more fluid than this strict categorisation allowed for, was extremely rigid. Ultimately this led to a situation in which the ICP, based on its analysis of a particular situation, would categorise the Ba'th Party and the KDP as being either 'progressive' or 'reactionary'. Once such a definition had been applied, the ICP wholeheartedly worked accordingly; if the other party had been deemed 'progressive' it would pursue collaboration at all costs even when, as happened on more than one occasion, being persecuted and having members killed by the other group. Conversely, if the verdict had been 'reactionary' the ICP would put the whole force of the party behind combating the other group. This ideological reading of reality, which in the past had served the ICP well, was in the period under study a serious impediment to a successful policy vis-à-vis the KDP and the Ba'th Party. These parties ruthlessly pursued a *Realpolitik* and were thus in a better position to read the power politics that characterised the period. The ICP leadership, on the other hand, desperately tried to fit reality into preconceived ideological blueprints; and this undoubtedly clouded their judgement. In the end, the choice was between the 'national socialism' of the Ba'th Party and the 'national liberation' of the KDP; the ICP leadership chose the former and put all their energy behind it, to the detriment of the previous ICP–KDP alliance.

Background

Since its creation in 1934, the ICP had staunchly promoted an inclusivist Iraqist ideology. Its mixture of nationalism and socialism had proved a popular recipe for Iraq's diverse population and throughout the 1940s and 1950s support for the party grew steadily. The ICP was the only political party that managed successfully to bridge the gap between the Kurdish and Arab parts of the Iraqi population.[1] Although Kurdish membership of the ICP dwindled somewhat after the Second World War, when the dominant KDP was formed, close ideological affinity remained between members of the Communist Party and the new grouping. In fact, the KDP partially emerged out of a Kurdish communist grouping known as *Shurish* ('Revolution'). A year before the foundation of the KDP, this group had taken a leading role in the establishment of a new leftwing Kurdish party, *Rizgari Kurd* ('Kurdish Liberation').[2] This group later merged with Mullah Mustafa Barzani, who had led the Kurdish revolt of 1943–1945 and who had then proclaimed the Kurdish Mahabad Republic in Iran. The resulting party was an uneasy mix of leftist nationalists and quasi-feudalist and tribalist patriots. The fact that many members and some of the leaders of the new party had their origin in the ICP, coupled with the large Kurdish membership of the ICP itself, meant that there were no rigid delimitations between the two parties. Identities were rather fluid; people in both parties would identify as communists and Kurds at the same time. This was undoubtedly a source of strength in the relationship between the two parties, but for the ICP this was also a weakness since the KDP could (and did) at

[1] The party counted numerous Kurds in its leadership and general membership over the years. Several of its leaders have been Kurds: Baha' al-Din Nuri (1951–1953); 'Abd al-Karim Ahmad al-Daud (1953–1954); and 'Aziz Muhammad (1964–1993).

[2] David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (2nd edn) (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), p. 294.

times appeal to the primordial sentiments among the Kurdish members of the Communist Party.

The revolution that took place on 14 July 1958 opened up a new era in Iraqi history. ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim, who as leader of the Free Officers proclaimed himself president of the new Republic, initiated a completely new political framework. Gone was the old link with imperial Britain and gradually Qasim also opened up to the Soviet Union (although remaining neutral in foreign affairs). Arab nationalism was on the rise in the region and in Iraq, especially since Gamal Abdel Nasser’s ascent to power in Egypt in 1952 and his triumphant deflance of British and French imperialism during the Suez crisis in 1956. Following the Iraqi revolution, these pan-Arabist groupings put pressure on the new Qasim regime, enthusiastically spurred on by Nasser. The KDP, which initially supported Qasim out of fear of a pan-Arabist future for Iraq, eventually grews disillusioned with his intentions for northern Iraq. The revolution also brought out social tensions as the new regime launched an agrarian reform that upstaged power relations in the countryside, thereby setting once powerful but now dispossessed rural landlords, shaykhs and *aghas* in motion against the new Republic.

The Communists and the Kurds in Revolutionary Iraq

The ICP’s stand on the Kurdish question was complicated and contradictory. Kurdish nationalism ultimately rested on assumptions of ethnic homogeneity, which for a communist party undoubtedly were perilous conceptions. The struggle of the ‘Kurdish nation’ therefore needed to be framed within a general *Weltanschauung* of anti-imperialist struggle. As with Arab nationalism, ‘imperialism’ was to blame for the division of the ‘Kurdish nation’. Due to the similar historical situations of both Arabs and Kurds, that is, having been ‘subjected to the injustices of the Ottoman domination and the evils of the extinct imperialist-royal regime’, a ‘brotherhood’ had evolved between the two peoples. Accordingly, the 14 July Revolution was argued to be ‘the revolution of the Arabs and Kurds’.[3] The general principle which the ICP followed on the Kurdish question was one that had been formulated by the party’s historical leader, Yusuf Salman Yusuf (Comrade Fahad). He had argued that the Kurds had the right to ‘decide their own fate’, including choosing separation, after imperialism had been defeated and Iraq liberated.[4] However, once this liberation had been achieved with the 14 July Revolution, the ICP leadership was much warier of the prospects of Kurdish separation, and in fact vigorously campaigned against it, denouncing ‘all the chauvinist tendencies and the separatist calls which prepossess some of the Kurdish chauvinists’.[5]

Before the revolution, the ICP had cooperated with the KDP and had tried to make it join the Front of National Union, but the resistance of the Ba‘th Party and the Istiqlal Party had eventually put an end to those ambitions. After the revolution, cooperation deepened; and, in November 1958, the KDP leadership agreed to joint action with the ICP.[6] However, relations between the KDP and the

[3] ‘The National Rights of the Kurdish People in the Programme of the ICP’, editorial from *Ittihad al-Sha‘b*, 21 January 1960, printed in English in *Iraqi Review* 1(24) (1 February 1960), p. 11.

[4] *al-Qa‘idah* (November 1945), quoted in Najm Mahmud (pseud.), *al-Sira‘ fi l-Hizb al-Shuyu‘i al-‘Iraqi wa Qadaya l-Khilaf fi l-Harakah al-Shuyu‘iyyah al-‘Alamiyyah* (Paris: n.p., 1980), p. 18.

[5] ‘National Rights’, p. 11.

[6] ‘Aziz Sbahi, *‘Uqud min Ta’rikh al-Hizb al-Shuyu‘i al-‘Iraqi*, Vol. 2 (Damascus: Manshurat al-Thaqafah al-Jadidah, 2003), pp. 500–501.

