

# The Kurds



## THE KURDS

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## MINORITY RIGHTS GROUP

Minority Rights Group works to secure rights and justice for ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities. It is dedicated to the cause of cooperation and understanding between communities.

Founded in the 1960s, MRG is a small international non-governmental organization that informs and warns governments, the international community, non-governmental organizations and the wider public about the situation of minorities around the world. This work is based on the publication of well-researched reports, books and papers; direct advocacy on behalf of minority rights in international fora; the development of a global network of like-minded organizations and minority communities to collaborate on these issues; and **the challenging of prejudice and promotion of public understanding** through information and education projects.

MRG believes that the best hope for a peaceful world lies in **identifying and monitoring conflict** between communities, **advocating preventive measures** to avoid the escalation of conflict and **encouraging positive action** to build trust between majority and minority communities.

MRG has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council and has a worldwide network of partners. Its international headquarters are in London. Legally it is registered both as a charity and as a limited company under the United Kingdom Law with an International Governing Council.

## THE PROCESS

As part of its methodology, MRG conducts regional research, identifies issues and commissions reports based on its findings. Each author is carefully chosen and all scripts are read by no less than eight independent experts who are knowledgeable about the subject matter. These experts are drawn from the minorities about whom the reports are written, and from journalists, academics, researchers and other human rights agencies. Authors are asked to incorporate comments made by these parties. In this way, MRG aims to publish accurate, authoritative, well-balanced reports.



*Villager from the Garmigan region of Iraqi Kurdistan. Her village was destroyed by the Iraqi government during the 1980s Anfal campaign. It was rebuilt by villagers with assistance from Oxfam in 1995.*

DANIEL McCALLUM

# The Kurds

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**Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities** (UN General Assembly; Resolution 47/135 of 18 December 1992).

**Article 1**

1. States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories, and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity.
2. States shall adopt appropriate legislative and other measures to achieve those ends.

**Article 2**

1. Persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities (hereinafter referred to as persons belonging to minorities) have the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, and to use their own language, in private and in public, freely and without interference or any form of discrimination.
2. Persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life.
3. Persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in decisions on the national and, where appropriate, regional level concerning the minority to which they belong or the regions in which they live, in a manner not incompatible with national legislation.
4. Persons belonging to minorities have the right to establish and maintain their own associations.
5. Persons belonging to minorities have the right to establish and maintain, without any discrimination, free and peaceful contacts with other members of their group, with persons belonging to other minorities, as well as contacts across frontiers with citizens of other States to whom they are related by national or ethnic, religious or linguistic ties.

**Article 3**

1. Persons belonging to minorities may exercise their rights including those as set forth in this Declaration individually as well as in community with other members of their group, without any discrimination.
2. No disadvantage shall result for any person belonging to a minority as the consequence of the exercise or non-exercise of the rights as set forth in this Declaration.

**Article 4**

1. States shall take measures where required to ensure that persons belonging to minorities may exercise fully and effectively all their human rights and fundamental freedoms without any discrimination and in full equality before the law.
2. States shall take measures to create favourable conditions to enable persons belonging to minorities to express their characteristics and to develop their culture, language, religion, traditions and customs, except where specific practices are in violation of national law and contrary to international standards.
3. States should take appropriate measures so that, wherever possible, persons belonging to minorities have adequate opportunities to learn their mother tongue or to have instruction in their mother tongue.
4. States should, where appropriate, take measures in the field of education, in order to encourage knowledge of the history, traditions, language and culture of the minorities existing within their territory. Persons belonging to minorities should have adequate opportunities to gain knowledge of the society as a whole.
5. States should consider appropriate measures so that persons belonging to minorities may participate fully in the economic progress and development in their country.

**Article 5**

1. National policies and programmes shall be planned and implemented with due regard for the legitimate interests of persons belonging to minorities.
2. Programmes of cooperation and assistance among States should be planned and implemented with due regard for the legitimate interests of persons belonging to minorities.

**Article 6**

States should cooperate on questions relating to persons belonging to minorities, *inter alia* exchanging of information and experiences, in order to promote mutual understanding and confidence.

**Article 7**

States should cooperate in order to promote respect for the rights as set forth in the present Declaration.

**Article 8**

1. Nothing in this Declaration shall prevent the fulfilment of international obligations of States in relation to persons belonging to minorities. In particular, States shall fulfil in good faith the obligations and commitments they have assumed under international treaties and agreements to which they are parties.
2. The exercise of the rights as set forth in the present Declaration shall not prejudice the enjoyment by all persons of universally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms.
3. Measures taken by States in order to ensure the effective enjoyment of the rights as set forth in the present Declaration shall not *prima facie* be considered contrary to the principle of equality contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
4. Nothing in the present Declaration may be construed as permitting any activity contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations, including sovereign equality, territorial integrity and political independence of States.

**Article 9**

The specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system shall contribute to the full realization of the rights and principles as set forth in the present Declaration, within their respective fields of competence.

**International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)**

**Article 27**

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.

**Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)**

**Article 29 (1)**

States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

- (...)
- (d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;

(...)

**Geneva Conventions of 1949 (Humanitarian Law)**

**Article 3 Common to the Four Geneva Conventions of 1949**

In the case of armed conflict not of an international character occurring in the territory of one of the High Contracting Parties, each Party to the conflict shall be bound to apply, as a minimum, the following provisions:

1. Persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including members of armed forces who have laid down their arms and those placed *hors de combat* by sickness, wounds, detention, or any other cause, shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria.

To this end, the following acts are and shall remain prohibited at any time in any place whatsoever with respect to the above-mentioned persons:

- a. Violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture;
  - b. Taking of hostages;
  - c. Outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment;
  - d. The passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgement pronounced by a regularly constituted court, affording all the judicial guarantees which are recognized as indispensable by civilized peoples.
2. The wounded and sick shall be collected and cared for.

An impartial humanitarian body such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, may offer its services to the Parties to the conflict.

The Parties to the conflict should further endeavour to bring into force, by means of special agreements, all or part of the other provisions of the present Convention.

The application of the preceding provisions shall not affect the legal status of the Parties to the conflict.

# Preface

**T**he Kurdish question has become increasingly prominent in recent years. This marks a significant change since MRG began publishing on the Kurds in 1975. In Turkey and Iraq, which together account for 18 million out of an estimated 26 million Kurds today, the Kurdish issue has become central to the integrity of both states. Significant Kurdish populations are also found in Iran, Syria, the former Soviet Union and Europe. As this report details, nowhere are Kurdish human rights fully respected.

The Kurds are now at a critical juncture in their history. It is for this reason that MRG has commissioned this new edition. We hope that this report will be a clear source of information which will raise the profile of Kurdish issues and act as a resource for those organizations and institutions working on Kurdistan. The Kurds are the largest ethnic minority in the Middle East and their treatment by the governments of the region defies internationally-agreed human rights standards. The report has been written by David McDowall, who is a well-known authority on the Kurds. His previous reports for MRG on the Kurds have been extensively used by national and international courts considering Kurdish human rights and individual cases.

As this new report makes clear, Turkey continues to flout international laws in its treatment of the Kurds yet is gaining increasing influence in the region with support from the United States (US) government. Having been granted membership of the European Union's (EU) customs union in January 1996, Turkey is seeking full membership of the EU despite its appalling human rights record. Between 2,500 and 3,000 villages have been destroyed in south-east Turkey since 1985 and an estimated 2 million people have had to flee their homes and settle in the shanty towns in Diyarbakir, Istanbul and the western coast.

Since 1992 when MRG last published on the Kurdish question, there has been a wealth of fresh information published on the Kurds which is included in this new edition. Increasingly, human rights organizations have been granted easier access to Kurdish regions since the establishment of the 'safe haven' for the Kurds in northern Iraq. Within the former Soviet Union, new material on the Kurds has also been forthcoming.

With a population of approximately 26 million, it might be argued that the Kurdish people have the right to self-determination in a state of their own. In theory such a right can hardly be denied. On a pragmatic level, however, it is highly unlikely that the United Nations (UN), or the states in which the Kurds live, would consider this option. They would argue that the potential for continuing instability would be considerable, both for geographic and political reasons.

The governments of Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria are understandably nervous about Kurdish political ambitions. Nevertheless continued repression is no solution. In Turkey for example, such a solution clearly mistakes the

symptom (the PKK insurgency) for the problem (the state's implacable denial of fundamental Kurdish rights). Suppressing the symptom is bound to intensify the problem, leading to a downward spiral of human rights abuses from both sides. The prospects for everyone in Turkey become increasingly ominous.

In Iraq, the presence of British, French and US jets enforces the no-fly zone in northern Iraq. Should the Allies withdraw and Iraqi forces re-enter the north, it is probable that hundreds of thousands of civilians would be forced to flee the area. The Kurds are a minority who face marginalization from all sides.

