

## Ethnic Conflict and the Kurds

By GEORGE S. HARRIS

**ABSTRACT:** The Kurds seem further from autonomy or independence today than in the past. In part, the cause lies in their disunity in language, religious behavior, and especially tribal structure. The division of their core area among Turkey, Iran, and Iraq after the First World War assured Kurdish nationalism major opponents. In Turkey, the government has attempted to deny the very existence of Kurds as a separate people. While Kurdish leaders can exploit the multi-party system to establish local power bases, they must eschew overt ethnic agitation. In Iraq, the military move of the Barzanis was ultimately squashed by a determined, well-equipped central government. Only minor dissidence seems possible to continue here. In Iran, once the USSR's wartime occupation of the northern part of the country ended in 1946, the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad which the Soviets had stimulated and facilitated collapsed. The shah has since maintained tight political control, while permitting the Kurds some cultural expression. Although there is, thus, little prospect of a renewed Kurdish military bid for autonomy or independence in these three states, economic grievances are likely to continue to foster a sense of ethnic identity among the Kurds.

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**I**NDPENDENCE or recognition as a national entity have both eluded the Kurds. Some of the frequent Kurdish revolts in the twentieth century have sought autonomy; others avowedly aimed at complete independence in a sovereign state. But the fate of all of these insurrections has been the same. No Kurdish movement has succeeded over the long run even in extracting major concessions. Today Kurdish autonomy, let alone independence, seems further from realization than ever.

Yet the Kurdish question seems unlikely to disappear entirely. These people form a more or less indigestible lump clustered in a clearly definable contiguous area—an arc north of Mesopotamia, stretching from near the Mediterranean to the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers to the edge of the Iranian plateau. Kurds are as numerous as other peoples who have formed nation-states. Using the criterion of linguistic background, the best test of Kurdishness, it is reasonable to estimate that they number at least 10 million.<sup>1</sup> Thus, while they have conspicuously failed to achieve independence by military means, they are nonetheless too numerous to be easily swallowed up.

The inability of the Kurds to establish their own state reflects the nature of their opponents and the tangled international situation that they have faced in the twentieth

century. It also testifies to important disabilities that the Kurds have suffered from within. Indeed, it may well be that for all their reputation as doughty mountain warriors they are not as promising subjects for a national movement as is often imagined. The elements of disunity that affect Kurdish political organization must, therefore, be carefully inspected.

#### OBSTACLES TO NATIONAL UNITY

Although the Kurds are easily distinguishable from the rest of the world, they are by no means united. Kurds are set apart from their neighbors chiefly by language. Kurdish belongs to the Indo-European family and is a close relative of Iranian. Yet Kurdish is not at all a unified tongue. It is divided into at least three major dialects. Kurdi, subdivided into Gurani and Sulaymani, is spoken by many Iraqi Kurds and is the most common written language. But Kirmanji, itself broken into Mil and Zil subdialects, is used by nearly two-thirds of the Kurdish speakers. Zaza, the third major subdivision, is confined to a group of Kurds in central Turkey; it is not readily intelligible to natives of either of the other two dialects. Thus, though language is the surest touchstone of Kurdishness, dialectical differences militate against a common sense of ethnic identity.

Religious behavior also divides the Kurds. To be sure, the overwhelming majority are Sunnis of the Shafii rite, a version of Islam not widely practiced by others in this region. However, on the level of tribal religious practices and adherence to mystical orders, major divisive tendencies come into play. Kurds seem particularly drawn to various dervish brotherhoods (es-

1. This figure represents a projection of linguistic evidence from various censuses in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq. It includes some 600,000 Kurds estimated to live in Syria and the Soviet Union. Some, particularly in the urban centers outside the core area, no longer speak Kurdish; many of these, especially in Turkey, may for all practical purposes be considered assimilated.

pecially the Nakshbandis and the Kadiris) and to unorthodox Islamic sects (such as the Nurcular in Turkey and the Ali Ilahis in Iran and Iraq). Even more significant, many tribal leaders—for example, the Barzanis in Iraq and the Kufrevis in Turkey—also combine hereditary religious leadership with their temporal authority. This combination serves to intensify tribal distinctions among Kurds.

