The Kurdish Question in Perspective

By MICHAEL M. GUNTER

Although a large majority in the mountainous Middle East, where Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria meet, the Kurds have been gerrymandered into being mere minorities within the existing states that they inhabit. Many Kurds' desire for statehood, or at least cultural autonomy within the states that they now inhabit, has led to an almost continuous series of Kurdish revolts since the creation of the modern Middle East following World War I, and this constitutes the Kurdish problem or question.[1]

There are approximately 25–28 million Kurds, making them the largest nation in the world without its own independent state. Since the end of the Gulf War in 1991 and the creation of a de facto state of Kurdistan in northern Iraq, the Kurdish problem has become increasingly important in Middle Eastern and even international politics. The war to remove Saddam Hussein from power in 2003 furthered this process. Turkey's application for admission into the European Union (EU) also has served to make the Kurdish issue more significant. As the Arab-Israeli dispute slowly winds down, the Kurdish issue will replace it as the leading factor of instability in the geostrategically important Middle East. Furthermore, because the Kurds sit on a great deal of the Middle East's oil and, possibly more important, its water resources, the Kurdish issue will become even more important in the coming years.

LAND AND PEOPLE

Geography

Kurdistan, or the land of the Kurds, constitutes the geographical area in the Middle East where the states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria converge and in which most people are ethnic Kurds. There also are significant enclaves of Kurds living in the Iranian province of Khurasan, which is east of the Caspian Sea, and in central Anatolia. Many Kurds also live in Turkey's three largest cities, Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir. Kurds also live in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan across the border from the Iranian province of Khurasan.

Given various political, economic, and social vicissitudes, the geographic extent of Kurdistan has varied considerably over the centuries. Although semi-independent Kurdish emirates such as Ardalan existed into the middle of the nineteenth century, there has never been an independent Kurdistan in the modern sense of a state. Before World War I, Kurdistan was divided between the Ottoman Empire and the Persian Empire. Following World War I, Kurdistan was divided among five different states. Although only approximations can be cited, Turkey has the largest portion of Kurdistan (43 percent), followed by Iran (31 percent), Iraq (18 percent), Syria (6 percent), and the former Soviet Union (now mainly Armenia and Azerbaijan—2 percent).

Mountains are the most prominent geographic characteristic of landlocked Kurdistan. Indeed, a famous Kurdish proverb explains, "the Kurds have no friends but the mountains." Although their rugged mountainous terrain contributes heavily to the lack of Kurdish unity, the mountains also have defined Kurdish history and culture and have protected the Kurds from being fully conquered or assimilated by the Turks to the north, the Iranians to the east, and the Arabs to the south and the west. The Zagros range constitutes the most important portion of the mountains, running from northwest to southeast through much of the land, similar to a spinal column. Portions of the Taurus, Pontus, and Amanus mountains also rise within Kurdistan.[2]

Michael M. Gunter is a professor of political science at Tennessee Technological University. He has published more than seventy-five articles on topics such as Kurds, Armenians, Turkey, and the United Nations.

Climate

The mountains' climate throughout the year has been described as bracing. Although northern Kurdistan has the highest average elevation, central Kurdistan enjoys a lower elevation, and thus a warmer, even relatively balmy, climate. The mean annual temperatures in Kurdistan exhibit great variations according to the elevation. Although it remains pleasantly cool in the mountains, summers in the lower elevations can be oppressively hot and humid. Winters in most areas are bitterly cold and snowy.

The climatic contrasts have been sharpened by the loss of the forests that once covered the land but succumbed to overgrazing, logging for fuel or construction, and the effects of war. In contrast to most other parts of the Middle East, much of Kurdistan enjoys adequate and regular rainfall.