As a member of the Council of Europe, Turkey is a signatory of the European Convention on Human Rights, which is part of Turkey's domestic law. Its denial of freedom of speech, a free press, freedom of assembly, its widespread use of arbitrary arrest and torture, its use of extrajudicial killings by security forces, its barbarous and indiscriminate practice of village evacuation and the coercion of people into its village militia force, all violate this Convention. Other signatories have the means, through Article 24 of the Convention, to compel Turkey to account for its actions at the European Commission for Human Rights in Strasbourg. There is sufficient evidence detailed in this report, and in the work of other organizations, for them to do so.

As the recommendations at the end of this report make clear, European states should act decisively with regard to Turkey. In other states where Kurds are a minority, the international community and the UN in particular should act to ensure the protection of the human rights of the Kurds. Recent history has shown the tragedy which resulted when the international community failed to protect these rights.

**Alan Phillips**  
*Director*  
November 1996

# Introduction

**T**he Kurds today, numbering at least 26 million, struggle to obtain political recognition and rights as national communities within the state boundaries in which they find themselves. They form the largest ethnic community in the Middle East without a state of its own. Kurds have been far less fortunate than other ethnic communities in the region. It is worth considering briefly why this should be so.

Ethnic nationalism is a product of nineteenth century European thought and was quite alien to traditional Middle Eastern society; the latter was based upon religious identity and loyalty to the sultan (Ottoman Turkey) or shah (Iran). However, the political and economic might of Europe made the rapid spread of such ideas almost inevitable. The most responsive communities were the Christians and Jews, who already had religious connections that made European values attractive. Muslims took longer. The other responsive category was the body of city-based intellectuals who recognized the comparative weakness of Middle Eastern polities, and the lack of intellectual enquiry. This latter group already had a literature of its own, notably the Arabs (in Beirut, Cairo and Damascus) and Ottoman Turks in Istanbul. These intellectuals began to look at themselves in a new light, along the lines of ethnicity rather than religion.

By the time of the break-up of the Ottoman Empire many of these intellectuals had established nationalist movements able to take advantage of the creation of modern states, mainly under European tutelage. The Kurds were the most notable omission. Why did they fail? It is natural that Kurds should blame the Great Powers and oppressive states in the region for this failure, and certainly all of them must carry some blame that the Kurdish question remains outstanding. But it is also true that at this vital juncture, when the opportunity for state creation existed, Kurdish society was wholly unready to seize it. It was rural, highly decentralized, largely tribal and without the urban intellectual leadership enjoyed by the Arabs and the Turks. The creation of a coherent and cohesive ethnic movement was to be the task of at least a generation.

Coherent national movements with reasonably well-defined objectives have emerged in Iran, Iraq and Turkey, but their progress has been slow and painful. Rivalry between one tribe and another, between left and right, between rural and urban Kurds, between Sunni and non-Sunni, between one party and another, and between one region and another, have all militated against a successful outcome to the Kurdish struggle. Moreover, governments and neighbouring states have been adept at coopting one element against another, thus retarding national formation.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this report is to explore the issues that affect the identity and political progress of Kurds, and to trace their experience since the break-up of the Ottoman

and Qajar empires, to look at their position in the countries in which they live, and to pinpoint some of the factors which currently motivate and impede Kurdish nationalism. Finally, a tentative attempt is made to look at the prospects for the Kurdish people.



# The land of the Kurds

**A**lthough Kurds are to be found in the Caucasian republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan, Khorasan (in eastern Iran), Lebanon, and Syria, today the main concentration lives where the Kurdish people have always lived, in the mountains where Iran, Iraq and Turkey meet. The heart of this area consists of extremely rugged mountains of the Zagros range, running in ridges north-west to south-east. In the west these mountains give way to rolling hills, and the Mesopotamian plain. To the north the mountains slowly turn to the steppe-like plateau and highlands of Anatolia. To the east the mountains fall away to lowlands where the Kurds also now live.

Although the population is not exclusively Kurdish in much of this area, Kurds constitute the dominant majority. Since the early thirteenth century much of this area has been called Kurdistan, however it was not until the sixteenth century, after the Kurds had moved north and west onto the Anatolian plateau by a series of tribal migrations, that the term Kurdistan came into common usage to denote a system of Kurdish fiefs. Since then, although the term Kurdistan appears on few maps, it is clearly more than a geographical term since it also refers to a human culture which exists in that land. To this extent Kurdistan is a social and political concept.

Nevertheless no map of Kurdistan can be drawn without contention, and for this reason the demographic map (on page 5) is not a political statement, but a statement of where large numbers of Kurds are to be found. Turkey for all practical purposes denies Kurdistan's existence, while Iran and Iraq are reluctant to acknowledge that it is as extensive as many Kurds would have them accept.

Nowhere is this dispute more sharply demonstrated than in the quarrel over Kirkuk, in Iraq, on account of its vast oilfield. Is it Kurd or is it Arab? The Kurds claim it as Kurdish. The Iraqi government would reply that it is Iraqi. There are other claimants. The Turkomans, another regional minority (see later), are long-resident descendants of Turkic tribes which moved into the area some centuries ago. Until 1958 the city of Kirkuk was predominantly Turkoman, yet Arabic, Kurdish, and Turkish were spoken by those resident in Kirkuk. To its south and west were nomad Arabs, and to its east the Hamavand Kurds.

The more extravagant Kurdish claims include both Luristan (the southern part of the Zagros range) and the Syrian-Turkish border area across to the north-east corner of the Mediterranean (thereby giving the putative Kurdish state a convenient sea outlet).<sup>2</sup> One of the prime difficulties of the claim to any delineable limits, lies in the extensive intermediate zones around the Kurdish heartlands, where Arabs, Azeris, Persians and Turks co-exist with Kurds. For example, in the villages around Arbil, an almost exclusively Kurdish city east of Mosul, Arabs are in a considerable majority.

Other communities have lived within the mountain heartlands, the northern Zagros range, and the eastern Taurus, for centuries. These include sizeable Christian communities, not only Armenian but also Assyrian, Jewish communities, and Turks. At times these have also been viewed by outsiders as Kurdish, and certainly they (with the partial exception of the Armenians) belonged to a Kurdish mountain culture in its broadest sense. From Kermanshah southwards live the Lurs and Bakhtiars, tribespeople similar to the Kurds, whom some Kurds claim belong to the Kurdish nation, but who mostly do not claim this identify themselves. To the east and north-east Kurdish populated areas give way to the Azeri Turk populated plains of Azerbaijan. To the west Kurdish villages overlap with Arab and Turkish ones towards the Tigris, and here many Kurds belong as much or more to the culture of the plain as they do to that of the mountain. In the north-west Kurds and Turks merge into a less easily discernible divide, and perhaps here it is not possible to talk of two different geographic cultures.

In the higher, remoter areas the climate is intolerably hot and arid in summer and bitterly cold in winter. During the winter, from December to February, many mountain villages are entirely isolated. These remote areas are sparsely populated by pastoralists who spend the summer months in search of upland pastures, and pass the winters in the valley. Permanent settlement is confined to the riverine valleys, where the climate is less severe, and where water-borne silt allows cultivation. Even on the Anatolian plateau temperatures can be punishing. At the northern extremity of the Kurdish populated area the average January temperature is  $-13^{\circ}\text{C}$ , while even in Diyarbakir to the south-west, the largest Kurdish city in Turkey, the average January temperature is  $-0.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ , yet by mid-August the people live with an average temperature of  $30^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Even spring and autumn are subject to sudden alternations of hot and cold spells.

A century ago Kurdistan provided the great oak beams for many houses in Mosul, and some were also floated downstream for the houses of Baghdad and Basra. Today one will look in vain for sufficient trees for such a trade. The old forests have gone, partly to increased demand for wood from the plain, partly by defoliation in modern war, but more devastatingly for firewood, and to goats which kill shrubs and saplings. Reforestation is highly desirable, not only to replenish wood stocks, but also to halt serious erosion, and allow for greater moisture retention by the soil.

All Kurdish communities are assiduous stock-breeders, mainly of goats, sheep and some cattle. In all parts of Kurdistan the cultivation of cereals is important, accounting for roughly 15 per cent of the total cereal production in Turkey, and 35 per cent and 30 per cent respectively in Iran and Iraq, although in the mountain valleys of the Zagros range it is only for local consumption. Elsewhere it

is an income earner. The principal cash crop of the Kurdish foothills is tobacco, but it is of moderate quality and cannot compete in outside markets. Cotton is also grown, particularly in Anatolia. In the mountains fruit and vegetables are the main crops for local consumption. No more than a third of Kurdistan's arable land is actually cultivated, of which one third is always fallow. The potential therefore is considerable.

The major mineral in Kurdistan is oil, found in commercial quantities in Khaniqin and Kirkuk in Iraq, Rumeylan in Syria, and Batman and Silvan in Turkey. The exploitation of these oilfields by the respective governments heightens both the Kurdish sense of injustice and also governmental determination to allow no separatism to threaten these important resources. Other minerals in significant quantities include chrome, coal, copper, iron and lignite.