ICP eventually broke down due to developments in Kurdistan. After the revolution, many Kurdish *aghas* and tribal leaders who opposed the Agrarian Reform Law (ARL) and the general direction of the new regime had fled to Iran. There they had been provided with arms and money by Mohammad Reza Shah.[7] These conservative Kurdish *aghas* were bent on reversing the effects of the revolution by opposing Qasim and creating disorder in Iraqi Kurdistan. The KDP, which like the ICP had opposed the monarchical regime from a leftist-nationalist platform, now increasingly became immersed in these power struggles. Following the 1958 Revolution, Mullah Mustafa Barzani, who was invited back from his exile in the Soviet Union by Qasim, tried to assert his influence over Iraq's Kurdish population, to the detriment of the Iraqist wing of the KDP led by Ibrahim Ahmad. Qasim used Mullah Mustafa as a counterweight to the pan-Arabists (who had been putting out feelers to Ahmad), and therefore put his political weight behind him. Mullah Mustafa soon struck against communist influence within KDP and the Kurdish nationalist movement in general. In July 1959, he ousted pro-ICP elements from the KDP Politburo, and a little later he ejected ICP sympathiser Hamzah 'Abdallah as well. By August, Mullah Mustafa's actions had precipitated an open conflict between ICP and Kurdish tribesmen in Iraqi Kurdistan.

For these reasons, the Kurdish question increased in importance on the ICP agenda. To counter the threat of Mullah Mustafa's anti-communist influence on the KDP Party Secretary Salam 'Adel forwarded a proposal in late 1960 to the politburo arguing that the ICP needed to mobilise politically and organisationally. He proposed that the ICP should reconfirm its slogan of autonomy for Iraqi Kurdistan and that a central committee for its Kurdish branch should be set up. He also suggested the branch should be renamed 'the Communist Party of Iraqi Kurdistan' (*al-Hizb al-Shuyu'i li Kurdistan al-'Iraq*). The reorganisation of the Kurdistan branch was however only partially adopted and the reaffirmation of autonomy for Kurdistan was voted down and not adopted until 1962 when war between Mullah Mustafa and Qasim already had broken out.[8]

However, the political situation soon dramatically changed and with it the frosty relations between Mullah Mustafa and the ICP. Qasim's honeymoon with Mullah Mustafa ended when it stood clear that Qasim would not accede to the former's demands for autonomy. As a result, Qasim withdrew his financial support to Mullah Mustafa and started to supply rival Kurdish tribal groups with arms and money.[9] From spring 1961, the political situation in northern Iraq deteriorated rapidly. At this moment, the ICP's relations with Qasim had also worsened following a communist surge in popularity after the revolution and an unsuccessful bid for political representation by the ICP in May 1959. Qasim refused the ICP government seats and later, in early 1960, denied them a party license following promises of legalisation of political parties. As a consequence, relations between the ICP and the KDP (and Mullah Mustafa) improved considerably. Thus, on 30 May 1961, the ICP issued a statement calling on the 'national forces' to be vigilant against the 'schemes of imperialism', and warned that the government was preparing for military action against Mullah Mustafa and his followers. The tone vis-à-vis the Qasim regime had markedly changed:

[7] Sbahi, *'Uqud min Ta'rikh*, 2, pp. 502–503.
[8] Sbahi, *'Uqud min Ta'rikh*, 2, p. 506.
[9] McDowall, *History of the Kurds*, pp. 302–308.

> The popular masses, and all the national forces are increasingly becoming convinced, day after day, that the protracted [period] called 'the emergency period' and the pressing into an order of individual dictatorship, is bringing with it an increase of tragedies and hardships on the sons of the people, and oppresses more and more their most elementary rights and democratic liberties, and threatens in a continuing way national independence.[10]

During the summer of 1961 relations between Qasim and Mullah Mustafa deteriorated further. This prompted the ICP to issue another manifesto on 22 August. In it, the party warned that foreign oil companies and western diplomats were scheming in Iraqi Kurdistan, and criticised Qasim for trying to accommodate the feudalist *aghas* at the expense of the progressive peasants' movement and Mullah Mustafa, whom they by now had accepted as representing the Kurdish national movement despite earlier differences. The Iraqi people were called upon to defend Mullah Mustafa and his followers, 'the righteous sons of the Iraqi people', and the statement further called on the government to stop military preparations against them.[11]

The Kurdish revolt that then broke out (and lasted until 1963) was initially led by large tribal landowners and *aghas* who refused to pay tax because they were unhappy with the ARL. It soon gained the support also of their subject tribal populations. When Qasim moved in to subdue the rebellion, Mullah Mustafa seized the opportunity and attacked rival tribal groups, which by now had lost their financial support from the regime. When in September 1961 the army in a retaliatory raid indiscriminately launched an air strike on Barzan, Mulla Mustafa's region, this brought him and his followers into the war, and when the KDP's offices were closed down later the same month, it too joined the revolt and became an ally of Mullah Mustafa. Kurdish army officers who deserted from the Iraqi army en masse now formed the nucleus of a new Kurdish unit, the *peshmergahs* ('those who face death'). Qasim had not anticipated this kind of escalation of the conflict and sought to end the seemingly pointless fighting. He therefore offered amnesties to the rebels in November 1961 and again in March 1962, but they could not be swayed. The revolt thus continued, with the effect that Qasim became increasingly isolated on the Iraqi political scene.[12]

The war between Qasim and the Kurds was the decisive factor in the ICP's re-evaluation of both sides. To the ICP's leaders, Qasim gradually lost his erstwhile 'progressive' status. The Kurds, on the other hand, especially the followers of Mullah Mustafa, were transformed in the minds of the communists from somewhat suspect 'feudalists' to being predominantly 'progressive' and representing the Kurdish national movement. The Kurdish war thus also marked the final breakdown of relations between the communists and Qasim, and as they openly came out in support of Mullah Mustafa and against Qasim, thousands of ICP members and supporters were thrown into jail.[13] When the war broke out in September 1961, the ICP had issued a long statement calling on 'the masses' to fight the government's 'national oppression' in Iraqi Kurdistan and for a democratic solution to the problem.[14] From spring 1962 onwards, the ICP concentrated its attention on the

[10] ICP Manifesto, 30 May 1961, quoted in Sbahi, *'Uqud min Ta'rikh*, 2, p. 508.
[11] ICP Manifesto, 22 August 1961, quoted in Sbahi, *'Uqud min Ta'rikh*, 2, pp. 508–509.
[12] ICP Manifesto, 22 August 1961, quoted in Sbahi, *'Uqud min Ta'rikh*, pp. 308–311.
[13] ICP Manifesto, 22 August 1961, quoted in Sbahi, *'Uqud min Ta'rikh*, p. 513.
[14] Sbahi, *'Uqud min Ta'rikh*, 2, p. 512.