Tribal structure is no doubt an important impediment to a national movement. In such societies, the unit of loyalty rarely ranges beyond the tribe; the individual is born into a series of family relationships from which he cannot disentangle himself as long as he remains within the system. And this traditional organization formed from aggregations of clans suffers from built-in rivalries and conflicts with neighbors. Disputes over grazing rights and marriage partners typically set adjoining tribes against each other. These feuds are so deep and hallowed with time that it takes extraordinary circumstances to band tribes of a region together even against outsiders. Hence, the Barzanis in northern Iraq were opposed to the end by their traditional tribal rivals; the Baghdad government was able to field loyal Kurdish units several thousand strong. Also, for dynastic and family reasons, one of Mulla Mustafa Barzani's own sons actively collaborated with the Iraqi central authorities against his father.

Tribal organization, however, is gradually breaking down, as the seminomadic, transhumant, and pastoral life become less prevalent among the Kurds. In towns and cities of the Kurdish region as well as the major urban centers in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq, there are growing numbers of detribalized Kurds. The latter are generally better educated

than their rural brothers and are far more likely to identify with an overarching ethnic cause. A number among them have embraced reformist or radical social doctrines, which at least in theory reject the traditional tribal system as archaic and backward.

Yet it has been within the tribal structure that all major twentieth-century Kurdish leaders have operated. The most successful—Sheikh Said in Turkey, Mulla Mustafa Barzani in Iraq, and Qazi Mohammad in Iran—have managed to go beyond their immediate tribal frame to attract confederations of tribes. The bandwagon effect of charismatic personality and the fame of success against a commonly despised central government have combined to bring allies to the cause. But at best, these have been a loose congeries of disparate elements ready to defect in the face of outside strength and always calculating their own factional advantage. These movements have broken down into their basic tribal units with great rapidity once the paramount leader surrendered or was forced off the scene.

#### OUTSIDE OPPOSITION

A serious complication militating against a national movement embracing a majority of the Kurds has been the division of their core area among Turkey, Iraq, and Iran. The arbitrary line drawn after the First World War frustrated realization of the Kurdish autonomy provided in the still-born Treaty of Sevres of 1920 and assured the Kurds not one, but three major adversaries in any move for autonomy or independence. In Turkey, where today somewhat over 4 million Kurds reside, they are outnumbered about ten to one by the Turks.

The some 2.5 million Kurds in Iran and the 2 million in Iraq each form at most about 20 percent of the population of these states. In this situation, the energies of the Kurds have been focused outward to deal with these national capitals rather than inward in efforts to come together across national frontiers.

### *In Turkey*

All efforts at Kurdish autonomy or independence were consistently and firmly suppressed by the Turkish Kemalists. On the one hand, in 1919 Mustafa Kemal Atatürk ordered his followers "to proceed in such a manner as to destroy the possibility of a separatist movement by the Kurds."<sup>2</sup> At the same time, in order to assure maximum support in the Turkish struggle for independence, he wooed the Kufrevis and other powerful Kurdish leaders; in the Grand National Assembly he made a special point of defending the brotherhood of Turks, Kurds, and other "Islamic elements."<sup>3</sup> İsmet İnönü at the Lausanne Peace Conference frequently spoke of Turkey as the "homeland of Kurds and Turks."<sup>4</sup> What Ankara principally intended by these references, however, was to buttress claims for the inclusion in Turkey of territory inhabited by Kurds.

The wartime phase over and a more coherent political machine organized, the Kemalist regime set about entrenching itself in power

in ways that seemed to threaten the interests of important Kurdish leaders. Hence, it was not surprising that the Nakshibandi tribal chief, Sheikh Said, revolted in 1925 in the name of the caliph and against the reformist regime in Ankara which was dedicated to uprooting the traditional power system in the country. Said's insurrection, however, did not call for the creation of a Kurdish national state, nor did the majority of the Kurds in Turkey join in. Some actively cooperated with the Turkish army against Sheikh Said, and some who welcomed the revolt at first were soon disaffected by the brigandage of the rebels. Although it was the most widespread revolt Atatürk would face, it was fairly speedily put down by the well-disciplined, experienced troops at Ankara's disposal.