## Who are the Kurds?

The Kurds are the descendants of Indo-European tribes who settled among the aboriginal inhabitants of the Zagros mountains in various epochs, but probably mainly during the second millennium BC. The first mention of Kurds, as 'Cyrtii', occurred in the second century BC. However, the term 'Cyrtii' did not seem to have indicated an ethnic group. At the time of the Arab conquest in the seventh century AD, the term 'Kurd' was used to denote nomadic people. Therefore, it had a socio-economic rather than an ethnic meaning.

There is no doubt that some Arab, Armenian, Assyrian and Persian (and later Turkoman) tribes became Kurdish by culture and language. Thus ethnic identity does not imply a single racial origin. There is also little doubt that, particularly on the fringes of Kurdistan, Kurdish communities mingled with others, some subsumed into the prevailing culture on the periphery, and others became absorbed into Kurdish identity. Around Arbil, for example, Kurdish displaced Arabic among a mixed population there.

Identity is also linked to imagined lineage. For religious and princely Kurdish families cachet attached to descent from the Prophet, implicitly indicating Arab lineage. Some such lineages may have been historically accurate; most were probably imagined but enjoyed widespread respect.

## How many Kurds?

The question of the size of the Kurdish population generates much controversy. Kurdish nationalists are tempted to exaggerate it, and governments of the region to minimize it. In Turkey only those Kurds who do not speak Turkish are officially counted for census purposes as Kurds, yielding a very low figure. On the other hand, some enthusiasts have been tempted to assume that over 30 per cent of Iraq is Kurdish, probably 7 per cent in excess of the actual figure. Trying to estimate the current number of Kurds is not a very fruitful exercise, since no figures can be proven correct. The author is responsible for the figures below.<sup>3</sup>

## Population estimates (1993)\*

Country	Total population	Kurds	%
Iran	61,000,000	6,100,000	10%
Iraq	19,300,000	4,400,000	23%
Syria	13,400,000	1,100,000	8%
Turkey	60,000,000	13,200,000	22%
Former Soviet Union		500,000	
Elsewhere		700,000	
Total		26,000,000	

(\*Estimates are in rounded figures.)

## Language of the Kurds

Unlike the Arabs, the Kurds have not yet evolved a single systematized written or spoken language. They remain divided into dialect groups and cannot communicate freely with other Kurds in their mother tongue, although most share a north-western Iranian linguistic origin. In some cases limited comprehension is possible, elsewhere it is not. Some Kurds, of course, are able to speak more than one dialect, and the use of radio and printed material, and the unifying effect of education are bound to improve the ease of communication considerably, and may even produce an eventual 'literary' style for broadcast and writing. The language is composed of two major dialects, but with considerable localized variations, and a number of sub-dialects:

Kurmanji – spoken northwards from Mosul into the former Soviet Union. There are two literary forms, one using Cyrillic characters (in the former Soviet Union), the other using Hawar (Turcized Latin) characters (in Turkey);

Sorani (or Kurdi) – which is spoken in a wide band across the international frontier from roughly Urmiya in the north to Khaniqin in the south. In Iraq this has become official Kurdish, indicating the cultural pre-eminence of Sulaymaniya over other Iraqi Kurd population centres. It is the only Kurdish language taught in schools or used by government. Its literary form uses Persian script.

Sub-dialects include Gurani, Kirmanshahi and Leki spoken in the area of Iranian Kurdistan running from Kermanshah to Sanandaj; and Zaza which is spoken in Dersim, an area of Anatolia inside an inverted triangle marked by Diyarbakir, Sivas and Erzerum. Although spoken at the opposite extremities of Kurdistan, Zaza and Gurani are closely related.

## Religion of the Kurds

The Kurds embraced Islam following the Arab conquests of the seventh century AD. Previously Christianity and Judaism, tree and solar cults, and



Zoroastrianism, had competed in the region. Religious *belief* plays no part in Kurdish distinctiveness.

Almost all Kurds adhere to the Shafi'i school of law, one of the four established schools of Sunni Islamic<sup>4</sup> jurisprudence, a mild distinction from their Sunni neighbours, the Turks, who mostly adhere to the Hanafi school. To the east the Azeri Turks, Lurs and Persians of Iran are all Shi'is. Religious difference among Kurds is expressed *in practice*, with the widespread phenomenon of adherence to religious brotherhoods, particularly the Qadiriya and Naqshbandiya, and what many find bizarre manifestations of devotion – such as fire-eating.

Not all Kurds adhere to Sunni Islam. In north-west Anatolian Kurdistan an estimated 3 million Kurds adhere to an unorthodox form of Shi'ism, and are called Alevi<sup>5</sup> (not to be confused with the Alawites of Syria), and are mainly Zaza-speaking (though neither all Zaza-speakers are Alevi, nor are all Alevi Kurds, more are probably Turks). South-eastern and extreme southern Kurdish tribes subscribe to Ithna'asheri Shi'i Islam,<sup>6</sup> the 'established' faith of Iran; in religious matters Kurds have tended to conform with orthodoxy rather than declare their difference from it.

Two other religions, both considered 'Islamic deviations' exist among Kurds:

Ahl-i Haqq (People of the Truth) is an extreme Shi'i syncretist sect to be found among the tribes west of Kermanshah and some settled Kurds further east in south-eastern Kurdistan.<sup>7</sup>

Yazidism is another syncretist religion which has absorbed elements from almost every religion in the region.<sup>8</sup> Yazidis are to be found in the former Soviet Union, Jabal Sinjar, due west of Mosul, and Syria, although there are relatively few followers. Their most sacred shrine is in Sheikhan, due east of Mosul. During the 1830s and 1840s Yazidis (and Christians) endured considerable persecution at the hands of their Muslim neighbours, Arabs, Kurds and Turks, at various times, and many emigrated to the Caucasus. The Yazidi community in Turkey has been harassed into leaving.

Yazidis probably do not exceed 100,000 today. They continue to be a persecuted community.<sup>9</sup> The Yazidis are all Kurds, although they have frequently found common cause with Christian communities, largely on account of shared persecution. Since the 1950s, however, they have increasingly identified with Kurdish nationalism partly on account of the discrimination suffered at governmental hands. In 1974 many Yazidis joined the Kurdish rebellion, and Yazidi leaders took refuge with the Barzanis that year (see later).

Christians and Jews have always lived among the Kurds. As a result of the collapse of the old pluralism, political uncertainty and some persecution, there are now far fewer, although the following can still be found in the region:

Armenians to the north, from Van northwards;

Assyrians, both Nestorian and Chaldean (erstwhile Nestorians now uniate with Rome) in Bahdinan and Urmiya;

Suriani (Syrian Orthodox) Christians in Tur Abdin near Mardin, and in Jazirah.

Most Jews left in the early 1950s, fearful of the bit-

ter feelings created by the establishment of Israel in Arab Palestine.<sup>10</sup>

It is interesting to note that Jews and Christians used to speak an almost identical ancient Semitic dialect. Followers of both religions have lived in separate villages and also mingled with the Kurds, providing a number of artisan skills which virtually disappeared once most of them left.



# Kurdish society<sup>11</sup>

**M**uch of Kurdish society is essentially tribal, and derives from the largely nomadic and semi-nomadic existence of most Kurdish tribes in previous centuries. Loyalties, first to the immediate family, thence to the tribe are as strong as in the Arab world. However, unlike the Arabs, Kurdish tribal cohesion is based on a mix of blood tie and territorial loyalty; yet a substantial number of Kurds in low-lying areas are not tribal even in a territorial sense. Nomadism, undoubtedly one source of tribal structure, rapidly diminished during the second half of the nineteenth century and is now virtually non-existent.

## The bonds of religion

**A**longside the tribal ties are strong religious loyalties, especially to the sheikhs, the local leaders of religious brotherhoods. This phenomenon is far more recent, dating from the first half of the nineteenth century (see below), when two orders, the Qadiriya and the Naqshbandiya, began to spread very rapidly throughout Kurdistan. The reason for the success of these orders is discussed later in this report.

The religious path was open to all men. Through personal spiritual authority and through acquisition of land rights even the poorest man, if he was ambitious, could reach the top of the social ladder as a landed sheikh. If his son chose to follow the path of religious study a sheikhly dynasty imbued with secular as well as religious power could be established. Mahmud Barzinja, Mulla Mustafa Barzani and Jalal Talabani (twentieth century leaders of Iraqi Kurds) all have sheikhly antecedents – an asset even in the apparently secular business of nationalism – although many sheikhs and their relatives have never used their position for secular aggrandizement.

Sheikhs have achieved an extraordinary hold on the Kurdish community, with each village or tribal sub-section tending to be loyal to one or other order. So tenacious is this loyalty that although Mustafa Kemal Atatürk suppressed and proscribed all religious orders in Turkey as long ago as 1925, they continue to thrive underground, and represent a significant obstacle to the efforts of socialists to mobilize the people along class lines.