Kurdish issue and in March, it finally adopted the previous proposal for Kurdish autonomy and began to lobby leaders of international communist parties and heads of socialist states for support for the Kurdish cause and to take a stand against the war.[15]

The Fall of Qasim and the Period of Arab Nationalists in Power

The Ba'thists, who before the revolution had been a rather insignificant political force, but who had allied with other pan-Arabists against the Qasim regime, now sensed that the time was right to strike the weakened Qasim. They organised their supporters in a 'Nationalist Front', and were able to nestle their way into the army, despite Qasim's vigilance. On 8 February 1963, the Ba'thists and their allies struck. The ICP resisted the Ba'thist coup but to no avail. The Ba'th made sure their first move was to assassinate Brigadier Jalal al-Awqati, chief of the Iraqi Air Force and a card-carrying ICP member. Next, they executed Qasim himself following a summary 'trial'. According to a senior member of the ICP, the coup resulted in the killing of some 5000 members and supporters of the ICP and Qasim.[16] The surviving communists fled to Iraqi Kurdistan or abroad, where throughout 1963 they tried to lie as low as possible. All in all, the Ba'thists got their hands on 12 Central Committee members, eight of whom were eventually killed.[17]

The Ba'thists were eventually betrayed by their erstwhile ally, 'Abd al-Salam 'Aref, who ousted them in a relatively bloodless coup in November 1963. He continued to rule until his death in a helicopter accident in 1966, following which he was succeeded by his older brother, 'Abd al-Rahman. During the period from the Ba'thist coup in 1963 until the overthrow of 'Abd al-Rahman 'Aref in 1968, the Kurdish areas became the ICP's main operational sphere inside Iraq due to the repression it suffered elsewhere. Following the February 1963 coup, the ICP was drawn into the intricacies of Kurdish politics in a more direct manner and this came to shape the party's general view of the Kurdish question during this period. Fleeing the terror of Arab Iraq, the communists sought refuge in KDP-controlled parts of Iraqi Kurdistan. In areas dominated by Mullah Mustafa and his followers cooperation between the two parties was generally benign. In these places, they were allowed to retain their weapons and were given places to gather and set up camp. However, in areas controlled by the leftist KDP faction led by Ibrahim Ahmad and Jalal Talabani, they were not allowed to carry arms, and in more than one place they were attacked—in some instances with deadly outcomes.[18]

[15] Sbahi, *'Uqud min Ta'rikh*, 2, pp. 512–513.

[16] *al-Akhbar*, 27 October 1963, quoted in Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'thists and Free Officers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978; reprint, n.p.: Saqi Books, 2004), p. 985.

[17] Those who died at the hands of the Ba'thists were: First Secretary Salam 'Adel (Husayn Ahmad al-Radi), Jamal al-Haydari, Muhammad Saleh al-'Abli, Muhammad Husayn Abu l-'Iss, George Hanna Tellu, 'Abd al-Rahim Sharif, Hamzah Salman and Nafi' Yunes. Zaki Khayri and Baqer Ibrahim al-Musawi hid in the Mid-Euphrates region, whereas 'Aziz Muhammad and 'Umar 'Ali al-Shaykh secreted themselves in Iraqi Kurdistan. Of those captured by the Ba'thists, only Saleh Mahdi Duglah was able to escape. Saleh Mahdi Duglah, *Min al-Dhakirah: 'Sirat Hayah'* (Damascus: Dar al-Mada, 2000), pp. 103–104; for a more exhaustive list of the party's 'martyrs', see *Shuhada' al-Hizb, Shuhada' al-Watan 1934–1963* (Beirut: Dar al-Kunuz al-Adabiyyah, 2001).

[18] These fatal attacks took place in Bamu province, where among others communist 'Ali al-'Askari was killed with his own gun. Baha' al-Din Nuri, *Mudhakkirat Baha' al-Din Nuri: Sikritir al-Lajnah al-Markaziyyah li l-Hizb al-Shuyu'i al-'Iraqi* (London: Dar al-Hikmah, 2001), pp. 348–349.

This fact undoubtedly had an impact on the later assessment of Mullah Mustafa as being 'progressive' and also made the ICP leadership hesitant to pursue collaboration with Ahmad and Talabani.

The close relations between ICP members and the Kurdish nationalist movement and the fluidity of Kurdish and communist identities led to an increase in ICP writings on Kurdish issues. In November 1963, 'Aziz al-Hajj, who himself was a member of the small Shi'i Kurdish Fayli community, explained the ICP's position on the Kurdish question at length. The party's policy, he wrote, was based on a number of premises. Firstly, that it was 'imperialism' which had divided 'Kurdistan' and which continued to encourage the persecution of the Kurds. For this reason, al-Hajj argued, 'imperialism' was 'the first and main enemy of the Kurdish people'. Secondly, he maintained that the Kurdish national-liberation struggle was part of the national struggles of the peoples of the region against imperialism. In other words, al-Hajj argued that like Arabs, Turks, and other peoples of the region, the Kurds, were being oppressed by 'imperialism' and that it was in their interest to ally with these peoples against this common enemy. However, al-Hajj's third point was more complicated as he argued that the 'Kurdish question has its peculiar aspects despite the fact that it is part of the national question . . . because the Kurds suffer from national oppression . . . . The Kurds in Iraq are part of the divided Kurdish nation'.[19] This kind of reasoning resembled closely the kind of language emanating from the Kurdish nationalist camp itself, and is testimony to the close ideological affinity that existed at the time between members of the ICP and the various Kurdish nationalist groups. On the face of it, this type of argument would also seem to justify the armed struggle against the Iraqi state, which had been taken up by Mullah Mustafa and the KDP. To get around this problem, the ICP argued that the suffering of the Kurdish population was part of the suffering of the 'Iraqi people' as a whole. Therefore, the only solution to the Kurdish problem, in the ICP's view, was democracy:

> The solution of the Kurdish national problem is part of the solution of the democratic issue in Iraq. [. . .] At present this can only mean turning Arab–Kurd unity into a democratic unity, a matter which can be achieved by granting autonomy to Iraqi Kurdistan within the framework of a united Iraqi republic . . . .[20]

Yet, at the same time, the Kurds were imagined to be part of a larger 'Kurdish nation'.[21] This, undoubtedly, was an inherent contradiction in the communist reasoning.

In accordance with their progressive/reactionary dichotomy, the ICP leadership categorised the Ba'thists who had pulled the bloody coup of February 1963 as reactionary 'fascists'. They even claimed the 'principal aim' of the coup had been 'to destroy the Communist party . . . in the Arab regions in order . . . to launch an armed attack on Kurdistan.' Accordingly, the war itself was described as 'racist' and 'genocidal'. In the same perfunctory manner, the Kurdish response was seen

[19] Aziz el-Haj, 'The Current Situation in Iraq', *World Marxist Review*, 6(11) (November 1963), p. 40.
[20] Statement of ICP Central Committee in March 1962, quoted in *el-Haj*, 'Current Situation', p. 40.
[21] Using Kurdish nationalist language, the ICP spoke of 'Kurdistan, the homeland of the Kurds'. ICP delegate at a 1963 meeting of Arab Communist Parties, 'The Present Stage of the National-Liberation Movement of the Arab Peoples', *World Marxist Review*, 6(10) (October 1963), p. 66. Similarly, 'Aziz al-Hajj used terms such as the 'divided Kurdish nation', which, in his view, was 'distinguished by its common language, land, historical heritage and its common aspiration to live in freedom'. Aziz al-Hajj, 'Support the Just Struggle of the Kurdish People!', *World Marxist Review*, 9(4) (April 1966), p. 46.

as 'a struggle for liberation from the rule of the fascist Ba'athists—the henchmen of imperialism—for a national-democratic government which would guarantee Kurdish autonomy'.[22]