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Population

The Kurds are a largely Sunni Muslim, Indo-European-speaking people. Thus, they are quite distinct ethnically from the Turks and Arabs but are related to the Iranians, with whom they share the *Newroz* (new year) holiday in the beginning of spring. No precise figures for the Kurdish population exist because most Kurds tend to exaggerate their numbers, although the states in which they live undercount them for political reasons.[3] In addition, a significant number of Kurds have partially or fully assimilated into the larger Arab, Turkish, or Iranian populations surrounding them. Furthermore, debate continues regarding whether or not groups such as the Lurs, Bakhtiyaris, and others are Kurds. Thus, there is not even complete agreement on who is a Kurd.

Nevertheless, a reasonable estimate is that there may be as many as 12 to 15 million Kurds in Turkey (18 to 23 percent of the population), 6.5 million in Iran (11 percent), 3.5 to 4 million in Iraq (17 to 20 percent), and 1 million in Syria (9 percent). At least two hundred thousand Kurds also live in parts of the former Soviet Union (some claim that as many as one million largely assimilated Kurds live there), and a Kurdish diaspora of more than one million recently arose in western Europe. More than half of the diaspora is concentrated in Germany. Some twenty thousand Kurds live in the United States. (It must be noted, however, that these figures simply are estimates, given the lack of accurate demographic statistics.) Finally, it should be noted that numerous minorities, including Christian groups such as the Armenians and Assyrians, Turkomans and Turks, Arabs, and Iranians, also live in Kurdistan.

The Kurds notoriously are divided geographically, politically, linguistically, tribally, and ideologically. As noted previously, mountains and valleys divide the Kurds as much as they ethnically stamp them. Whatever their exact origin, it is clear that racially, Kurds today constitute a mixture of various groups as a result of earlier invasions and migrations.

The Kurdish language, which is related to Iranian, also has two main variants, Kurmanji (or Bahdinani), spoken mainly in northwest Kurdistan (Turkey and the Bahdinan or Barzani area of northwest Iraqi Kurdistan), and Sorani, spoken mainly in southeast Kurdistan. In addition, Dimili (Zaza) also is spoken in parts of Turkish Kurdistan, and Gurani is spoken in sections of Iraqi and Iranian Kurdistan. Finally, there are numerous subdialects of each of the four main dialects. The Kurdish language variants are only partially understandable for those of other linguistic backgrounds, a situation that creates more divisions within Kurdish society.[4]

Tribalism also has prevented Kurdish unity. Indeed, it probably is true that there is more loyalty to the tribe than to the Kurdish state. In all of the Kurdish revolts of the twentieth century, for example, significant numbers of Kurds have supported the government because of tribal antipathies for those rebelling. In Iraq, pro-government Kurds have been referred to derisively as *josh* (little donkeys), and in recent years the Turkish government created a pro-government militia of Kurds called village guards. Similarly, the *aghas* (feudal landlords or tribal chieftains) and *sheikhs* (religious leaders) continue to command allegiances inconsistent with the full development of a modern sense of nationalism.

Economy

Although many Kurds historically were nomadic, few practice such a lifestyle today. Many Kurds now farm and raise livestock. Corn, barley, rice, cotton, and sugar beets produce valuable crops. In addition, the best tobacco in Turkey and Iraq is grown in Kurdistan. Animal husbandry (goats, sheep, cows, and buffaloes) is a mainstay. Because of recent wars, many Kurds now live in urban areas.

Blessed with large reserves of water in the Turkish and Iraqi parts and oil in the Iraqi section, Kurdistan has great economic and geostrategic importance. Despite being economically underdeveloped compared with the non-Kurdish areas of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, Kurdistan witnessed a tremendous amount of economic, political, and social modernization during the twentieth century. Indeed, Iraqi Kurdistan's economy surpassed that of the rest of Iraq in the late 1990s because of the oil-for-food program funds it received from the sale of Iraqi oil through the United Nations. Similar hopes have yet to materialize for Turkish Kurdistan, however, despite the *Guneydogu Anadolu Projesi* (GAP), or Southeast Anatolia Project, of harnessing the Euphrates and Tigris rivers through the construction of gigantic dams.[5] The Turkish, Iranian, and Syrian portions of Kurdistan still lag economically.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The origin of the Kurds is uncertain, although some scholars believe them to be the descendants of various Indo-European tribes that settled in the area approximately four thousand years ago. The Kurds themselves claim to be descendants of the Medes, who helped overthrow the Assyrian Empire in 612 BCE, and they also recite interesting myths about their origins involving King Solomon, *jinn*, and other magical agents. Many believe that the Kardouchoi, mentioned by Xenophon in his *Anabasis* as having given his ten thousand soldiers quite a mauling as they retreated from Persia in 401 BCE, were the Kurds' ancestors.