Even since 1970 when left-wing movements in Turkey started to make real inroads into Kurdish society, the unpoliticized continue to vote for candidates who are chiefs or sheikhs, or possess these connections. Loyalty will persist even in an exploitative situation for a very long time, for some Kurds who consider themselves 'progressive' can still feel emotional loyalties to chief or sheikh. The support Sheikh Izzedin Husaini, admittedly himself sympathetic to the left, currently enjoys among extreme left-wing Iranian Kurds is just such an example.

## The bonds of tribalism

**K**urdish tribalism is far from homogeneous, and is now in a period of disintegration, although tribal values remain strong. It is extremely difficult to classify Kurdish tribalism, since there is a complexity of relationship which changes almost from tribe to tribe. Beyond loyalty based on blood tie and territoriality lies the organization of tribal confederations, tribes and sub-tribes. It is almost impossible to generalize about these, except to say that the difference is essentially one of degree rather than kind. Within the confederation, and even within the sub-tribe, there exist both blood tie relationships and others based on mutual interest.

Loyalties of one group to another are not immutable, and can be severed and different ones negotiated, in response to political or economic situations. When an ambitious chief tries to extend his territory or the number of loyal groups within his control, there will almost certainly be a counter-move and shift of alliances as others endeavour to contain his ambition. This counter-move may be inspired by central government, or by neighbouring tribal groups who do not wish the 'equilibrium' to be disturbed. Thus when considering the underlying tension between the mountain and the plain (the desire and ability to maintain a greater degree of independence from government than plainspeople can), the potential and reality of alliance between mountain tribe and government against another tribe must always be borne in mind.

It would seem that the tribal confederations, the largest tribal groupings, were originally created or fostered by the state, and formalized by the Ottomans and later the Persians, in order to guard the approaches to the border. The Jaf confederation in southern Kurdistan is a prime example. The paramount chief accepted by the tribes also received official title from the state, thus drawing him closer to the state apparatus. He also nearly always claimed foreign descent, sometimes including *sayyid* (descent from the Prophet) status. In some cases the paramount family had no blood relationship whatsoever with members of the confederation. These two attributes, government recognition and noble, semi-religious origins, gave him a position above and outside the internal politics of the tribe, making his position as arbiter of internal disputes immensely strong.

One might wonder why the settlement of disputes is so important. But in Kurdish society, like others dependent on strong blood ties, a quarrel between two people is almost a contradiction in terms. No relatives of someone in a dispute can easily stand apart since they are required to take their relative's side. Thus all disputes take on a dangerous factional quality. The need to settle such disputes within a tribe is always urgent to prevent the tribe being torn apart. That can only be done by the chief or

some other respected and impartial (or theoretically so) individual. Many paramount chiefs surrounded themselves with a 'praetorian guard', who had no blood loyalty to others in the confederation, and could provide the core of the confederation's fighting capability.

Within the confederation were the tribes consisting of smaller groups, the land-owning or territory-controlling (in a nomadic sense) village groupings, descending mainly from a common, real or fictitious, patrilineal ancestor, but with other non-relative members of the village. Until 1920, their economy was based almost exclusively on grazing flocks and illegal trading (and banditry) in the frontier region between the Ottoman and Persian empires.

Kurdish society on the plain and in the foothills differs so markedly from that of mountain Kurds that in many respects they can be treated as a separate culture. The plain economy was and is sedentary, combining pastoralism with the more important business of growing barley, rice, tobacco and wheat. Blood ties frequently exist but they are not as all-embracing as among tribes with a nomadic tradition, and even those who might call themselves a tribe are usually subject to an wholly unrelated landlord family that has title to the land from the government, and claims no bonds of loyalty from those who work its land. The relationship is far more directly exploitative than that of the paramount chief in the mountains ever was, because the landlord was frequently an absentee, did not rely on the peasantry as a fighting force, and could call on government forces to quell dissent. The landlord family has responsibilities primarily to government, and traditionally may have been in a vassal gift-exchange relationship with government, being recognized by the latter as fief-holder on condition it provided taxes and dues, and probably conscripts. The tribal people under it, while practising loyalty between themselves, might well be in a relationship akin to serfdom with the fief-holding family.

Some of these people formed sub-tribes, related to tribes in the mountains. Others did not, and many were peasants without any tribal ties at all. All, however, had more in common with the other villages of the plains and foothills close to the mountains, both Arab Muslim and Christian villages, than with the mountain Kurds. These lowlanders viewed the mountain Kurds with the same apprehension as they did the desert Arabs. Some suffered from both, the bedouin driven north by the heat for summer grazing, and the Kurds driven down the mountains in winter. Sometimes peasants would burn off the grass before the mountain Kurds could bring their animals down to the lowlands for winter pasture.

The man of the household tended to be responsible for external affairs, and among the nomadic tribes military prowess was highly valued. Women took care of domestic affairs, and in addition those who were peasants shared in agricultural labour and those who were nomadic shared in the tasks of stock-rearing. They functioned, and to some extent continue to function, within a hierarchical society defined according to tribe (or class), gender and age.

Apart from the rural peasantry, there evolved the urbanized Kurds, who were largely subsumed into the predominant culture of the plain. Unless they were absentee landlords (a growing phenomenon in the twentieth century) they were natural opponents to the tribal chiefs, both as

the first systematic purveyors of national ideas, and as people who regarded tribalism as 'backward' compared to urban government and administration. In addition to this urban, educated class a new 'oil proletariat' has also grown, both in Iraq and Turkey. In this sense the Kurdish nationalist struggle during the twentieth century has been one not only between Kurd and non-Kurd rulers, but also between the concept of tribal rule and modern government, a struggle which has split and weakened the Kurdish movement.

## The power of the *aghas*

Although most tribes formed confederations, effective political power tended to lie more in the hands of *aghas*, as the chiefs were known, controlling either one village or a small group of them. The authority of confederate 'paramount chiefs' depended both on governmental recognition and on the willingness of these lower-ranking chiefs to do their bidding. The latter were reluctant to sacrifice their power to that of the *gha*.

It is easy to appreciate the power of these village *aghas*. Most villages, certainly within the central Zagros area, depended upon authority and discipline for their viability. Someone had to ensure the equitable allocation and maintenance of the agricultural terraces, carefully maintained for millennia, and decide where and when the livestock should be taken to graze in winter, and above all how the water resources were to be shared.<sup>12</sup> That someone was, and still frequently is, the village *gha*. His authority must be beyond question if the village is to run smoothly.

His authority is accepted partly because discipline is obviously essential for a viable society, but also because 50 per cent of the village may be close relatives, and most of the remainder related in some way. The *aghas* have a large number of close relatives, forming the bedrock of social solidarity, because until quite recently they tended to be polygamous, while other villagers would almost always be monogamous. Families of *aghas* thus increased, while those of commoners remained static or even declined.

This explains why nearly everyone in the village is related to one another, and also why – despite despotism or exploitation – an *gha's* power and authority has remained so tenacious. His power of approval allows him to ensure that villagers do not marry outside the village, thereby ensuring that he controls any relationships beyond the village boundary, partly through his own marriages to the daughters of neighbouring chiefs. He even used to control contact with visitors to the village, since it was only in the *gha's* guest house (a place well provisioned by all the villagers) that a stranger could be received.

Because he could thus effectively insulate the villagers from ties with the outside world, the *gha* alone handled diplomacy both with other villages and with the government. Here, if anywhere, the *gha* was vulnerable to the machinations of an ambitious relative. For hundreds of years a tradition of government recognition has been a valuable confirmation of village or tribal process. Withdrawal of that recognition, or support to a young pretender, could threaten an *gha's* position. In the fifteenth century the Turkoman dynasties, the Aqkoyunlu,

Karakoyunlu and Safavids, successfully appointed Kurdish chiefs, killing those appointed by the previous dynasty. Relations with government and with neighbouring chiefs were interrelated. Thus as recently as the 1974–5 Iraqi-Kurdish war, while an estimated 50,000 Kurds fought against the government, tens of thousands of irregulars fought for it. In a situation where tenure of the chiefship is not guaranteed, many *aghas* would have been at risk if the rebel chiefs had defeated the army and persuaded government to recognize a new order in the mountains.

## The importance of land

As in most societies, control of land is a critical component of power. In the mountains land was traditionally controlled by the tribe, and the *agha* was responsible for the equitable allocation of pastoral rights. On the plain and in the foothills the community worked on land held in fief, or later directly owned, by a landlord who shared neither common lineage nor common economic interest with those who worked it.

During the mid-nineteenth century, however, the reform in land-holding started a process of ‘detrribalizing’ land, reinforcing the position of both landlord and mountain *agha* as titleholders over much previously commonly held land. This process happened on both the Ottoman and Persian sides of the border, increasing stratification within the tribe, reducing communal features of the tribal economy, and encouraging a new class of absentee landlords who frequently cooperated with tribal chiefs still in the mountains to ensure their common interests. The transition, at the beginning of the twentieth century, from a subsistence to a market economy intensified these interests and accelerated absorption of the landlord class into the state establishment.