When the new 'Aref regime signed a peace agreement with Mullah Mustafa Barzani on 10 February 1964, the ICP leadership welcomed the move.[23] Others within the Kurdish nationalist movement were however less supportive. The KDP faction led by Ibrahim Ahmad and Jalal Talabani criticised what they regarded as Mullah Mustafa's sell-out agreement. But because 'Aref continued Qasim's old policy of supporting Mullah Mustafa, he was able to sideline his critics. Rallying the conservative elements of Kurdish society behind him, Mullah Mustafa represented a completely different ideological and socio-political force than the avowed leftists within the Ahmad–Talabani faction. But they were now paying the price for having put their support behind him since the 1961 uprising, when they had started describing him as the leader of the 'Kurdish nation'.[24]

Relations between the 'Aref regime and Mullah Mustafa soon deteriorated. Eventually this led to renewed armed conflict in 1965. When the war broke out, the ICP leadership argued that the conflict harmed the interests of the 'Arab nation'. 'It is in no way in the interest of the Arab nation', a party manifesto published in *Tariq al-Sha'b* read, 'to launch an unjust war against the Kurdish people which at all times have been and continues to be a loyal ally to the Arab liberation movement in the struggle against colonialism and reaction'.[25] As the party became increasingly entangled in the infighting of the Kurdish nationalist movement, its ideological understanding of events was accordingly challenged by facts on the ground. In Iraqi Kurdistan, politics was overshadowed by the indomitable figure of Mullah Mustafa Barzani. Despite his initially narrow tribal support base, by now he had grown into a living embodiment of Kurdish nationalism, and, as such, the ICP was in no position to disregard him. The Ahmad–Talabani faction had unsuccessfully tried to challenge Mullah Mustafa's authority in April 1964, when a KDP Congress they had convened condemned him. But in July he replied by convening his own congress where representatives of the Ahmad–Talabani faction were arrested. Mullah Mustafa then set up a new leadership and ousted most of the old one. Some days later, he amassed a large force of *peshmergahs* and forced Ibrahim Ahmad and Jalal Talabani, together with their approximately 4000 supporters, into Iran.[26] With Mullah Mustafa's new omnipotent position, the ICP was also coerced into subordination. Thus, when senior ICP leader Baha' al-Din Nuri was sent to Iraqi Kurdistan in early 1966 to take up the role of Secretary of the party's Kurdish branch, he was forced to pay Mullah Mustafa a courtesy visit to inform him of the new arrangements. At this meeting, Mullah Mustafa simply instructed Nuri that he wanted Soviet aid in his fight against the regime and he made it clear that he saw the ICP as intermediaries to the Soviets.[27]

But despite such brazen insolence, it was clear that by now the ICP had decided to wholly put its weight behind Mullah Mustafa and his KDP faction. Despite the closer ideological affinity between the ICP and the Ahmad–Talabani faction it

[22] Iraqi delegate at the Arab communist meeting in 1963, 'Present Stage', p. 67.
[23] Mahmud, *al-Sira'*, p. 78.
[24] McDowall, *History of the Kurds*, pp. 315–316.
[25] Manifesto of the Iraqi Communist Party, 'La Tal'abu bi l-Nar ya Hukam Baghdad, Shabh al-Harb al-Ahliyyah Yukhayyim 'ala Ard al-'Iraq', *Tariq al-Sha'b*, 21(5) (mid-March 1965), p. 1.
[26] McDowall, *History of the Kurds*, pp. 316–317.
[27] Nuri, *Mudhakkirat*, pp. 334–342.

was Mullah Mustafa's tribal fighters that got the support. In fact, not only did the ICP denounce the Ahmad–Talabani faction, it actually commissioned its *Fedayeen* fighters, who since Nuri's arrival in early 1966 had been attached to Mullah Mustafa's leadership in the regions of Balik, Qarah Dagh, Garmiyan and Bahandinan, to combat it. But despite such altercations, the Ahmad–Talabani faction, unlike the Ba'th Party, was still considered to be in the 'progressive' camp; it was categorised as a 'nationalist organisation walking along an erroneous path'.[28] Consequently, the ICP pursued a policy of trying to convince the Ahmad–Talabani faction to mend fences with Mullah Mustafa. But such a policy was not appreciated by Mullah Mustafa, who applied pressure on the ICP leadership to denounce the Ahmad–Talabani faction. Mullah Mustafa even went as far as demanding that the ICP kill Ahmad and Talabani. When the ICP refused, Mullah Mustafa threatened to demolish the ICP's Kurdish branch and hunt down and kill all communists in Iraqi Kurdistan.[29] Despite these stormy relations, however, Mullah Mustafa continued to be categorised as 'progressive' by the ICP. In the summer of 1966, the ICP's Kurdish branch wrote an 'appraisal leaflet' on Mullah Mustafa, analysing his 'ideological composition', 'class affiliation' and 'capabilities'. The resulting assessment described him as a 'representative of the Kurdish bourgeoisie', from the 'wing that carries a mixture of tribal-peasant mentalities and the mentality of the intellectuals of the bygone era', and that he relied on 'tribal methods'. But despite these scathing remarks he was nevertheless confirmed as a 'patriotic and national leader' (*za'im watani wa qawmi*) who served his people.[30]

This assessment epitomises the party's ambivalent position towards Mullah Mustafa Barzani. On the one hand he was a representative of the 'Kurdish bourgeoisie' while at the same time carrying a 'tribal-peasant' mentality and relying on 'tribal methods'. In this manner, Mullah Mustafa's all-encompassing figure forced the ICP to readjust its theories in order to ideologically understand and categorise him. However, by ideologically accommodating and putting the weight of the party behind him, the communists unavoidably strengthened his position in Iraqi Kurdistan to the point where they could no longer seriously challenge his authority. Thus, although having been among the strongest political forces in the Kurdish areas since the 1940s, the ICP now surrendered its positions in the belief that doing so would favour the Kurdish 'national liberation' movement. What it in reality did, was to force the communists to play a secondary role in the Kurdish areas over the coming decades.

The Ba'th Party in Power

When the Ba'th Party seized power in July 1968 this led to a new stage in the communist–Kurdish relationship. The Ba'thists realised that their own popular support was slim and therefore sought to woo the ICP and the KDP interchangeably. At first, the Ba'th thus sought dialogue with the KDP while clamping down on the ICP. After 1971, it moved close to the Soviet Union, and as a result, its suppression of the communists eased—to the detriment of the Kurds. The Ba'thist regime's decision to nationalise Iraq's oil resources in 1972, coupled

[28] Nuri, *Mudhakkirat*, pp. 349–351.
[29] Nuri, *Mudhakkirat*, pp. 352–354.
[30] Nuri, *Mudhakkirat*, p. 344.

with Soviet–Ba'thi rapprochement, swayed the ICP to establish a national front with the Ba'thists in July 1973. This, in turn, prompted a dramatic deterioration of relations with the Kurds for both parties.