In the seventh century CE, the conquering Arabs applied the name Kurds to the mountainous people they Islamicized in the region, and history also shows that the famous Saladin (Salah al-Din), who fought so chivalrously and successfully against the Christian Crusaders and Richard the Lionhearted, was a Kurd.

Early in the sixteenth century, most Kurds loosely fell under Ottoman Turkish rule, and the remainder were placed under the Persians. In 1596, Sharaf Khan Bitlisi completed the *Sharafnama*, an erudite history of the ruling families of the Kurdish emirates. During the following century, Ahmad-i Khani wrote *Mem u Zin*, the Kurdish national epic, and he was seen by some as an early advocate of Kurdish nationalism. Badr Khan Beg, the ruler of the last semi-independent Kurdish emirate of Botan, surrendered to the Ottomans in 1847. Some scholars argue that Sheikh Ubeydullah's unsuccessful revolt in 1880 represented the first indication of modern Kurdish nationalism, although others consider it little more than a tribal-religious disturbance.

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Turkey

In 1891, Ottoman sultan Abdul Hamid II created the *Hamidiye*, a modern pro-government Kurdish cavalry that proved to be an important stage in the emergence of modern Kurdish nationalism. Nevertheless, the Kurds supported the Ottomans in World War I and Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk) during the Turkish War of Independence following World War I.

During World War I, one of President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points (number 12) declared that the non-Turkish minorities of the Ottoman Empire should be granted the right of "autonomous development." The stillborn Treaty of Sevres, signed in August 1920, provided for "local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas" (Article 62), and in Article 64 even looked forward to the possibility that "the Kurdish peoples" might be granted "independence from Turkey." Turkey's quick revival under Ataturk—ironically enough, with considerable Kurdish help, because the Turks promoted the theme of Islamic unity—altered the entire situation. The subsequent and definitive Treaty of Lausanne in July 1923 recognized the modern Republic of Turkey without any special provisions for Turkish Kurds.

Ataturk's creation of a secular and purely Turkish state led to the first of three great Kur-

dish revolts and the rise of Sheikh Said, the hereditary chief of the powerful Naqshbandi Sufi Islamic order, in 1925. Sheikh Said's rebellion was both nationalistic and religious because it also favored the reinstatement of the Caliphate. After some initial successes, Sheikh Said was crushed and hanged.[6] In 1927, *Khoybourn* (Independence), a transnational Kurdish party founded that year in Lebanon, helped launch another major uprising under General Ihsan Nuri Pasha in the Ararat area that also was completely crushed, this time with Iranian cooperation. Finally, the Dersim (now called Tunceli) rebellion, which lasted from 1936 until the end of 1938 and was led by Sheikh Sayyid Riza until his death in 1937, also ended in a total Kurdish defeat.

Although many Kurdish tribes either supported the Turkish government or were at least neutral in the rebellions, Turkish authorities decided to eliminate anything that might suggest a separate Kurdish nation, such as language and personal Kurdish names. Numerous social and constitutional devices were employed to achieve this goal. In some cases, what can only be termed pseudotheoretical justifications were offered to defend the actions. Thus, the so-called Sun Theory taught that all languages derived from one original primeval Turkic language in central Asia. Isolated in the mountain fastnesses of eastern Anatolia, the Kurds simply had forgotten their mother tongue. The much abused and criticized appellation "Mountain Turks," used when referring to the Turkish Kurds, served as a code term for these actions. Everything that recalled a separate Kurdish identity was to be abolished, including language, clothing, names, and so on.[7]

The present constitution, adopted in 1982, contains a number of specific provisions that even seek to limit speaking and writing in Kurdish. Its preamble, for example, declares "[t]he determination that no protection shall be afforded to thoughts or opinions contrary to Turkish national interests, the principle of the existence of Turkey as an indivisible entity." Two articles ban the spoken and written use of the Kurdish language without specifically referring to it.