After 1920 in Iran and Iraq the spread of land registration gave title to land in the name of individuals so that it became effectively their absolute property. This strengthened the *agha* class, while tribespeople increasingly became a landless cultivator class. This process was made a good deal easier with the creation of more impermeable international borders after 1920, for this destroyed the nomadic pattern of many tribes which had seasonally crossed the mountains. In Iran this was accompanied by forcible settlement of the nomads by the shah. By the 1960s, 78 per cent of cultivated land in Iranian Kurdistan was registered as privately owned, only 2 per cent remaining ‘tribal’. In Turkey, following the transition from a tribal to a capitalist economy, by 1965, 62 per cent of the 800,000 farmers of the Kurdish area were land-holders; but of these only 2 per cent owned 30.5 per cent of cultivable land.<sup>13</sup>

It was inevitable that this process should, in all three countries, draw the new landlord class into the ruling establishment. Direct government increased the power of village *aghas*, since their relationship with government was no longer regulated through confederate paramount chiefs. Tribespeople allowed their *aghas* to register tribal land in the *agha’s* name partly because both were ignorant of the implications, and also because of the widespread aversion to being registered, since this always meant an

increased governmental hold on individual families for taxation and – worse still – conscription into the army.

The comparatively recent advent of mechanization of agriculture on fertile plains has resulted in only seasonal work for the villager. This has led to seasonal migration to nearby or even distant towns (as far as Ankara or Baghdad) for employment. This migration has been intensified by land scarcity and underdevelopment of Kurdish areas, creating a permanent absence from the village of many working males. The growth of a Kurdish proletariat, and industrial capital, outside Kurdistan has had an inevitable effect on the overly simple picture of Kurdish life described above. In the last 30 years or so the position of the *agha* has been eroded by these socio-economic factors far more than by any efforts of the state. Nevertheless it is extremely important to remember the power of tradition, and that the advance of these socio-economic changes has occurred unevenly and is still under way.

Before turning to the bloody and colourful history of the Kurdish people one further point must be made:

*The tales of all the raids and feuds and wars in these mountains ... deeds of daring, self-sacrifice, greed and treachery form the subject for Kurdish epic songs, which the young warrior hears as he [sic] lies awake in his cradle. One cannot fail to be impressed by the thorough indoctrination in the heroics of bloodletting that young Kurds, among other mountaineers, undergo.*<sup>14</sup>

Those deeds, not least the modern nationalist movement, pass into a potent folklore which is still a major part of the political education of young Kurds today.

# Historical background to 1920

**K**urdistan has always been an unruly area for the governments of the region. Until the advent of modern weaponry, communications and technology, governments were seldom able to directly administer the less accessible parts of Kurdistan. They therefore sought to coopt tribal chiefs and petty princes in the region. Broadly speaking, government sought three things: troops for the Muslim armies; relatively secure trade routes across Kurdistan, notably the silk road from Central Asia; and the repulsion of any external challengers to the government's nominal sovereignty.

Kurdish chiefs, for their part, sought relative independence for the territory they dominated; reasonable prosperity; and opportunities for aggrandizement *vis-à-vis* their neighbours. On the whole governments could live with the first of these requirements, welcomed the second, and used the third as a lever, backing rival chiefs or pretenders against uncooperative local chiefs and rewarding and strengthening loyal ones.

During the Middle Ages many chiefs tied themselves into the ruling establishment, some becoming quasi-feudal servants of the state rather than tribal chiefs, others providing troops. Those who provided and led Kurdish troops frequently settled outside Kurdistan.

Many tribes at this stage were either wholly or partly nomadic, moving to uplands in summer, but coming onto lower ground during the cold months. They benefited from the social and economic upheavals resulting from the destruction of the peasantry by the Mongols and Turkomans in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. They inherited as grazing land large tracts of previously agricultural land in Anatolia, and were able to penetrate into Armenian regions for the first time.

The struggle between the Ottoman and Safavid empires, newly emerged in Turkey and Persia respectively during the sixteenth century, allowed the Kurdish tribes and their chiefs to strengthen their position and importance. Following the decisive victory of the Ottoman Sultan Selim over the Safavid Shah Ismail at Chaldiran in central Anatolia in 1514, the Kurdish *aghas* assisted in throwing Ismail out of eastern Anatolia, and establishing what, after the treaty of 1639, became a durable border between the Ottoman and Persian worlds. Most of the Kurdish tribes sided with the Ottomans since the latter offered the chiefs fiefdoms, and to some principalities (emirates) in return for loyalty to the sultan and the maintenance of security in the border region.

A number of Kurdish emirates were created and provided the overall political structure of Kurdistan until the nineteenth century. Each of these was ruled by a family

granted hereditary title by a government which was able to select the actual family member it wanted as emir. While this might seem an admirable arrangement in that it allowed Kurdish society considerable freedom to continue undisturbed, it also gave the state an important hold on key positions. For most families usually had a relative ready to do the state's bidding if the incumbent proved rebellious. This has remained an enduring feature of Kurdish relations with government.

Despite their closer cultural ties to Iran, the Kurds were discouraged from supporting the Persian Safavids because of the latter's severe treatment of *aghas* who had acted for preceding dynasties, their increasing Shi'ite distinctiveness inherited from the preceding Aq Koyunlu dynasty, and their attempts at direct government.

## Extension of direct Ottoman control

**T**he Ottomans were strong enough in the first half of the nineteenth century to dismantle the emirates, and the large tribal confederations which maintained them. They were impelled to do so partly by the growing European threat, felt particularly in the Balkans and in eastern Anatolia. This threat was most overt in the form of Russian military encroachments, but also manifest in trade and missionary penetration all over the empire.

Some of the emirs rebelled and were duly defeated. It is tempting to view them as early nationalists, but it would be unwise to assume that they were concerned with more than their personal power, for they proved incapable of uniting against the common enemy.

The destruction of the emirates broke Kurdish power structures into much smaller tribal segments, and led to a widespread breakdown in stability. Ottoman authority frequently did not extend far beyond the towns in which it kept troops. Bereft of paramount arbiters there was frequently disorder and rivalry between the tribal chiefs.

The vacuum was filled by the leaders of what one might describe as 'folk' Islam. For centuries Sufi brotherhoods had enjoyed a strong following in the countryside in many parts of the empire. During the early nineteenth century, the Qadiriya and the Naqshbandiya brotherhoods established a strong hold in Kurdistan. The sheikhs who led these brotherhoods acquired followings and power by force of personality. Some of them began to arbitrate in disputes between chiefs, acquiring their own power bases in villages which sought sheikhly protection or patronage.

One or two sheikhly families, most notably those of Nihri

(near Hakkari), Barzan (on the Greater Zab river) and Barzinja (near Sulaymaniya) became very powerful locally. In 1880 Sheikh Ubaidullah of Nihri, a Naqshbandi, invaded western Iran where he also had client villages; his forces also plundered and slew many Shi'i inhabitants around lake Urumiya before they withdrew over the border. At the time Ubaidullah appeared to appeal for the establishment of an independent Kurdish national entity,<sup>15</sup> and this is how many Kurds have interpreted his actions. But one should be cautious. It seems more likely that he was acutely concerned by the growing Armenian national threat and by (Kurdish) tribal raids on his villages, and that he sought the kind of independence enjoyed by the old emirates, still subject and loyal to the sultan, but free from local Ottoman administrators. His invasion of Iran may have benefited from the connivance of the sultan, who reluctantly exiled Ubaidullah following European pressure.<sup>16</sup>

One reason for suspecting the sultan was more sympathetic to Sheikh Ubaidullah than he cared to admit, was that they shared a common fear of Armenian nationalism, and Russia's interest in exploiting it. He sought to shore up eastern Anatolia against these threats with an Islamic policy aimed at stiffening the resolve of Muslims against the Christian threat. In 1891 he raised a large tribally based irregular cavalry force among the Kurds, known as the Hamidiya. Ostensibly raised to defend the eastern border, the Hamidiya rapidly became better known for its disorderly behaviour and depredations, especially against Armenian villagers, reaching a nightmare climax in the waves of massacres in 1894-5. Kurds moved into the villages of those whom they had slaughtered.

## The Young Turks and the Kurds

The Young Turk revolution of 1908, which overthrew the despotic rule of Sultan Abdulhamid and promised constitutional reform and representative participation in government, did not fulfil expectation. In the first euphoria a number of political clubs were established by Kurdish intellectuals, notables, officers and one or two educated *aghas* in Istanbul, Bitlis, Diyarbakir, Erzerum, Mosul, Mush and even Baghdad. Several Kurdish-medium schools were also established.