The relatively benign relations that had existed between the ICP and Mullah Mustafa's KDP since the 1958 revolution continued after the 1968 Ba'thist coup until the establishment of the National Front in 1973. During the period of Ba'thist repression of the ICP and the KDP, the communists raised the general slogan of 'democracy for Iraq and autonomy for Kurdistan'. In a seminal article entitled 'What does Autonomy Mean for Iraqi Kurdistan?', published in *Tariq al-Sha'b* in February 1969, the ICP treated its position on the Kurdish problem at length. Just as before, the party maintained that the right to self-determination was an 'indisputable principle' of all peoples, which in 'a multi-ethnic society' comprised 'the right to autonomy within a unified state or a federal union of two unionist states'. But what was more interesting was the notion that, at least theoretically, all peoples also had the right to 'separation and the creation of an independent state'. The article made haste to add, though, that the right to self-determination would 'not necessarily require separation', but that granting it would bring different peoples together. A people would usually not exercise its right to separation, the article explained, unless under 'unbearable oppression in which peaceful co-existence with the majority ethnicity is impossible' and unless there were no 'conditions for economic and political development'.[31]

The ICP would argue on the one hand that the 'recognition of autonomy for the Kurdistan region on an ethnic basis is the only way to solve the Kurdish question democratically far from the dangers of bourgeois chauvinist views'. However, at the same time, they argued the opposite, claiming they were 'against the separation of the working class of the two peoples'. Instead, the ICP maintained that because the interests of Kurdish and Arab workers were 'approximately the same' especially when it came to 'the joint struggle for the sake of national liberation, democracy and social progress', the Kurdish workers would adopt 'the voluntary union with their Arab brothers within a single state'.[32]

This idea of a 'voluntary union' of Kurdish and Arab workers coupled with the ICP's relatively benign relations with Mullah Mustafa, the KDP leader, meant that during the period from the Ba'thist takeover of power in 1968 until the communists themselves became allies of the Ba'th Party in 1973, they usually tried to mitigate the situation whenever contradictions between the KDP and the Ba'th flared up. Thus, the ICP argued in October 1969,

> Our Iraqi Communist Party is firmly convinced that there are wide possibilities, if the two sides, especially the government, show a real understanding of the conditions that our country and the Arab nation face. If they do not understand, then the scheming imperialist, Zionist and reactionary plans deepen not only against our national [*watani*] independence and the Arab liberation movement, but also against the national [*qawmi*] democratic movement of the Kurdish people itself ....[33]

Even during times of strife, the ICP went to great lengths to mend fences with the Ba'th and with the KDP. Thus, when the Ba'th Party reached its historical 11

[31] 'Madha Ya'ni al-Hukm al-Dhati li Kurdistan al-'Iraq?', *Tariq al-Sha'b*, 26(2) (mid-February 1969).
[32] 'Hukm al-Dhati'.
[33] 'Ta'azzum al-Wad' fi Kurdistan Yastalzam Nuhud Jami' al-Ahzab wa l-Quwa al-Wataniyyah wa l-Dimuqratiyyah bi Mas'uliyyatiha li Iqaf al-Qital Fawran wa Tahqiq al-Hall al-Salmi al-Dimuqrati li l-Mas'alah al-Kurdiyyah', *Tariq al-Sha'b* 26(7) (early October 1969).

March 1970 agreement on Kurdish autonomy with the KDP,[34] the ICP claimed credit for it, arguing it 'was brought about by urging the government continuously and patiently by us'.[35]

When, during 1971–1973, the ICP moved closer to the Ba'th and eventually entered an alliance with it, this led to a sharp deterioration in its relations with the KDP. Though the communists did their best to persuade the Kurds to enter the national front, through the dispatching of high-ranking ICP delegations to deliberate with Mullah Mustafa at his headquarters in the north, the KDP would have none of it. Mullah Mustafa's position was clear: he would only enter a front between the KDP and the Ba'th—the forces representing the two main ethnicities.[36]

In June 1973 (before the establishment of the Front), the antagonism between the KDP and the ICP descended into armed confrontation. The military conflict, which was initiated by the KDP, further escalated throughout the autumn and winter of 1973–1974. Armed attacks by KDP *peshmergahs* on ICP fighters and kidnappings, such as the 'disappearance' of 10 communists in Zakho in August, became commonplace.[37] Throughout this period, a fierce propaganda war was fought on the leading pages of the ICP's *Tariq al-Sha'b* and the KDP's *al-Ta'akhi*. On 3 October, the ICP leadership tried to convince the KDP about its Leninist understanding of the national question, which, it argued, could only be solved 'in the current of revolutionary struggle against imperialism'. Throughout the newly independent countries of Asia and Africa with 'multiple nationalities' and 'tribes', it asserted, 'neo-colonialism is working towards inciting national and tribal strife with a view to weaken the positions of the anti-imperialist forces'.[38]

However, because the KDP was still deemed to be 'progressive', the ICP leadership decided not to fight back. Instead, the party leadership implored the 'brothers' in the KDP leadership 'in the interest of the Kurdish people and the Iraqi people in its entirety' to 'desist' from the 'dangerous road' and 'to be alert to the machinations and conspiracies of the imperialist, reactionary and Zionist circles'.[39] The KDP leadership, for its part, denied it was behind a persecution campaign against the ICP and claimed the communists had started the fighting. At this point, the Soviets, who otherwise tried to steer away from direct interference in internal Iraqi political problems as they sought friendly relations with all three major parties, saw it fit to intervene. On 14 November, a Kurdish delegation to the Soviet Union that included senior KDP-leader Saleh Yusufi was received by Boris Ponomarev, the chief of the International Department of the CPSU Central

[34] In short, the major points of this agreement provided for Kurdish to be used as an official language, Kurdish representation in government, that officials should be Kurdish-speaking in Kurdish majority areas, restoration of Kurds who had been uprooted in previous fighting, implementation of Agrarian Reform, inclusion in the Iraqi constitution of the term 'the Kurdish nationality', surrendering of a Kurdish broadcasting station and arms to the government, the provision that a Kurd should be vice-president, share of legislative power and unification of Kurdish majority areas as a self-governing unit. McDowall, *History of the Kurds*, pp. 326–328.

[35] *Report of the Central Committee to the Second National Congress of the Iraqi Communist Party* (n.p.: Iraqi Communist Party: n.d.), p. 20; See also ICP's expression of general support for the agreement: 'Hizbuna al-Shuyu'i al-'Iraqi Yad'am Ittifaq 11 Adhar 1970' & 'Ila Ra'is al-Hizb al-Dimuqrati al-Kurdistani wa Qa'id al-Harakah al-Qawmiyyah al-Kurdiyyah Mustafa al-Barzani al-Muhtaram', *Tariq al-Sha'b* 27(3) (late March 1970).

[36] Salah al-Kharsan, *Safahat min Ta'rikh al-'Iraq al-Siyasi al-Hadith: al-Harakat al-Marksiyyah 1920–1990* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-'Arif li l-Matbu'at, 2001), p. 147.

[37] al-Kharsan, *Safahat min Ta'rikh,* p. 147.

[38] 'Hawla l-Hall al-Ishtiraki li l-Mas'alah al-Qawmiyyah', *Tariq al-Sha'b*, 16 (3 October 1973).

[39] 'Nahj Khatar… Nadu' ila al-Kaff 'anhu', *Tariq al-Sha'b*, 48 (12 November 1973).