Although restrictions on the use of the Kurdish language were eased following the Gulf War in 1991, Article 8 of a new anti-terrorism law adopted in April 1991 made it possible to consider academics, intellectuals, and journalists who spoke peacefully for Kurdish rights as engaging in terrorist acts. Similarly, under Article 312 of the Turkish Penal Code, one could be charged with "provoking hatred or animosity between groups of different race, religion, region, or social class" simply through verbal or written support for Kurdish rights. Yasar Kemal, one of Turkey's most famous novelists and an ethnic Kurd, was indicted in 1995 for violating the provisions of what some have called "thought crime."

Beginning in the 1970s, an increasingly significant portion of Turkey's population of ethnic Kurds have actively demanded cultural, linguistic, and political rights as Kurds. The government has suppressed these demands ruthlessly for fear that they would lead to the breakup of the state. This official refusal to brook any moderate Kurdish opposition helped encourage extremism and the creation of the *Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan* (PKK), or Kurdistan Workers Party, headed by Abdullah (Apo) Ocalan on November 27, 1978. In August 1984, the PKK officially launched its insurgency, which, by the beginning of 2000, resulted in more than thirty-seven thousand deaths, the partial or complete destruction of as many as three thousand villages, and the internal displacement of some three million people.

For a short period in the early 1990s, Ocalan seemed close to achieving a certain degree of military success. In the end, however, he overextended himself, and the Turkish military spared no expense in containing him. Slowly but steadily, the Turks marginalized the PKK's military threat. Ocalan's ill-advised decision in August 1995 to attack Massoud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in northern Iraq because of its support for Turkey further sapped his strength. The final blow came in October 1998, when Turkey threatened to go to war with Syria unless Damascus expelled Ocalan from his longtime sanctuary in that country.

Ocalan fled to Italy, where U.S. pressure on behalf of its NATO ally, Turkey, forced Italy and others to reject Ocalan as a terrorist undeserving of political asylum or negotiation. Indeed, for years the United States had given Turkey intelligence training and weapons to battle what it considered the "bad" Kurds of Turkey while, ironically enough, supporting the "good" Kurds of Iraq against Saddam Hussein. Ocalan finally was captured in Kenya on February 16, 1999, flown back to Turkey for a sensational trial, and sentenced to death for treason.

Rather than making a hardline appeal for renewed struggle during his trial, Ocalan issued a remarkable statement that called for the implementation of true democracy to solve the Kurdish problem within the existing borders of a unitary Turkey. He also ordered his guerrillas to evacuate Turkey to demonstrate his sincerity. Thus, far from ending Turkey's Kurdish problem, Ocalan's capture began a process of implicit bargaining between the state and many citizens of Kurdish ethnic heritage as represented by the PKK and the Peoples Democracy Party (HADEP). HADEP was founded in 1994 as a legal Kurdish party and elected numerous mayors in the Kurdish areas during the local elections held shortly after Ocalan's capture.

At the same time, Harold Hongju Koh, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights, and labor, visited Turkey and met with a wide variety of officials and possibly some citizens as well. Although he recognized Turkey's right to defend itself against the PKK, he also argued that one could oppose terrorism and still support human rights. He also maintained that, far from hurting Turkey's territorial integrity, now that the PKK's military threat had been defeated an inclusive policy that acknowledged human rights would strengthen the Turkish state by giving its Kurdish ethnic community a genuine stake in Turkey's future.

In December 1999, the European Union finally accepted Turkey as a candidate member. If granted, EU membership would fulfill Ataturk's ultimate hope for a strong, united, and democratic Turkey joined with the West. Until Turkey successfully implemented the so-called Copenhagen Criteria of minority rights for its Kurdish ethnic population and suspended Ocalan's death sentence to conform with EU standards that ban capital punishment, however, it was clear that Turkey's long-treasured candidacy would only be a pipe dream.