The first Kurdish 'Society for Progress and Mutual Aid' was formed in 1908 by the illustrious Badr Khan family and by Sheikh Ubaidullah's son, Sayyid Abd al Qadir and his supporters. However, their rivalry led to schism and the Ottomans had no difficulty in closing it down. Most Kurdish chiefs who knew of the organization probably had little time for nationalist ideas which might eventually threaten their own local power. As a result of this and the highly decentralized nature of Kurdish society, such currents made little impact outside a relatively small circle.

In October 1914 the Ottomans declared war on the Allies, notably Russia, which threatened its north-eastern border. For the majority of Kurdish conscripts and tribal irregulars the conflict was cast in terms of Muslim versus Christian. Many of them readily complied with Turkish orders to destroy the Armenian presence in Anatolia. The Kurdish population also suffered acute privation during Russo-Armenian counter-attacks and Turkey's scorched

earth tactics which led to massive displacement and death from exposure and starvation. Having used the Kurds against the Armenians, Turkey also intended to engineer the forced assimilation of the Kurds into Turkish society but failed to implement its scheme.<sup>17</sup>

## The peace settlement of 1918 and after

It was a radically different world in 1918. The Ottoman Empire was defeated, prostrate and with foreign armies encamped on much of its territories, with British forces occupying almost all of present-day Iraq, including some of the Kurdish areas. Beyond the empire's borders much else had happened: Austria-Hungary had collapsed, and western Persia endured the presence of British, Russian and Turkish forces confronting each other in the strategic zone around Azerbaijan and the Caucasus. Tsarist Russia had been overthrown by the Bolsheviks. Allied plans for post-war settlement included the apportionment of Turkish parts of the empire to France, Greece, Italy and Russia. These remained almost entirely a dead letter because of the collapse of Tsarist Russia during the war and because Turkey's defeat triggered a major internal upheaval inside Turkey.

An entirely different struggle was also to take place. This was between the expressed or unexpressed strategic or imperial interests of the powers with military force still at their command in the area, and the principles of civilization accepted in a general sense at the conference table by these same powers – so long as they did not interfere with their own plans. These principles were set out most clearly by President Woodrow Wilson in his *Fourteen Point Programme for World Peace*, point twelve of which stated that non-Turkish minorities of the Ottoman Empire should be 'assured of an absolute unmo- lested opportunity of autonomous development'.

It was an admirable if unrealistic aspiration to create a just order in the Middle East. The Kurdish people were ill-prepared to face the challenge of the post-war settlement and the new nationalism. Most of them still believed in membership of the Sunni community, the basis of Ottoman society irrespective of language or race, and feared Allied reprisals for their participation in the Armenian genocide.<sup>18</sup> Internally the Kurds were weakened by the traditional structures under which most of them continued to live. Tribal loyalty remained far stronger for village or pastoralist Kurds than new ideas about national identity. *Aghas* were a good deal more concerned with holding or increasing their position locally than with uniting with old adversaries in neighbouring valleys, or with those urban Kurds more capable of negotiating with the outside world.

The intellectuals tried, as they had done before the war, to establish political groups that would further Kurdish independence or at least autonomy. Of these the most important was Kurdistan Taali Djemiyeti (Society for the Recovery of Kurdistan) which enjoyed the leadership of Kurdistan's most illustrious *émigrés* in Istanbul. It was not long, however, before the society was split between

secessionists, autonomists and those content with assimilation into Turkish society. As a result, the Kurds failed to produce a coherent policy or leadership.

The terms of the Treaty of Sèvres, signed on 20 August 1920, brought the Kurds and the Armenians closer to statehood than ever before or since. The relevant parts of the treaty stated that a commission composed of Allied appointees would:

*Draft within six months from the coming into force of the present Treaty a scheme of local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates, south of the southern boundary of Armenia as it may be hereafter determined, and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia (Article 62).*

*If within one year from the coming into force of the present Treaty the Kurdish people within the areas defined in Article 62 shall address themselves to the Council of the League of Nations in such a manner as to show that a majority of the population in these areas desires independence from Turkey, and if the Council then considers that these people are capable of such independence and recommends that it be granted to them, Turkey hereby agrees to execute such a recommendation, and to renounce all rights and titles over these areas ... If and when such renunciation takes place, no objection will be raised by the Principal Allied Powers to the voluntary adhesion to such an independent Kurdish State of the Kurds inhabiting the part of Kurdistan which has hitherto been included in the Mosul Vilayet [part of British-occupied Mesopotamia]' (Article 64).*

It was Britain that largely drafted these two articles. It still hoped for the creation of a Kurdish buffer state between Turkish Anatolia and British Mesopotamia, and was prepared to cede southern Kurdish areas in order to achieve that entity.<sup>19</sup>

The Kurds were unable to make use of this treaty provision for two main reasons. They were unable to unite on account of their tribal composition, and their leaders were divided and perplexed by the options facing them: how to respond to the continuing Armenian threat; whether they wanted a state that would probably come under British tutelage; and crucially, whether to risk detaching from the Muslim Ottoman heartlands. The majority of chiefs did not favour this risk.



# The Kurds in Turkey

The defeated Ottoman government in Istanbul which had signed, but not ratified, the Treaty of Sèvres did not survive to implement it. The seizure of its Arab territories of Mesopotamia and Syria; the threat of the loss of eastern Anatolia to a new Armenian and possibly a Kurdish state; the entry into Cilician Anatolia (essentially the Taurus range and Adana plain) of a French force intent on annexing it to Syria; and most of all the abject failure of the government in Istanbul to respond to the invasion of Ottoman Turkey by the Greeks, of whom large numbers were to be found in Thrace (European Turkey) and in western Anatolia, had already resulted in a revolt in Anatolia led by Mustafa Kemal.

## The regime of Kemal Ataturk

The support of a significant proportion of Kurds for Mustafa Kemal's revolt indicated their identity with the other Muslims of Anatolia and their fears of falling within an Armenian, and therefore Christian, state. Kemal had been careful to appeal, despite his own Turkish nationalist views, to Muslim unity. Kurdish forces under Turkish officers defeated and drove out the troops of Georgia and Armenia.

In the west, Kemal established undisputed leadership of the nation by his defeat of the Greeks and the elimination of virtually all the Christians remaining in Anatolia. The Allies found themselves having to renegotiate the settlement of the remnants of an empire which had ceased to exist. Although they themselves kept virtually all that they had wanted (France conceded Cilician Anatolia to Turkey), they were no longer able to negotiate for the Kurds, let alone the Armenians. In framing the provisions of the Treaty of Sèvres there had never been any intention of using force to implement it. The Allies were exhausted by the rigours of war, and force was never an option.

They therefore arranged a new peace conference at Lausanne, finalized in treaty in July 1923, whereby Turkey, alone of those defeated in the conflict, managed to impose terms on the victors. It re-established complete and undivided sovereignty over eastern Thrace and all Anatolia, although the question of the disputed Mosul province was left unsettled. It also repudiated the British request that it should recognize the Kurds as a national minority.

Despite official statements of recognition of 'the national and social rights of the Kurds',<sup>20</sup> it quickly became clear that Kemal's interest following the defeat of the Christian elements was in the creation of a nation-state along European and authoritarian lines, and it was a specifically Turkish and secular state that he intended.

The abolition of the Sultanate in 1922, and of the Caliphate in 1924, removed the twin ideological pillars on which belief in a Muslim state, for which Kurds had will-

ingly fought alongside Turks, against the Armenian and Greek threat, had depended. These abolitions also removed the secular and spiritual bases from which the authority of *aghas* and sheikhs, however indirectly, derived. With the abolition of the Caliphate, on 3 March 1924, all public vestiges of separate Kurdish identity were crushed. Kurdish associations, publications, religious fraternities, schools and teaching foundations were all banned.

Therefore, the threat to Kurdish identity and the threat to the traditional order of *aghas* and sheikhs served to unify Kurds of different viewpoints. Within a short space of time many politically-aware notables, *aghas*, sheikhs and army officers were loosely attached to an organization called Azadi (Freedom). However a brief mutiny among troops near the Iraqi border in 1924 led to the round-up of Azadi's leadership.

In February 1925 a short-lived revolt broke out in the countryside north and north-east of Diyarbakir, led by the Naqshbandi Sheikh Said. The revolt failed to spread further afield largely because it was confined to Zaza-speaking Sunnis. Most Sunni tribes remained indifferent, while some Alevi tribes actually assisted the authorities. With the failure to seize Diyarbakir itself, the rising rapidly collapsed. It never had any chance of success because the authorities could always concentrate their forces faster than the rebels.