Committee. Four days later, *al-Ta'akhi* announced it would unilaterally cease its propaganda campaign, and on 19–20 November, ICP and KDP representatives held talks that temporarily brought about an end to the hostilities.[40]

But new tensions soon flared up again during the winter of 1973–1974. Yet the ICP leadership refused to denounce the KDP as 'reactionary'. Instead, they went 'back to basics' in order to fully spell out its position on the KDP and leave no room for misinterpretation or misconstruction by the KDP leaders. In January 1974, it explained, in an article in *Tariq al-Sha'b*, that

> Our Iraqi Communist Party considered the founding of the Kurdistan Democratic Party at the end of the Second World War an objectively positive phenomenon, which the concrete historical and national circumstances in the Kurdish society and the development and growth of the social classes with their own distinct interests in this society had dictated. On the basis of this scientific view our Iraqi Communist Party defined its position on the occurrence of the KDP in the arena of the national political movement in Kurdistan, with regard to the fact that it was a patriotic [*watani*] and bourgeois nationalist [*qawmi*] party opposed to colonialism, reaction and national oppression. And starting from this position our Party found that there were important convergence points and common political goals between it and the Kurdistan Democratic Party. And in the light of that, it sketched the policy of cooperation and front alliance with it.[41]

However, because of the changing power relations in the country, with the ICP having entered into a formal alliance with the ruling Ba'th Party in July 1973, the ICP leadership could now afford to take a much harder line towards Mullah Mustafa than it had been able to in the 1960s. The changing attitude was no doubt also informed by Mullah Mustafa's own ill-advised 'foreign policy' statements, such as when he in June 1973, weeks before the establishment of the National Front, declared that should he receive 'sufficient support' from the US he would 'be able to control the Kirkuk oilfields and confer exploitation rights on an American company'[42]—a statement that undoubtedly made enemies for him in most parts of Iraq.

This situation led the ICP leadership to adopt a new policy which sought to create a dichotomy between Mullah Mustafa and the rest of the Kurdish nationalist movement. The party thus began to argue that Kurdish infighting and ideological disagreements were a logical consequence of the eclectic mix of people that had rallied around Mullah Mustafa, and that not all of these people were 'progressive' and worthy of communist support. Following their own rather narrow class-based analysis, the communists explained these ideological frictions as 'aspects of the class struggle' that was ongoing in Kurdish society, which, they argued, 'flares up whenever the country is on the road to more profound progress'.[43] Thus to the ICP, the KDP's refusal to join the communist/Ba'thist National Front was a display of its 'fear of progress'. This, in turn, was a natural result of its 'bourgeois' class position. To further underline this point, the ICP insisted that the Kurdish national movement as a whole did not equate to the KDP, and that the party distinguished

[40] Haim Shemesh, *Soviet–Iraqi Relations, 1968–1988: In the Shadow of the Iraq–Iran Conflict* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1992), pp. 117–118.
[41] 'Min Jadid Hawla Dawafi' wa Marami Hamlat al-Fi'at al-Yaminiyyah fi al-Hizb al-Dimuqrati al-Kurdistani 'ala al-Shuyu'iyyin wa Sa'ir al-Taqaddumiyyin fi Kurdistan: Mawqifuna min al-Hizb al-Dimuqrati al-Kurdistani', Part 3, *Tariq al-Sha'b*, 104 (18 January 1974).
[42] As quoted in McDowall, *History of the Kurds*, p. 333
[43] 'Min Jadid . . . : al-Yamin La Yamthul al-Wajh al-Mushrifah li l-Harakah al-Taharruriyyah al-Kurdiyyah', Part 2, *Tariq al-Sha'b*, 103 (17 January 1974).

between its 'principled position' on the Kurdish people with its 'just nationalism' (*al-qawmiyyah al-'adilah*) and the KDP 'which has its own special solutions and its own defined role in the arena of the Kurdish issue, all in accordance with its ideological departure points and the class interests that it gives expression to'.[44] While such a stand might have appeared somewhat unrealistic given the sheer dominance of the KDP on the Kurdish political scene, it was nevertheless a clear sign that the ICP leadership was having serious misgivings about whether to continue to classify the KDP and Mullah Mustafa as 'progressives'.

The KDP, for its part, charged the ICP leadership with complicity in a pronounced Ba'thist policy of 'Arabisation' in Iraqi Kurdistan.[45] The accusation hit a nerve, as this phenomenon was much harder to explain with the usual rhetoric about Ba'thist 'progressiveness'. 'There is no doubt', the ICP thus wrote, 'that in a state of multiple nationalities the attempt to change the national character of the regions in which the national minorities or the oppressed nationalities live, creates a glaring and distasteful phenomenon of the politics of national oppression which the bourgeoisie of the big nationalities pursues against the other nationalities'. The ICP took pains, however, to point out that this matter was nothing new, but had in fact been going on 'since the days of the destroyed monarchical-feudal age' and was part of 'the politics of national-historic repression' of Iraqi Kurdistan which aimed at 'erasing the national traits of the Kurdish people or narrowing the area known as Iraqi Kurdistan'. The party also pointed out that it had always had a 'clear and resolute' position against any 'Arabisation' attempts occurring in the past, but since 'at the present no Arabisation operations' were ongoing, as far as the ICP leadership was concerned there was no problem to discuss.[46] The KDP, for its part, insisted on this issue and brought up the forced emigration of Iraqi Fayli Kurds to Iran in mid-1971.[47] While the ICP did not deny that the Ba'thists indeed had carried out this atrocity, it argued that since the incident occurred in 1971 (before the Ba'th/ICP alliance), the ICP 'did not possess any means to communicate its voice' because not until later did 'relationships of positive cooperation' with the Ba'th materialise.[48]

The final breakdown of KDP-ICP relations developed when the regime presented its plans for a new 'autonomy law' (*qanun al-hukm al-dhati*) during January–March 1974. The law, which was an offshoot of the 11 March 1970 Agreement, was backed by the ICP who cooperated with the Ba'th in its preparation. The party saw the new law as the practical implementation of the 1970 agreement and warned the KDP, who rejected its terms, that carrying out the agreement was 'a joint national responsibility that no national section can exempt itself from' and that it was connected with 'the safeguarding of the existing revolutionary system and the deepening of its content'.[49] To the ICP leadership, its

[44] 'Min Jadid', Part 3.
[45] These allegations were expressed in a KDP memo, quoted by *Tariq al-Sha'b*, 109 (24 January 1974).
[46] 'Min Jadid…: Mawqif Hizbina al-Shuyu'i min Mas'alat Taghyir al-Tarkib al-Qawmi fi Kurdistan', Part 7, *Tariq al-Sha'b*, 109 (24 January 1974).
[47] The Fayli Kurds, a Shi'i minority in the overwhelmingly Sunni Kurdish community, had lived in Iraq since Ottoman times but had been refused Iraqi citizenship since the creation of the Iraqi state. As a vulnerable minority, they were caught up in the demographic struggle between the regime and the KDP. Arguing they were Iranians, the Ba'thi government expelled some 50,000 of them during 1971. McDowall, *History of the Kurds*, pp. 329–330.
[48] 'Min Jadid…: Mawqif Hizbina al-Shuyu'i min Mushkilat al-Akrad al-Fayliyyin', Part 8, *Tariq al-Sha'b*, 111 (28 January 1974).
[49] 'Min Jadid…: Bi Sadr Asbab al-Khilafat bayna Hizbina al-Shuyu'i wa l-Jinah al-Yamini fi l-Hizb al-Dimuqrati al-Kurdistani', Part 5, *Tariq al-Sha'b*, 106 (21 January 1974).