From these events, Ankara drew the conclusion that the Kurdish tribal leadership was responsible for the insurrection. Atatürk thus executed the handful of paramount chiefs and dispersed the lesser lights to enforced residence outside of the Kurdish areas. At the same time, Ankara stepped up the pace of its efforts to assimilate the dissidents. The Kurds were to be encouraged by all practical means to identify as Turks. In the effort to celebrate the pre-Islamic cultural heritage of the Turks as the basis of a new nationalism, the Ankara authorities promoted the view that Kurds were Turanians who had somehow forgotten their linguistic origins. It became the vogue in Turkey to deny the existence of the Kurds as a separate people.<sup>5</sup>

The revolt of Kurdish tribal ele-

2. Atatürk, *A Speech Delivered by Ghazi Mustapha Kemal* (Leipzig: K. F. Koehler, 1929), p. 109.

3. Ali Harzya, "Kurt Sorunu," *Emek*, no. 6 (November 1970), p. 46; Turkey, *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*, Devre 1, İçtima senesi: 1, vol. 1, 3rd ed. (Ankara: T.B.M.M. Matbaası, 1959), p. 165, session of 1 May 1920.

4. İsmet Çeriff Vanly, *Le Kurdistan Irakien Entite Nationale* (Neuchatel: Editions de la Baconniere, 1970), p. 54.

5. See İsmail Beşikçi, *Doğu Anadolu'nun Düzeni* (Istanbul: E. Yayınları, 1969), pp. 13-14; Harzya, "Kurt Sorunu," pp. 49-50.

ments near Mt. Ararat in 1930 which spilled over into the Maku region of Iran was likewise severely suppressed. The Kurdish insurgents were no match for Ankara, which used air power this time in addition to its effective ground forces. And with the failure of the 1937 uprising in Tunceli against the central government's efforts to set up gendarmery posts and schools in this area, the military phase of the Kurdish question came to a close in Turkey.

To assure that further Kurdish revolts would not occur, Ankara imposed stricter administrative controls over eastern Turkey than in the rest of the country. A consistent effort was made to disarm the tribes, and gendarmes were stationed throughout this area. Some Kurdish tribes and especially their leaders were removed from the troubled region. Railway lines were built to facilitate government troop movements.

At the same time, the Kurds suffered severe cultural disabilities. The use of Kurdish as a written language, or as a tongue on the radio and television, was sternly prohibited. While the "Citizen Speak Turkish" campaign of the early 1960s was quickly shelved in view of the practical difficulties of insisting on linguistic conformity by millions of people who did not know this language, the political and legal system in Turkey is heavily biased in favor of Turkish. To be eligible to enter parliament, for example, one must be fluent in Turkish.

Although barred from making overt appeals to ethnicity, the Kurds have been able to take advantage of the Turkish system of multi-party political competition introduced after the Second World War. The parliamentary process offers

scope for defending regional—if not avowedly ethnic—interests. And the dynamics of multi-party politics has assured competition by the major parties for local support in the Kurdish provinces. Indeed, this process proceeded to the point that in the 1950s the Democrat party allowed local administration of this area frequently to fall into the hands of natives rather than administrators sent from the capital. And in reaction to this policy of regional concessions, the military junta which took power in 1960 deported 55 Kurdish tribal chiefs to western Turkey. But when civilian rule returned the next year, these leaders were restored to their traditional followers with their power largely unchanged.<sup>6</sup>

Tribes, however, have limitations in the game of parliamentary politics similar to those they suffer in national movements: they provide a relatively narrow base of support. As a result, minor parties in particular have had to be content with the backing that one tribal constituency could give in a province. For example, in 1965 the Turkish Labor party received the lion's share of its votes in Diyarbakir province from the county of Lice, home of its sometime secretary general.<sup>7</sup>

For those Kurdish politicians who aspired to broader power bases, there were social mechanisms that could help somewhat to transcend tribal limits. Fictive relationships based on the sponsorship of circumcision celebrations (*kirvelik*) offered a way for the rich and power-

6. Y. K. Karaosmanoglu described the Democrat tactics, *Ulus*, 6 December 1960. See also *Milliyet*, 27 October 1960; *Hurriyet*, 21 November 1960.