The main significance of the revolt is that it opened the way for the wholesale suppression of Kurdistan, including the religious brotherhoods. Thousands were killed, and hundreds of villages razed, the pacification process itself provoking other tribes into rebellion until 1927. It also gave Kemal (who, significantly, assumed the name 'Ataturk', or Father of Turks, in 1934) the pretext for a one-party state, and the suppression of any opposition to the governing ideology of the new republic. Symptomatic of that ideology was the view that Kurds were dispensable, as Turkey's Foreign Minister explained:

*In their Kurdish case, their cultural level is so low, their mentality so backward, that they cannot be simply in the general Turkish body politic ... they will die out, economically unfitted for the struggle for life in competition with the more advanced and cultured Turks ... as many as can will emigrate ... while the rest will undergo the elimination of the unfit.*<sup>21</sup>

In 1928 another major rising took place, this time on Mount Ararat (Agri Dagh), led by local chiefs supported by Khoybun (Independence), a new pan-Kurdish movement. This revolt was only suppressed in 1930, following Turkey's insistence that Iran cede territory on the eastern slopes of Ararat to ensure the area could be encircled. Once again Turkey pacified the region with great brutality, killing large numbers of non-combatants and exiling others. Law 1850 gave the security forces a free hand to commit massacres and other atrocities throughout the second half of 1930 without fear of prosecution.



The then Minister of Justice made clear the relationship of Turk and non-Turk in the republic:

*I believe that the Turk must be the only lord, the only master of this country. Those who are not of pure Turkish stock can have only one right in this country, the right to be servants and slaves.*<sup>22</sup>

Yet again the government used mass deportations to pacify the area and assimilate the Kurds into the Turkish population. In June 1934, Law 2510 divided Turkey into three zones: (i) localities to be reserved for the habitation of persons possessing Turkish culture; (ii) regions to which persons of non-Turkish culture could be moved for assimilation into Turkish culture; (iii) regions for complete evacuation. However, the size of the task rendered this legislation wholly impracticable.

In 1936 the government moved in earnest against the Alevi Kurds of Dersim (now called Tunceli). Dersim had always been resistant to government interference, with no less than 11 expeditions sent to quell the region since 1876. Now Dersim merely wished to be free from Kemalist assimilation and deportation. The army deployed 50,000 troops who killed thousands, deported many more and systematically destroyed all remoter human settlements. It is said that 40,000 perished. The area remained under martial law until 1946.<sup>23</sup>

## The Kurds in post-Ataturk Turkey, 1938-83

Such brutal repression silenced Kurdish expression for almost 30 years, but the government nevertheless remained tense, and Kurdistan remained a military zone closed to foreigners until 1966. Yet it was inevitable that any Turkish liberalization was also bound to affect Kurdish areas. In 1946 the authoritarian one-party system was relaxed and an opposition Democrat Party established, which lost no time in promising greater civic freedom, restoration of confiscated lands, and wooing the sheikhs and *aghas* and others penalized by Kemalist policies. It was not long before rival parties solicited the votes of Kurdistan through the *gha*/sheikhly class, bribing landlords with tractors, village electrification, and agricultural roads. It was said that Diyarbakir province, for example, was controlled electorally by a mere 20 landlords. Thus the state revived the very class Kemal had set out to eliminate 30 years earlier.

Military conscription, deportations to western Turkey and mechanization of agriculture – which drove tens of thousands off the land – all helped to create a Kurdish urban proletariat. Forty per cent of migrant labourers moving out of Kurdistan settled in Istanbul. During the 1960s this process, the result of Turkish persecution and economic neglect, bore unexpected fruit. For it was among the new urban class that a Kurdish revival first became apparent – ironically among the young gifted Kurds whom the state had handpicked for assimilation. From 1958 onwards, Kurdish intellectuals began to propagate discussion of the problems of ‘the East’, the euphemism now used for Kurdistan. In 1959 a major

Kurdish demonstration led to the arrest of 49 Kurdish intellectuals who escaped execution only on account of state fear of international repercussions. The following year a military coup unexpectedly led to the most liberal constitution in the republic’s history, allowing freedom of expression, of the press and of association. Kurds began to express their discontent in the Turkish press and even tried publishing in Kurdish, a move which rapidly led to arrests and the closing down of new publications. National feeling was greatly inspired by the exploits of Mulla Mustafa Barzani (see Iraq section), a Kirmanji.

Interconnected organizations now carried Kurdish feeling forward. Given that no specifically Kurdish party was – or ever has been – permitted, many Kurds joined the newly legal Turkish Workers’ Party (TWP). Many students or would-be students joined Dev Genc (the Federation of Revolutionary Youth), and these were instrumental in major Kurdish popular demonstrations in 1967, the first real defiance of the state since 1938. In 1969 a network of clubs, known as Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Hearths (DDKO), spread like wildfire from Ankara across Kurdistan. This was a Kurdish development of unmistakably nationalist character. DDKO was closed down in autumn 1970, and its leaders imprisoned, including the young Turkish sociologist Ismail Besikci, destined to spend much of the next 25 years in prison for his espousal of the Kurdish cause. At its Fourth Congress in October 1970, TWP affirmed: ‘There is a Kurdish people in the East of Turkey ... the fascist authorities representing the ruling classes have subjected the Kurdish people to a policy of assimilation and intimidation’.<sup>24</sup> TWP was consequently also shut down a few months later, following Turkey’s second military intervention in March 1971. A general crackdown ensued, with the arrest of thousands of Kurds and left-wingers. No Turkish government was able to abide any public discussion of its minority question.

Following the return to civil government in 1974, thousands of young militants were amnestied, and many new left-wing groups appeared, in whose ranks Kurds were heavily represented because of the massive drift of Kurdish students and workers in search of education or work. However, many Turks (and some Kurds) were attracted to the extreme right, in particular to the Grey Wolves, a youth group with fascist and racist tendencies. With unemployment having risen almost threefold to 1.5 million by 1977, these opposing groups had no difficulty in recruiting young people eager for ‘action’. As a consequence, the university campuses of Turkey and also much of Kurdistan became a battlefield between left and right, with the government formally trying to hold the ring but at a local level undeniably sympathetic to the right. The left-right contest became a vehicle and form of camouflage for other contests: Turk versus Kurd, Sunni versus Alevi, Sunni versus secularist, artisan/trader class versus rural migrant and urban proletariat.

In December 1978 a major massacre of Alevi Kurds by Grey Wolves took place in Maras, in which at least 109 died (the official figure) and probably a great many more.

It was during the 1970s period of growing left-right conflict that a number of Kurds, despairing even of the Turkish left, began to form new parties. These began to spread left-wing ideas, more or less for the first time, into

the Kurdish countryside, and directly clashing for the first time with traditionalist tribal and Islamic values, thereby polarizing Kurdish society between those supportive of the progressive and secularist left and those supportive of traditional values, the rule of landlords and the mainstream parties of the republic. The growing chaos and government paralysis was reflected in the rising death toll. In the 20-month period following the Maras massacre no fewer than 3,856 were killed in the conflict.<sup>25</sup>

On 12 September 1980 the army intervened for the third time, rounding up thousands of left-wingers and Kurds, and deploying over half of its forces in Kurdistan. A new period of stringency against the Kurds had begun.

## The Kurdish challenge since 1983

When Turkey was again returned to civil government in 1983 it was widely believed that armed dissidence had been crushed and that order had been restored, particularly to the eastern part of the country. However, in August 1984 a hitherto largely unknown group, *Partiya Karkari Kurdistan* (PKK – the Kurdistan Workers' Party), made two dramatic attacks on army posts in the south-east, killing 24 soldiers. This was the beginning of Turkey's most serious Kurdish challenge ever.

In fact the PKK had been established as 'Apocular' or followers of 'Apo', the nickname of their leader, Abdullah Ocalan, in the mid-1970s. Ocalan had narrowly avoided capture in the round-ups of 1980, escaping to Syria. He and his colleagues adopted a doctrinaire Marxist-Leninist programme, but also devised a skilful and ruthless guerrilla campaign. Their targets were: the fascist right, the state and its agents, the Turkish left (for its failure to recognize Kurdish rights) and above all the Kurdish landlord class, seen as being hand-in-glove with Turkish rule and exploitative of the Kurdish masses. The PKK launched a series of bloody attacks on landlords and their families, demonstrating the inability of the state to protect its own. The PKK shocked many Kurds, first by its extreme left-wing politics, widely seen as anti-Islamic, and also by its use of female guerrillas. Over the years, its hard-left stance seemed less important than its championing of basic Kurdish rights. Likewise, the use of female fighters became a source of pride when once it had occasioned shame.

Kurdish society was also initially profoundly shocked by PKK violence, particularly its massacres of whole families, but soon discovered that the state easily outmatched PKK excesses. Military sweeps, degrading treatment, beatings, widespread and arbitrary arrest and the wholesale use of torture drove thousands of the impoverished and exploited rural population into the arms of the PKK. Indeed, the security forces proved to be the PKK's most efficient recruiting sergeant. As time passed, the casualty figures accelerated. By 1991, 2,500 had died in the conflict since 1984, but this figure rose to 3,000 by November 1991, doubled to 6,000 by the end of 1992, reached 10,000 by the end of 1993 and stood at approximately 20,000 by the end of 1995. By this stage Ankara had approximately 300,000 troops and gendarmes deployed in the region at an annual cost of \$8 billion, over 20 per cent of the annual budget. These it used not only inside Turkey,

but also for assaults on suspected PKK camps just inside Iraq. In October 1993 and March 1995 it launched two major operations, the former in collaboration with the Iraqi Kurdish parties, the latter unilaterally but with a 35,000-strong force crossing into Iraq.