alliance with the Ba‘th in the National Front constituted an even better opportunity for the KDP to gain its rights in negotiation with the regime. To them, the KDP’s position was untenable because it had accepted the terms four years earlier, and as Iraq now was more ‘progressed’, logically there was even more cause for the KDP to cooperate at this point.[50]

The new Autonomy Law was finally presented on 11 March 1974—four years after the original agreement. Following the inauguration of the law and the complete breakdown of relations with the KDP due to its continued refusal to join the front or accept the new law, ICP propaganda switched focus, now instead trying to eradicate the KDP’s role in the Kurdish nationalist movement. The communists argued that ‘the existence of a progressive Arab nationalist party in the leadership of the regime’, which had ‘adopted the Kurdish question from a more progressive position than all the parties and Arab nationalist forces that have obtained power in Iraq’, had created ‘a new opportunity to solve the national question peacefully and democratically’. As for the KDP leadership, they were ‘following the road of cooperation with imperialism, Iranian reaction and Israel’—a road that could only lead ‘in the end to destruction’.[51] In other words, the KDP and Mullah Mustafa were gradually being reclassified as ‘reactionaries’, thereby losing the ideological support of the ICP. The KDP leadership was also accordingly re-categorised, from ‘bourgeois nationalist’ and thus worthy of support to ‘feudalist’ and ‘reactionary’. The KDP leadership was described as constituted by the ‘Kurdish feudalist’ who

> dreams … that the elimination of national oppression and the realisation of nationalist slogans, including autonomy, will lead to the creation of a Kurdish feudal emirate which he himself and the sons of his class will rule unrestricted, and transform the peasants, or [let them] remain as they are, slaves who build palaces for them and who produce honey and butter for them.[52]

The Kurdish nationalist movement in Iraq, the party argued, was still part of the patriotic movement of the Iraqi people as a whole, but because it consisted of ‘different social classes and groups’ who did not have ‘a unified understanding’ of national rights, it was ‘not strange that contradictions show between them’. Nationalism, the communists explained, could be used either to further ‘progressive’ interests or as ‘a tool that sanctifies the control of the big capitalists and the big landowners’.[53]

Following the breakdown of negotiations between Mullah Mustafa Barzani and the Ba‘thist regime, all-out war erupted in April 1974. Mullah Mustafa’s inferior force of some 50,000 tribal *peshmergahs* now stood against some 90,000 well-trained and well-equipped government forces. The Iraqi army swiftly moved in with full force and pushed the insurgents far back. Had it not been for Iran providing logistical support over its borders, the rebellion would quickly have been crushed. Instead, the Kurdish guerrilla fighters held out until winter, but by

[50] ‘Min Jadid … : Man al-ladhi Bada’a Yatakhala Fa‘lan ‘an Qadiyat al-Sha‘b al-Kurdi wa Maslahatiha?’, Part 6, *Tariq al-Sha‘b*, 107 (22 January 1974).
[51] ‘al-Jinah al-Yamini fi H.D.K. Yaqud al-Harakah al-Qawmiyyah al-Kurdiyyah ila Mazaliq Khatirah’, *Tariq al-Sha‘b*, 182 (24 April 1974).
[52] ‘Waqfah Mas’ulah ma‘a al-Jinah al-Yamini fi Qiyadat al-Harakah al-Qawmiyyah al-Kurdiyyah: Hawla Tabi‘at al-Sira‘ wa Dawafi‘uhu bayna Atraf al-Harakah al-Qawmiyyah al-Kurdiyyah’, Part 2, *Tariq al-Sha‘b*, 186 (29 April 1974).
[53] ‘Li Madha Yata‘awan al-Yaminiyyun fi l-Harakah al-Qawmiyyah al-Kurdiyyah ma‘a A‘da’ al-Sha‘b al-Kurdi wa Harakatihi al-Taharruriyyah?’, *Tariq al-Sha‘b*, 191 (6 May 1974).

February 1975, their situation was desperate.[54] However, when Saddam Husayn at the OPEC Conference in Algiers on 6 March reached an agreement with Mohammad Reza Shah, settling outstanding disputes between the two countries and ending Iranian support for the Kurds, the uprising was doomed.[55] The Iraqi regime, in accordance with the agreement, offered Mullah Mustafa a ceasefire from 13 March to 1 April, allowing him and his forces either to retreat into Iran or surrender. Distraught the KDP leadership decided to end the fighting and soon more than 100,000 Kurds—*peshmergahs* and relatives—made their way into Iran and the rebellion was finished.[56]

The End of the Road

The regime swiftly moved in to fill the vacuum left by the KDP, and, anxious to convey the idea that it was 'progressive', soon began development works on an unprecedented scale. Some 336 million Iraqi Dinars were spent on developing the region. Militarily, the Ba'thist regime aimed at eradicating the continuous threat of the KDP by establishing a security belt along the Iranian and Turkish borders, on the Israeli pattern. At first, this belt was 5 km wide but over time, it widened to 30 km in places. Initially, some 500 villages were razed to implement the scheme, a figure that might have risen to 1400 by 1978. In the name of progress, people were removed from their villages and deported to modern *mujama'at* ('collectives'). The regime also tried to settle the demographic issue, which had been the main sticking point in the negotiations with the KDP in 1970 and 1974. According to Kurdish sources, some one million people were moved from the disputed areas of Kirkuk, Khanaqin, Mandali, Shaykhan, Zakho and Sinjar to other areas of the country and were replaced by Arab workers.[57]

Despite these draconian measures used by the Ba'thist regime to suppress the Kurdish rebellion and 'Arabise' Iraqi Kurdistan, the ICP leadership invariably put the blame for the Kurdish nationalist movement's perishment on the 'rightwing' KDP leadership. Although in reality little had changed in its composition since the days of close ICP–KDP cooperation, ICP First Secretary 'Aziz Muhammad (himself a Kurd) argued that the 'right wing of the Kurdish movement' was 'hostile to the progressive political line of the national authority, resist social changes, especially the agrarian reform, and are openly anti-communist'.[58] At its Third National Congress in 1976, when the Kurdish rebellion had been crushed, the ICP outlined the reasons for its break-up with the KDP. The party maintained that the 'rightwing' KDP leadership had disregarded the 'social content' of its

[54] McDowall, *History of the Kurds*, pp. 330–338.