7. Turkey, T. C. Başbakanlık, Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü, 1950-1965 *Milletvekili ve 1961, 1964 Cumhuriyet Senatosu Üye Seçimleri Sonuçları* (Ankara, 1966), pp. 425-45.

ful to expand the numbers of those who were personally bound to them.<sup>8</sup> The control of landlords over tenants served as another means of constructing the network of relations needed to go beyond the tribal frame. Using these devices, Kurdish politicians in eastern Turkey have developed bases of power independent of party organizations, giving these leaders the option to shift party at will or to run as independents if they could not strike the proper deal with the national organizations. In the 1977 election campaign in Turkey, Kurdish leaders from several eastern provinces reportedly took their followers out of the Republican People's party for such reasons.<sup>9</sup>

The possibility of substantial benefits within the system discourages most of the prominent Kurdish political leaders from risking their positions by overtly promoting ethnic separatism. Embarrassment at being identified with Kurdish national aspirations was clearly evident in 1963, for example, in New Turkey party Secretary General Yusuf Azizoglu's rejection of Minister of Interior Hifzi Oguz Bekata's accusations that he was encouraging Kurdish divisive sympathies. And there could be no mistaking the warning implicit in Republican People's party deputy Asim Eren's parliamentary question in 1959 about the advisability of retaliating against Turkish Kurds for the massacre of Turkmen tribesmen in Mosul.<sup>10</sup>

8. Dr. Ayşe Kudat, *Kirvelik* (Ankara: Ayıldiz Matbaası, 1974), passim.

9. *Hurriyet*, 22 April 1977.

10. *Milliyet*, 10 October 1963; *Akşam*, 15 April 1959, carried open telegrams protesting Eren's suggestion and expressing surprise that his party would not disown these "threats." The following day the press noted that the authorities had banned further discussion "on the subject of the Kurds."

In this situation, Kurdish nationalist sentiment has been openly exploited only by the most radical of Turkey's legal political bodies, the Turkish Labor party—and then only after this party was solidly established. This avowedly Marxist organization publicly equated the economic backwardness of eastern Turkey with a discriminatory ethnic policy by the Ankara government. For the temerity publicly to return to Inonu's Lausanne formulation that Turkey was a country of Turks and Kurds in its program adopted in November 1970, the Turkish Labor party was summarily closed in mid-1971; its leaders, both Kurds and non-Kurds, were given lengthy jail terms.<sup>11</sup> To a military-backed regime in Ankara, there was evidently no more serious crime than encouraging Kurdish separatism.

If Kurdish nationalist sentiment can no longer be manipulated so openly by formal political parties, it may still be visible in the anarchist and extremist current that has disturbed Turkey in the past decade. Kurds are disproportionately represented in the radical leftist movements in Turkey. Perhaps interest in these causes is generated from the fact that eastern Turkey remains comparatively poor and neglected in the development of the country. Whatever the reason, when Kurdish students go to the major universities, they seem more likely than their Turkish colleagues to join activist movements. In the rebellion against authority common to all these protagonists, the demand for a better deal for the Kurd-

11. "Türkiye İşçi Partisi IV. Büyük Kongre Kararları," *Emek*, no. 7 (December 1970), pp. 7-8; *Milliyet*, 15-16 May 1971, claimed that the Labor party was linked to the Democratic party of Kurdistan; *Milliyet*, 15 June 1971.

ish areas is frequently voiced.<sup>12</sup> At present in Turkey there is little propaganda calling directly for Kurdish independence; but in agitation for faster, more equitable economic development of the eastern part of the country, the undercurrent of ethnicity clearly persists.

### *In Iraq*

The Kurds of northern Iraq greeted the advent of British rule after the First World War with traditional tribal revolt. Seeking to resist the imposition of firmer control from Baghdad than they had previously known, Sheikh Mahmud, a major Kurdish leader, rose first in 1919 and in a broader move in 1922. It took the British authorities two years to put down his last insurrection; even then unrest remained endemic in the Kurdish region, though the Iraqi Kurds seemed largely unaffected by the rise and fall of Sheikh Said in Turkey.