Although the election of Ahmet Necdet Sezer, a reform-minded judge, as Turkey's new president in May 2000 demonstrated a willingness to seek new, bold approaches, there unfortunately are still powerful forces in Turkey that do not want further democratization, because they fear it would threaten their privileged positions and Turkey's territorial integrity. Thus, reform legislation in August 2002 that allowed significant Kurdish cultural rights in theory and the commutation of Ocalan's death sentence to life imprisonment in October 2002 have not solved the continuing Kurdish problem in Turkey. The effects of the tremendous electoral victory of the moderate Islamist AK Party (AKP) on November 3, 2002, also remain to be seen.

As of March 2003, however, little progress on the Kurdish issue had occurred. Indeed, there were even signs that the PKK (which had changed its name to the Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress [KADEK] by February 2002) might resume the military struggle.

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Iraq

The Kurds in Iraq have been in an almost constant state of revolt since Great Britain artificially created Iraq—according to the Sykes-Picot Agreement of World War I—out of the former Ottoman *vilayets* (provinces) of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra. There are three major reasons for this rebellious situation.[8]

First, Kurds in Iraq long constituted a greater proportion of the population than they did in any other state they inhabited. Consequently, despite their smaller absolute numbers, they represented a larger critical mass in Iraq than elsewhere, a situation that enabled them to play a more important role there than in Turkey and Iran. Second, as an artificial, new state, Iraq had less legitimacy as a political entity than Turkey and Iran, two states that had existed in one form or another for many centuries, despite their large Kurdish minorities. Thus, discontent and rebellion came easier for the Iraqi Kurds. Third, Iraq was divided further by a Sunni-Shiite Muslim division absent in Turkey or Iran. This predicament further called into question Iraq's future.

For its part, the Iraqi government always has feared the possibility of Kurdish separatism. Kurdish secession would not only deplete the Iraqi population but also would set a precedent that the Shiites, some 55 percent of the population, might follow, thus threatening the future of the Iraqi state. In addition, because approximately two-thirds of the oil production and reserves and much of the fertile land were located in the

Kurdish area for many years, the government felt that Kurdish secession would strike at the economic heart of the state. Thus were sown the seeds of a seemingly irreconcilable struggle between Iraq and its Kurdish minority.

To further their goals, the British, who held Iraq as a mandate from the League of Nations, invited a local Kurdish leader, Sheikh Mahmud Barzinji of Sulaymaniya, to act as their governor in the Kurdish *vilayet* of Mosul. Despite his inability to overcome the division among the Kurds, Sheikh Mahmud almost immediately proclaimed himself "King of Kurdistan," revolted against British rule, and began secret dealings with the Turks. In a precursor to subsequent defeats at the hands of the Iraqi government in Baghdad, the British Royal Air Force (RAF) successfully bombed the sheikh's forces, putting down several of his uprisings during the 1920s.

Although the Treaty of Sevres (1920) held out the possibility of Kurdish independence as mentioned previously, the definitive Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 did not mention the Kurds. In addition, the British already had decided to attach the largely Kurdish *vilayet* of Mosul to Iraq because of its vast oil resources. The British felt that this was the only way that Iraq could be made viable.

With the final defeat of Sheikh Mahmud in 1931, Mulla Mustafa Barzani began to emerge as the leader almost synonymous with the Kurdish movement in Iraq. Although the Barzanis' power originally was founded on their religious authority as Naqshbandi sheikhs, they also became noted for their fighting abilities and for wearing a distinctive turban with red stripes. For more than fifty years, Barzani fought the Iraqi government in one way or another. Despite his inherent conservatism and tribal mentality, he was the guiding spirit of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), founded on August 16, 1946. He spent a decade in exile in the Soviet Union (1947–58), and at the height of his power in the early 1970s he negotiated the March Manifesto of 1970, which theoretically provided for Kurdish autonomy under his rule. Kurdish infighting against leaders such as Ibrahim Ahmad and his son-in-law Jalal Talabani and continuing government opposition, however, helped lead to Barzani's ultimate defeat in 1975. Barzani's defeat also occurred because the United States and Iran withdrew their support in return for Iraqi concessions, an action that U.S. national security advisor Henry Kissinger cynically explained as a necessary covert action not to be confused with missionary work.[9]