[55] The Algiers accord, later incorporated into a formal agreement in June, was undoubtedly an Iraqi concession in the short run, but proved to be strategically beneficial as it opened up the possibility of permanently settling one of the Ba'thist regime's endemic problems—the Kurdish question. Thus, in exchange for a cessation of Iranian support of the KDP and closure and increased supervision of the Iran–Iraq border that before had provided vital supply routes for the Kurdish rebels, Saddam had to yield to Iranian demands on the delineation of the territorial waters of the Shatt al-'Arab, thus recognising Iranian supremacy in the Persian/Arab Gulf. Eberhard Kienle, *Ba'th v. Ba'th: The Conflict between Syria and Iraq 1968–1989* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1990), p. 87; Oles M. Smolansky and Bettie M. Smolansky, *The USSR and Iraq: The Soviet Quest for Influence* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 162–163; Edith Penrose and E. F. Penrose, *Iraq: International Relations and National Development* (London: Westview Press, 1978), pp. 372–373.

[56] McDowall, *History of the Kurds*, p. 338.

[57] McDowall, *History of the Kurds*, pp. 339–340.

[58] Aziz Mohammed, 'The Socialist Community is Our Dependable Ally', *World Marxist Review*, 18(1) (January 1975), p. 17.

Kurdish national movement and insisted on 'the narrow national course' emanating from 'selfish class interests' and 'backward tribal behaviour'. This, it was argued, could be seen in the period from 1970 to 1975 when, as a result of the 1970 Agreement, the KDP exercised limited autonomy in certain areas of the northern region. That autonomy had provided 'the opportunity for the reactionary rightist elements to assume the leading posts' in the KDP, it had led them to 'opposing communism' and to adopt 'bourgeois and liberal points of view' in the socio-economic field, to drift away from the Soviets and move closer to 'the reactionary forces at home and in the region' and to 'the imperialist and Zionist forces'; it had also led them to reject agrarian reform and to ally with the *aghas*, but most important, in the minds of the communists, was the KDP's rejection of the national front.[59] Accordingly, the main achievement of that front was said to have been 'the liquidation of the reactionary rightist rebellion'.[60]

The same line was essentially kept until the end of Ba'th–ICP relations in 1979, despite renewed Ba'thist repression against the ICP once the Kurds had been subdued. Thus, 'Adel Haba, alternate member of the ICP Politburo, would argue in 1977 that the Kurdish rebellion, due to it having been taken over by 'reactionary feudal elements' was essentially 'an armed uprising against the autonomy of Iraqi Kurdistan'. Following previous class-based analysis, Haba maintained the rebellion occurred because the KDP leadership 'refused to have autonomy under a progressive regime'.[61] Astonishingly, he also claimed the Autonomy Law, which was implemented with ICP assistance, 'helped to put an end to the bloodshed and opened up fresh vistas for the working people of Iraqi Kurdistan'.[62] Karim Ahmad al-Daud, a Kurdish ICP Politburo member, argued in the communist cultural organ *al-Fikr al-Jadid*, that it was only 'natural' the party 'took a stand against an armed revolt propped up by imperialism and reaction',[63] which, incidentally, was precisely how the ICP had described the Ba'thist coup in 1963.

In the end, it was the ICP's ideological understanding of the Iraqi political situation in the 1970s that prompted it to join forces with the Ba'th Party against its erstwhile ally, the KDP. The socio-economic composition of the KDP and its role on the Iraqi political scene had changed little since Mullah Mustafa Barzani's ascent to the top position in 1964. Ideologically, the KDP under his leadership, rather like the Ba'th Party, had been guided by relentless pragmatism with the ultimate goal of extending its influence and position within the Iraqi polity. Mullah Mustafa's flirtations with the 'mortal enemies' of the Iraqi Republic, such as his pronounced willingness in 1973 to cede oil concessions to the Americans in exchange for military support, while obviously a thorn in the side to both the Ba'th Party and the ICP, was nothing new. Already in 1966, when the ICP had characterised him as a 'patriotic and national leader', he was receiving substantial support from both Iran and Israel.[64] But while the ICP had been in the political

[59] 'Report of the Central Committee to the 3rd National Congress of the Iraqi Communist Party', in *The 3rd National Congress of the Iraqi Communist Party*, 4–6 May 1976, Special Issue of *Iraqi Letter*, 4.5 (n.p.: Iraqi Communist Party: 1976), pp. 65–66.
[60] 'Report of *3rd National Congress*, p. 55.
[61] Adel Haba and Sarada Mitra, 'We Saw the Brotherhood of Nations', *World Marxist Review*, 20(6) (June 1977), p. 21.
[62] Haba and Mitra, 'We Saw the Brotherhood of Nations', p. 16.
[63] Karim Ahmad, 'al-Qadiyyah al-Qawmiyyah al-Kurdiyyah: Juz' min Qadiyyat Sha'bina al-'Iraqi fi l-Taharrur wa l-Taqaddum al-Ijtima'i wa l-Dimuqratiyyah', *al-Fikr al-Jadid*, 297 (24 June 1978).
[64] McDowall, *History of the Kurds*, p. 320.

wilderness at that point, it could now allow itself to sharpen the 'class struggle' against the KDP's and Mullah Mustafa's 'reactionary' aspects. The ideological accommodation of the Ba'th Party, and, in particular, the reification of the National Front, were thus the decisive factors in shaping ICP's shifting policy vis-à-vis the KDP and Mullah Mustafa Barzani. On the ground, this policy evolved significantly from almost unquestioning support of the KDP in the mid-1960s to outright condemnation and active participation in its suppression a decade later. On the ideological level, however, it had only needed a minor shift from contemplating the KDP leadership as 'feudal-tribal' leading a just 'national cause' to seeing it as a 'rightist reactionary' leadership promoting 'chauvinist', 'narrow-minded', and 'egotistical' class interests.

Conclusion

The period from the 1958 Revolution until the consolidation of power by the Ba'th Party in the mid-1970s was a crucial time in modern Iraqi history. But the eventual emergence of the Ba'th Party as the dominant political group was far from a foregone conclusion during this period. In fact the two main political parties, in terms of political and ideological support and organisational capacity were the ICP and the KDP. The crucial support that the Ba'th Party received from the ICP from 1973 onwards was instrumental in the ruling party's efforts to subdue and eventually eradicate the KDP as a significant political force on the Iraqi political scene.

As has been argued in this article, the key to understanding why the ICP turned against the KDP, who since the 1958 revolution had been their allies, lies in the rigid ideological analysis that the ICP leadership carried out. In their dichotomous ideological reading of a complex political reality, there was only room for 'progressives' and 'reactionaries'. Although these concepts were fairly flexible and allowed for changing situations on the ground, they certainly had cut-off points. Once these had been crossed, the new categorisation meant a change in policy towards the other party. Such a cut-off point occurred in the aftermath of the establishment of the National Front in 1973 and the KDP's refusal to accept the Ba'th Party's Autonomy Law in 1974. This prompted a dramatic reversal of ICP policy towards the KDP—from accommodation to outright hostility and assisting the Ba'th Party in subduing it. While seemingly incomprehensible, this shift was a logical consequence of the KDP having lost its status as a 'progressive' party in the minds of the communists. To them, it was now the Ba'thists, who were building 'national socialism' with Soviet support, that were the new 'progressives'.