By 1927, the Barzani clan had come to the fore as the leading Kurdish dissidents. In the years that followed, the Barzanis earned a reputation for activism and boldness in resisting the central government in Baghdad. In 1929 they demanded the formation of an all-Kurdish province embracing their core area in Iraq, a demand they repeated in 1943. Under this stimulus, in 1930–31 notables petitioned the League of Nations to set up an independent Kurdish government.<sup>13</sup> Their main motives, however, appeared to be to gain concessions from the Arabs to permit the

establishment of local autonomy and the use of Kurdish as a language of education as well as to demand a greater share of Iraq's revenues for the development of the northern region. When continuing Barzani agitation elicited a determined thrust from the Baghdad government backed by the British in 1945, Mulla Mustafa Barzani—the most active and charismatic of the leaders of this tribe—fled with a group of followers first to Iran and thence to the USSR on the collapse of the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad in 1946.

The quiet induced by the departure of Mulla Mustafa, coupled with more capable government in Baghdad and the suppression of Kurdish dissidence in Iran, hardly survived the overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy in 1958. The advent of a radical central government oriented toward the Arab world posed a threat to the Kurds. Abdul Karim Qasim, who initially welcomed Mulla Mustafa Barzani home from refuge in the Soviet Union, soon turned against the Kurdish leader. After granting Barzani's political party—the Democratic party of Kurdistan—legal status in 1960, Qasim encouraged the Baradost and Zibaris to pursue their traditional feuds with Mulla Mustafa.

The Barzani revolt of June 1961, therefore, began as a traditional move to resist the central government and to defend tribal rights. Mulla Mustafa's aims were at most some form of self-administration for the Kurds in northern Iraq; he was not after broad autonomy or even the overthrow of Qasim. Nor was Barzani at first even supported actively by the small group of city-bred detribalized Kurdish radicals who had been the guiding light of the Democratic party of Kurdistan.

12. Harzya, "Kurt Sorunu," pp. 52–64; "Açık Oturum: Ortadoğu Devrimci Çemberi," *Anı*, no. 1 (May 1970), pp. 63–84.

13. Stephen H. Longrigg, *Iraq 1900 to 1950* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 193–96, 324–27.

They objected to his traditionalist tribal approach and favored radical socialist organization instead. And throughout 1962 the radicals maintained a separate identity, eventually establishing their own rival front in the rugged area to the southeast of Barzani's territory.<sup>14</sup>

While Qasim claimed to see a foreign finger in triggering the Barzani insurrection, there is no evidence to substantiate his charges. The Kremlin, though critical of Qasim for suppressing the Iraqi Communist party, did not wish to see his anti-Western regime upset; Moscow, therefore, did not give unequivocal support to Mulla Mustafa. Arab states vacillated, torn on the one hand between feelings of solidarity with Baghdad against non-Arabs and, on the other, Egyptian-Iraqi rivalry which had burst forth once Qasim showed his independence of Gamal Abdal Nasser. The West remained aloof; it still generally regarded Barzani as a Communist on the basis of his 15 years in the Soviet Union. Only Iran was sympathetic to Mulla Mustafa, seeing him as a useful ally in the contest against Qasim. But Tehran was willing to do little of a practical nature to help the Kurds, and it appears that the Iranian government had little if anything to do with setting off the Kurdish insurrection.

Qasim's efforts to bring Mulla Mustafa to heel failed. Baghdad's military establishment never recovered from the shock of the revolution and the reorientation of supply from British to Soviet equipment. Moreover, the security forces were not free from pursuing other domestic enemies long enough to focus

fully on the Kurds. In Qasim's years, the army was also committed to press Kuwait in the south. Thus, Baghdad could not exert its maximum force against the Kurdish irregulars who took advantage of their mountainous terrain in the north.

The stalemate with the Kurds irritated powerful factions in the army and contributed to some degree to Qasim's overthrow in February 1963. The Baath party regime which ran Iraq for the ensuing nine months also was unable to settle itself firmly in power. It first offered Barzani a compromise of limited autonomy in only one of the three major Kurdish provinces. But the Baath apparently from the first intended to try to crush the insurrection by force. It was only the inner strains that brought the Baath regime down after the end of the fighting season in the fall of 1963 that saved Barzani. His men had not performed well against the Baath offensive.