Following Barzani's collapse in March 1975, his son Massoud Barzani eventually emerged as the new leader of the KDP, and Talabani established his Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) on June 1, 1975. Divided by philosophy, geography, dialect, and ambition, Barzani's KDP and Talabani's PUK have since alternated between cooperation and bloody conflict. They also have suffered grievously from horrific repression such as Saddam Hussein's genocidal *Anfal* campaigns of 1987–88 and the chemical attack against the city of Halabja on March 16, 1988.

After the Gulf War and the failure of the ensuing Kurdish uprising in March 1991, the mass flight of Kurdish refugees to the mountains forced the United States to create a safe haven and no-fly zone in northern Iraq, where a de facto Kurdish state began to develop. In addition, the unprecedented UN Security Council Resolution 688 of April 5, 1991, condemned "the repression of the Iraqi civilian population . . . in Kurdish populated areas" and demanded "that Iraq . . . immediately end this repression." As symbolic as it may have been, never before had the Kurds received such official international mention and protection.

Despite the de facto Kurdish state that emerged in northern Iraq following Saddam Hussein's defeat in the Gulf War, the KDP and PUK actually fought a civil war against each other from 1994–98. As a result of this internal Kurdish fighting, there were two separate rump governments in Iraqi Kurdistan after 1994, the KDP's in Irbil and the PUK's in Sulaymaniya. The resulting instability and power vacuum inevitably drew in neighboring Turkey and Iran, in addition to others such as the United States, Syria, and, of course, Iraq, because none of the powers wanted to see a Kurdish state established in northern Iraq.

The United States finally brokered a ceasefire by bringing Barzani and Talabani together in Washington, DC, in September 1998. The Kurds also began to receive 13 percent of the receipts from the oil that Iraq was allowed to sell after 1995. Peace, relative prosperity, and democracy began to grow in the de facto state of Kurdistan in northern Iraq. In October 2002, the reunified parliament of the de facto Kurdish state met for the first time since 1994 and declared that Iraqi Kurdistan would be a federal state in a post-Saddam Iraq.

During fall 2002, President George W. Bush demanded that Saddam Hussein disarm, or the United States would lead a coalition war to disarm Iraq. Although most Iraqi Kurds seemed to support the idea of removing Saddam Hussein, they did not approve of a U.S. plan to allow Turkish troops to enter Iraqi Kurdistan in the event of a war, because such an occurrence might threaten the existence of the de facto Kurdish state. Turkey, however, feared that the Iraqi Kurds offered an increasingly dangerous model for the Kurds in Turkey that might reignite their military struggle. On March 19, 2003, the United States finally launched a war against Iraq that quickly overthrew Saddam Hussein's regime. Thus, the future of the Iraqi Kurds remained very uncertain as of this writing.

Iran

Although twice as many Kurds live in Iran as live in Iraq, the Kurdish national movement in Iran has enjoyed much less success, in part because of the relatively greater long-term strength of the Iranian governments. This, however, did not prevent Ismail Agha Simko from leading major Kurdish revolts in the 1920s that only ended when the Iranian government treacherously assassinated him under false pretenses of negotiation in 1930.[10]

This Iranian technique of solving its Kurdish problem was used again on July 13, 1989, when Iranian agents assassinated the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, in Vienna, Austria, supposedly while negotiating with him. On September 17, 1992, Iranian agents also assassinated Ghassemlou's successor, Sadegh Sharafkandi, while he was dining at a restaurant in Berlin, Germany. Earlier, the KDPI's revolt against the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's new government had been completely smashed by the superior Iranian forces by 1981.