The Arif brothers who took over for the next five years also tried both conciliation and conflict to deal with Mulla Mustafa. The tactic of a ceasefire, declared in February 1964, almost succeeded. It provoked a split in Kurdish ranks between the tribal forces and the urban radicals, who accused Barzani of selling out by ending the fighting without a specific promise of autonomy. And this challenge led Mulla Mustafa to expel the Kurdish activists by force.<sup>15</sup>

Despite this purge of his forces, Barzani could not deflect conflict with the Arif regime. In Baghdad he was seen as the symbol of dissidence. There was abiding pressure on the central government to

14. Edgar O'Ballance, *The Kurdish Revolt: 1961-1970* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1973), p. 87.

15. Vanly, *Kurdistan Irakien*, pp. 222-24; O'Ballance, *Kurdish Revolt*, pp. 120-21.



reestablish firm control over the north. But the government's military campaign of 1965-66 failed disastrously. Tehran had by now broadened considerably its military supply to the Kurds in the context of severely deteriorating relations between Iraq and Iran. And when Baghdad overextended itself in the quest for a knockout blow in the Ruwanduz valley, its forces were routed by Mulla Mustafa.

This stalemate, in which the Kurdish forces could not descend from their hills and the central government's army could not leave the main roads, led Baghdad to offer a 12-point peace program in June 1966, providing for elections, amnesty, reparations, and some form of decentralized administration.<sup>16</sup> Yet this compromise was given little chance to succeed. The Arif regime collapsed in the wake of the Arab defeat in the Six-Day war against Israel in 1967.

The Baath party which now took over wasted little time in launching a major move to end Barzani's independence. Like its predecessors, however, the Baath regime found it difficult to gain the advantage; the government's drive stalled, and the campaign during 1969 proved indecisive. No doubt the slowness of the new regime to consolidate its position in Baghdad played a part in ordering the military standoff. And internal rivalries within the 15-man Revolutionary Command Council kept the government from devoting its full attention to action against the Kurds. In addition, the Baath forces were distracted by an escalating confrontation with Iran which led Baghdad

to withdraw forces from operations in the north. Worsening relations between Iran and Iraq also led Tehran to increase markedly the flow of assistance to the Kurds. On the other hand, Moscow did not cut military aid as it had when the Baath took power in 1963, though the Soviets did press Baghdad to come to terms with Barzani rather than pursue military action.

In this situation, the central government concluded a 15-point peace plan with Mulla Mustafa in March 1970.<sup>17</sup> This accord provided for more far-reaching autonomy for northern Iraq than ever before. It also granted the Kurds the right of assured representation in the executive and legislative bodies of the central government which pledged the rapid economic development of the Kurdish region. Moreover, this compact authorized the Kurds to keep their heavy weapons for four years, until the accord was to be fully implemented.

This agreement marked the high-water of Kurdish gains. Not only was Baghdad forced to acknowledge its inability to crush Barzani's movement, Mulla Mustafa's opponents in the Democratic party of Kurdistan were obliged to recognize his paramountcy as well.

Yet, from this high point, Kurdish fortunes declined with startling suddenness. On the one hand, the Baath regime steadily solved its problems of internal divisions. At the same time, it moved to end its isolation in the post-Nasser Arab world and to strengthen its ties with Moscow. Indeed, in April 1972 a 15-year Treaty of Friendship was concluded between the USSR and

16. For the text of this program, see Majid Khadduri, *Republican Iraq* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 274-76.

17. Iraq, Ministry of Information, *March 11 Manifesto on the Peaceful Settlement of the Kurdish Issue in Iraq* (Baghdad, 1974).

Iraq.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Mulla Mustafa could do little to strengthen his forces. The shah was apparently interested in keeping the Kurds supplied only for defense, not to the point of asserting independence. And it was difficult for Barzani to maintain his forces on a prolonged war footing.

With the end of the four-year term of the 1970 accord, therefore, the time was ripe for a renewed Baath offensive. Under these circumstances, moreover, the tide of battle quickly turned against Barzani, who for the first time faced a fully determined, well-equipped military operation. In response, Mulla Mustafa redoubled his appeals for outside assistance.

The changing fortunes of the Kurds posed a major problem for Tehran. As Baghdad's troops drove ever closer to the border with Iran, it became increasingly evident that in order to help Barzani effectively the shah would have to commit his own forces to the battle. This would have risked a major war between Iran and Iraq. At this juncture, however, Baghdad gave evidence that it would be prepared to satisfy other Iranian desires if Tehran would end its aid to the Kurds. It was on this basis, therefore, that the shah accepted Hayri Boumediene's offer of mediation in March 1975 and worked out a comprehensive settlement of all outstanding issues with the Baghdad government.<sup>19</sup>

This pact shut off the Kurdish lifeline to the outside world. It ended vital military assistance to

the Barzani forces. Equally, it ranged the shah against the Kurds by committing him to close the border and deny sanctuary for those engaged in military operations against Baghdad.

In this situation, the odds were too great for Mulla Mustafa to buck. He took advantage of the grace period to flee to Iran to throw himself on the mercy of the shah. Many of his supporters fled with him. The rest surrendered en masse. Within days the rebellion was over and central authority was reimposed in the hills of northern Iraq for the first time in nearly 15 years.

Baghdad has sought to clinch its advantage for all time by making some population shifts to increase the numbers of Arabs in the region of the oil fields on the border of the Kurdish area. It has also widely disarmed the Kurds and stationed security forces broadly through the area. The Kurds maintain limited cultural rights, while being exposed to quick retaliation if they should step out of line.

Nonetheless, restiveness remains. There are reports of occasional instances of small-scale insurgency in the north, said to be fomented by Kurdish nationalists who slipped into the area from Syria.<sup>20</sup> Undoubtedly such dissidence will be limited as long as the Iranian border stays shut. But it is almost impossible to assure complete quiet as long as there are those outside who are dedicated to stirring up Kurdish separatist sentiment and who can exploit the sense of grievance at unequal treatment that persists in the Kurdish region.

18. For the text, see *New Times*, no. 16 (1972), pp. 4-5.

19. Geoffrey Godsell, "Shah Tells Why He Made Peace with Iraq," *Christian Science Monitor*, 7 May 1975, p. 3.

20. David Hirst, "Disorders, Guerrilla Warfare Weaken Iraq's Ruling Party," *Washington Post*, 1 May 1977, p. K3.

*In Iran*

The breakdown of central authority in Iran left the northwest border area in almost continuous turmoil after the First World War. Kurdish tribes led by Ismail Aga Simko managed to set themselves up briefly as independent lords of the Mahabad area near Lake Rezaiyeh. This venture was the traditional tribal drive for local dominance and reflected little broader Kurdish nationalist aspiration. After the central government regained control of the rest of Persian Azerbaijan in 1922, Simko's move quickly collapsed. Further south a Qajar pretender also raised the Kurds in 1926 in an abortive effort to seize the throne.<sup>21</sup> By 1930, however, Reza Shah managed to impose order on the area and partially to disarm the tribes.

In the interwar period, Tehran attempted no consistent drive as the Turks did to break up Kurdish tribal organization. To be sure, Reza Shah's regime did not permit Kurdish to be used as the language of education or government. Yet, unlike the Turks, the Iranians did allow Kurdish books to be printed and Kurdish programs to be broadcast on the radio. Thus, the Iranian experience formed a half-way point between the absolute denial of Kurdishness in Turkey and the cultural and at times political permissiveness in Iraq.

With the occupation of Iran by the Soviets during the Second World War, the situation of the Kurds changed significantly. In the first place, the demobilization of the Iranian army weakened Tehran's control over this area and returned

Kurdish tribesmen with their arms to the region. More important was the manipulation of the Kurds by the Soviets who saw in the encouragement of Kurdish separatism a way to consolidate their power in northwestern Iran.

Encouraged by Moscow, detribalized Kurds in Mahabad in 1942 took the initiative to organize the *komula*, a local organization dedicated to promoting Kurdish separatism.<sup>22</sup> The following year, Qazi Mohammad, the paramount religious figure of the region, began to agitate for formal recognition of Kurdish autonomy. The separatist movement also drew impetus from the general opposition to being incorporated in the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic being organized by the Azeri Turks of Iranian Azerbaijan. Not only was there strong ethnic antagonism between these groups, but the Soviet-inspired Azerbaijan Republic reflected radical social doctrines which caused concern among conservative Kurdish tribal leaders. Finally, the *komula* movement in Mahabad drew strength from the advent of Mulla Mustafa Barzani, who reached there in flight from Iraq at the end of 1945 with several thousand tribal followers.