Despite these failures, Iranian Kurds are famous among their Kurdish brethren for having established the only Kurdish state in the twentieth century, the short-lived Mahabad Republic of Kurdistan (January–December 1946). When this rump Kurdish state was destroyed, however, its president, Qazi Muhammad, was hanged on March 31, 1947, a blow from which the Iranian Kurds still have not completely recovered.[11]

Syria

Approximately one million Kurds live in Syria, a much smaller number than in Turkey, Iraq, and Iran.[12] Although the largest minority in Syria, Kurds live in three noncontiguous areas and have been organized and developed much less successfully than in the other three states. Many Kurds have even been denied Syrian citizenship. The repressive Baathist Party under Hafez Assad (and his son Bashar Assad since 2000) also has kept a close watch on the Kurds. A government decree in September 1992, for example, prohibited the registration of children with Kurdish first names. Kurdish cultural centers, bookshops, and similar activities also have been banned. Indeed, some have suspected that in return for giving the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) sanctuary in Syria for many years, the PKK kept the lid on Syrian Kurdish unrest. For all of these reasons, therefore, the Kurds in Syria are not as pressing a problem as they are in the other three states.

What is certain is the increasing importance of the Kurds for the future of both the Middle East and international politics.

THE FUTURE

Despite the seemingly ceaseless conflicts of the past century, most Kurds in Turkey probably would still be satisfied with meaningful cultural rights and real democracy. In Iran and Syria, the lesser-developed Kurdish movements also would be more than pleased with such a result. In Iraq, on the other hand—because of the incredible incompetence of Saddam Hussein in calling forth the Gulf War of 1991 and, thus, the resulting institution of a de facto state of Kurdistan in northern Iraq—Iraqi Kurds probably will be satisfied with nothing less than a federal solution in any post-Saddam Iraq. Now that Saddam Hussein has been removed from power, the precise arrangements remain to be seen.

As described previously, therefore, Kurdish aspirations seem better placed, but still highly problematic, in Turkey and Iraq. To the extent that the fledgling democracy in Iran continues to develop, however, one also might hold out

hope for greater Kurdish cultural rights in that state as well. Even Syria has demonstrated a modicum of hope for modest Kurdish rights now that longtime strongman Hafez Assad has died and his possibly more progressive son Bashar Assad has succeeded him. Only time will tell, however, whether this occurs.

Any Kurdish independence and even more pan-Kurdish unity remains unlikely, however, because all of the neighboring states bitterly oppose the Kurdish state as a threat to their own territorial integrity. The United States, although protecting the de facto state of Kurdistan in northern Iraq with a no-fly zone until Saddam Hussein's removal from power in 2003, opposed independence for the Iraqi Kurds because of Turkey's attitude and the U.S. fear that Kurdish independence would destabilize the geostrategically important Middle East. Officially, both the United States and the Iraqi Kurds have accepted that the Kurds will remain part of a post-Saddam, democratic, and federal Iraq that will allow the Kurds to exercise a great deal of self-government. Given the current uncertain situation regarding the future of a post-Saddam Iraq, however, the Kurdish situation in Iraq remains highly uncertain. What is certain, however, is the increasing importance of the Kurds for the future of both the Middle East and international politics.

NOTES

1. Possibly the two best recent studies in English of the Kurds are Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (London: Zed, 1992); and David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996). See also Mehrdad Izady, *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook* (Washington, DC: Crane Russak, 1992); Thomas Bois and Vladimir Minorsky, "Kurds, Kurdistan," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 5 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 438–86; Gerard Chaliand, ed., *People without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1993); Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl, eds., *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview* (London: Routledge, 1992); and Nader Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1992). All of these sources may be consulted in addition to the works listed in later notes. For a wealth of further studies, see Lokman I. Meho, comp., *The Kurds and Kurdistan: A Selective and Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1997); and Lokman I. Meho and Kelly L. Maglaughlin, comps., *Kurdish Culture and Society: An Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001).

2. For further data, see Bois and Minorsky, "Kurds, Kurdistan," 439–44; and Izady, *Kurds: Concise Handbook*, 1–21.

3. For further discussions of the size of the Kurdish population, see McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 3–5; Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, 14–15; and Izady, *Kurds: Concise Handbook*, 111–20. For a detailed analysis that lists smaller figures, see Servet Mutlu, "Ethnic Kurds in Turkey: A Demographic Study," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28 (November 1996): 517–41.

4. On the Kurdish language, see Amir Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan, 1918–1985* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992); and Philip G. Kreyenbroek, "On the Kurdish Language," in *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, ed. Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl (London: Routledge, 1992), 68–83.

5. On the GAP project, see Carl E. Nestor, "Dimensions of Turkey's Kurdish Question and the Potential Impact of the Southeast Anatolian Project (GAP): Part I," *International Journal of Kurdish Studies* 8, nos. 1–2 (1995): 33–78; and Carl E. Nestor, "The Southeast Anatolian Project (GAP) and Turkey's Kurdish Question: Part II," *International Journal of Kurdish Studies* 9, nos. 1–2 (1996): 35–78.

6. For a solid study of the Sheikh Said revolt, see Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion 1880–1925* (Austin: University of Texas, 1989).

7. For detailed analyses of the Kurdish problem in Turkey, see Henri J. Barkey and Graham E. Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998); Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurds and the Future of Turkey* (New York: St. Martin's, 1997); Kemal Kirisci and Gareth M. Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-state Ethnic Conflict* (London: Frank Cass, 1997); and Paul White, *Primitive Rebels or Revolutionary Modernizers? The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey* (London: Zed, 2000).

8. For a detailed analysis of the Kurdish problem in Iraq, see Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurdish Predicament in Iraq: A Political Analysis* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999); and Gareth Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan: Political Development and Emergent Democracy* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003). For earlier events, see Edmund Ghareeb, *The Kurdish Question in Iraq* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1981). In addition, see C. J. Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs: Politics, Travel and Research in North-Eastern Iraq, 1919–1925* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957); Edgar O'Ballance, *The Kurdish Revolt, 1961–1970* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1973); Sa'ad Jawad, *Iraq and the Kurdish Question, 1958–1970* (London: Ithaca, 1981); Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurds of Iraq: Tragedy and Hope* (New York: St. Martin's, 1992); and Ismet Sheriff Vanly, "Kurdistan in Iraq," in *People without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan*, ed. Gerard Chaliand (New York: Olive Branch, 1993), 139–93.

9. For Henry Kissinger's exact words, see "The CIA Report the President Doesn't Want You to Read," *The Village Voice*, February 16, 1976, 70–92. The article contains the report of the U.S. House of Representatives' Pike Committee, which investigated the CIA in the mid 1970s. The part dealing with the Kurds is entitled "Case 2: Arms Support" and appears on pp. 85 and 87–88. Many years later, Kissinger explained his position more thoroughly in

Years of Renewal (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 576–96.

10. For further background on the Kurds in Iran, see Farideh Koohi-Kamali, *The Political Development of the Kurds in Iran: Pastoral Nationalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); and A. R. Ghassemlou, "Kurdistan in Iran," in *A People without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan*, ed. Gerard Chaliand (New York: Olive Branch, 1993), 95–121.

11. On the Mahabad Republic of Kurdistan, see William Eagleton, Jr., *The Kurdish Republic of 1946* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963); Archie Roosevelt, Jr., "The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad," *Middle East Journal* 1 (July 1947): 247–69; and "The Republic of Kurdistan: Fifty Years Later," special issue, *International Journal of Kurdish Studies* 11, nos. 1–2 (1997).

12. For further background on the Kurds in Syria, see Ismet Cheriff Vanly, "The Oppression of the Kurdish People in Syria," in *Kurdish Exodus: From Internal Displacement to Diaspora*, ed. Mohammed M. A. Ahmed and Michael M. Gunter (Sharon, MA.: Ahmed Foundation for Kurdish Studies, 2002), 49–61.