Early in 1946, again with Soviet help, Qazi Mohammad proclaimed the Kurdistan Autonomous Republic in Mahabad. This was a hastily constructed state, based on the detribalized *komula* elements in uneasy cooperation with the local tribal chiefs and Barzani's Iraqi refugees. It also suffered from a built-in territorial conflict with the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic over rich farm land and towns on

21. Hassan Arfa, *The Kurds* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 64-7; Longrigg, *Iraq*, p. 159.

22. William Eagleton, *The Kurdish Republic of 1946* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 33-40.

the edge of the Kurdish region. Moreover, the new Kurdish state did not extend far south of its capital and hence did not enjoy the allegiance of an important segment of Iran's Kurds.

The main problem for Mahabad was the growing power of the Tehran government. When the Soviets agreed to evacuate northern Iran in May 1946, the Azeri and Kurdish states in the north could not stand. Already in the case of the Mahabad Republic internal strains had undermined the loyalty of many of the tribes to the Kurdish cause. Traditional leaders were disturbed by the Communist orientation of some of the *komula* agitators; a coalition of tribal chiefs, through the intermediation of the American Consulate in Tabriz, offered their submission to Tehran. The Barzanis, too, were willing to negotiate with the Iranians and British for safe passage to return to Iraq. In this situation, the central government found little resistance to its advance in December 1946.<sup>23</sup>

Tehran now sought to end Kurdish dissidence once and for all. Qazi Mohammad and his closest collaborators were executed. After some days of talks, the Iranian army moved against the Barzanis; Mulla Mustafa and 500 followers escaped to the USSR. The government disarmed the Kurds and stationed the well-armed Third Corps of the Iranian army in the region. With the expansion of the road system and the spread of social services into the rural areas, the Kurds came increasingly into the tempo of modern existence. In this situation, the government's stringent security measures and efforts to break down the tribal organization effectively deprived the Iranian Kurds of

potential for causing Tehran serious difficulties. Indeed, there is no evidence that in recent decades Iran has been troubled by significant Kurdish separatist activity.

#### THE FUTURE OF KURDISH SEPARATISM

Today, Kurdish nationalism is promoted primarily by detribalized Kurds living in the West or elsewhere outside of the core area. Kurdish student organizations in Europe and the United States encourage the development of a common ethnic identity. The Democratic party of Kurdistan also maintains a tenuous existence in exile, agitating in low key for the independence of the Kurds of Iraq.

There seems little likelihood that this agitation will succeed in securing recognition of the Kurds as a nation. The United Nations has characteristically refused to come out in favor of breaking up member states along ethnic lines. No major country now shows interest in taking up the Kurdish cause. While there was an outpouring of sympathy in the United States when Mulla Mustafa Barzani's revolt was finally extinguished, this reaction reflected humanitarian concern. It was also a product of the political debate in America over the operation of the intelligence community: the version of the Pike Committee report released in *The Village Voice* made much of the alleged betrayal of the Kurds as an exhibit in its critique of the Nixon administration's conduct of foreign affairs.<sup>24</sup> This highlighting of the Kurdish problem,

24. "The CIA Report the President Doesn't Want You to Read," *The Village Voice*, 16 February 1976, pp. 70, 85-7; Aaron Latham, "What Kissinger Was Afraid of in the Pike Papers," *New York*, 9 November, no. 40, 4 October 1976, pp. 50-68.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 104-5, 108-16.

therefore, proved of short duration; it did not suggest that there were deep roots in the United States for support to the Kurds as a national movement.

Without consistent support from outside, including large amounts of military equipment, a Kurdish separatist movement clearly cannot survive. It requires modern weapons to take on the established central governments of the region which share a common determination to prevent the establishment of an independent or truly autonomous Kurdish state on their territories. With their own resources, the Kurds cannot produce the arms they would need. Thus, a military move for autonomy or independence no longer seems possible.

Although serious Kurdish ethnic

conflict, therefore, now appears to be a thing of the past, economic inequalities and cultural traditions will assure that the Kurds have motives for asserting themselves. The intensity of their drive for recognition will undoubtedly vary in the different states of their residence. But the claim to the oil resources that their movements have advanced in the past are unlikely ever to be met. In this situation, it will be a long time before the standard of living in the Kurdish areas rises to the level of the surrounding regions. Thus, the sense of grievance that has lain at the heart of the separatist movement in the past is unlikely to weaken. And the Kurdish question will remain alive for future generations to resolve.