In order to deny food and shelter to the PKK, the state undertook two basic measures. In 1985 it established a locally recruited auxiliary militia, the Village Guards, initially designed to protect targeted villages from PKK attack. Soon it was widened to include tribes whose leaders were friendly with the government. These often contained a criminal element. Through the payment of stipends that easily outmatched the income from stock-rearing and subsistence farming, the state started to attract large numbers. By 1990, 20,000 had joined the Village Guards, by 1993, 35,000 and by 1996 an estimated 60,000. The Village Guard system proved reminiscent of the *Hamidiya* a century earlier, its officers prone to use their power to settle local scores; to seize land from unprotected communities; to collaborate corruptly with local state officials, for smuggling and for fraudulent enrolment figures to obtain more state money. From the end of the 1980s, people were coerced to join the Village Guards, usually under threat that if they did not cooperate their village might be razed or their livestock destroyed. Thus the system was also corrupted in the sense that its loyalty to the state was compromised. Many of those unwillingly conscripted into its ranks had relatives fighting for the PKK.

The second measure applied by the state was to destroy the means of sustenance for the guerrillas. In July 1987 it promulgated the State of Emergency Legislation (Decree 285) whereby the governor of the emergency region was empowered to order the evacuation of villages. This emergency region covered the eight provinces of south-east Turkey.<sup>26</sup> In practice this meant rendering the whole countryside inhospitable by forcibly evacuating villages, first in the border provinces (Hakkari, Mardin, Siirt and Sirnak) with Iraq and Syria from which guerrillas were crossing, but later as the insurgency spread to the interior, from huge swathes of countryside in the provinces of Bitlis, Diyarbakir, Van and then even in Bingol, Elazig and Tunceli in the Anatolian heartlands. At first it was the apparently recalcitrant villages, but then it became wholesale, with even Village Guards being evicted. By 1995 at least 2,664 Kurdish villages and hamlets were recorded as either completely or partially destroyed.<sup>27</sup> In early 1996 it was reported that, having depopulated much of the emergency region, the security forces had started to evacuate Kurdish villages in the provinces of Erzincan and Sivas, and had already evacuated 169 villages there. By now perhaps 3 million rural Kurds had been rendered homeless by such methods. Many squatted in degrading and insanitary conditions both in Kurdistan and beyond. Diyarbakir expanded from a city of 500,000 in 1990 to that of over 1 million by 1995. Thousands moved on to Mediterranean cities like Adana, Iskanderun and Mersin. Others went to Ankara and Istanbul. In every shanty they came under police surveillance and harassment, and brick-built shelters were often bulldozed if it was learnt that a family member had joined the PKK.

In April 1990 Decree 285 had been strengthened by

Decree 413 which empowered the regional governor to suppress and censor all reporting on the region, thus stifling any informed debate on the crisis anywhere in Turkey. However, by 1990 no one could remain unaware of a serious problem in the east with burgeoning civil resistance to the state. This was marked primarily by major demonstrations on or around Nawruz, the Kurdish New Year (21 March).

As a consequence, what had been viewed as a low-intensity war in the east began to affect the political scene. In March 1987 it had still been possible for a senior minister to ask: 'Is there such a thing as a Kurd?'<sup>28</sup> By the end of 1991 that was no longer a credible position. Turgut Ozal, now President, was arguing for an amnesty for the guerrillas and contemplating dialogue, while Suleyman Demirel, the new Prime Minister, remarked: 'Turkey has recognized the Kurdish reality.'<sup>29</sup>

Several developments had, indeed, made denial of the Kurdish question an absurdity. In 1990 a new party, the People's Labour Party (HEP), had been formed by Kurdish MPs from the Social Democracy Populist Party (SHP). It lasted three years before being closed down on charges of 'separatism'. Its successor party, the Democratic Labour Party (DEP) was shut down a year later, in 1994, for the same offence after intimidation had prevented it taking part in the March 1994 local elections. While the Kurds demonstrated the growing power of the Kurdish vote, the state demonstrated its determination to deny the Kurds a democratic voice. In December 1995 DEP's successor, the People's Labour Party (HADEP) was able technically to participate in the general election, but it was ensured that it would be unable to represent the Kurdish population in any meaningful way. A threshold of 10 per cent of the overall vote was required to obtain parliamentary representation. Given the short notice of the election, the number of unregistered voters among the 3 million displaced, and the intimidation carried out by security forces at polling booths, there was no chance of HADEP gaining any parliamentary seats. However, in the event that it had done so, it would have discovered another insuperable obstacle in law:

*Political Parties may not (a) claim that there are any national minorities based on differences of national or religious cultures or on differences of sect or language on the territory of the Republic of Turkey; (b) pursue the objective of disrupting the national integrity by creating minorities ... by means of protecting, developing or promoting any language or culture other than the Turkish language or carrying out any activities to that effect.*<sup>30</sup>

In April 1991 Turgut Ozal had persuaded parliament to approve the lifting of Law 2932 and thereby permit Kurdish to be freely used except for broadcasts, publications and in education. By the end of the year Kurdish was also permitted for publications, but the state harassed those who tried to exercise this right. Editors were prosecuted for separatist activities, 17 journalists and vendors of the newspaper *Ozgur Gundem* were killed in the period of its existence – May 1992–April 1994 – by unknown assailants.<sup>31</sup> It was the beginning of a new and sinister phase in which those viewed as enemies of the state died

at the hands of unknown killers, or 'disappeared', only for their tortured corpses to be found later on waste ground. In the meantime, in order to balance his liberalization, Ozal inaugurated a new anti-terrorism law which defined as terrorism 'any kind of action ... with the aim of changing the characteristics of the republic',<sup>32</sup> a definition which gave the state freedom to stifle any democratic attempt to moderate the character of the state. Ozal was partly driven by the crisis in Iraqi Kurdistan (see below) and by the way in which this accelerated Kurdish feeling inside Turkey.

However, there were other factors which indicated that the military struggle had become a sideshow to the mass politicization of the Kurdish people. By the end of the 1980s, the acute disparity in wealth between the Kurdish region, where the income per head was 42 per cent of the national average and only one quarter that of the Marmara/Aegean region, and the rest of Turkey testified to a century of neglect. The state persisted in allocating less than 10 per cent of the development budget to the Kurdish region – a disproportionately small sum, whether judged according to population, geographical area, or the severity of under-development. This disparity of wealth was reinforced by the government's failure to tackle land reform in the east, mainly because landlords were still essential to the delivery of votes in the Kurdish countryside. This left 8 per cent of farming families in control of 50 per cent of the land, and 79 per cent of farmers holding 5 hectares or less, half of them holding no land at all.<sup>33</sup> This impoverishment was reinforced by low quality Turkish-medium education, despite the fact that in the countryside primary school age children only spoke Kurdish. No wonder, therefore, that only 70 per cent of children enrolled at primary school, that only 18 per cent went on to secondary school and that of these only 9 per cent completed the cycle.<sup>34</sup> In this direct way, the state's refusal to recognize and use Kurdish in primary education directly contributed to the economic misery that fuelled political and guerrilla opposition to the state.

This state refusal also helped to perpetuate the use of Kurdish at home. For the early drop-out rate remains substantially higher among girls than among boys. It is girls, predominantly, who fail to learn Turkish, and inevitably therefore it is through them, as young mothers, that the next generation also learns Kurdish as their mother tongue.

In March 1995 an independent Kurdish-language television service, MED-TV, began broadcasting from Europe. Despite Turkish government efforts to halt it, MED-TV rapidly became a major factor in advancing Kurdish national solidarity. In Diyarbakir, for example, the widespread presence of satellite dishes used almost exclusively to receive MED-TV indicates the importance of this medium.

The war also affected the Turkish population. With the death of over 3,000 troops by 1996, and the return of disconsolate conscripts following their service in the east, few people in Turkey could plead ignorance of this ugly war. PKK bombings of tourist targets added to that awareness. However, very few Turks, apart from conscripts, had any idea of the oppressive conditions under which Kurds were forced to live. In their ignorance, their distrust or hostility towards Kurds was expressed in the refusal to employ Kurdish seasonal workers, to offer them accommodation, or in actual attacks on Kurds. Others, however, started to

question the failure of the army to achieve Kurdish submission and the wisdom of the National Security Council and the political establishment, which insisted that outright defeat of the PKK must precede any discussion of the Kurdish question. Some intellectuals recognized that the very process of military operations, accompanied by serious and widespread human rights violations, rendered defeat of the PKK unlikely and made the deepening politicization of the Kurdish people virtually inevitable. But such people, while they could air their unease in the press, had few direct levers on policy makers.<sup>35</sup>

A small number of Turks were also aware of another crucial factor. In the mid-1970s Kurds had probably comprised only about 19 per cent of the population, but they had increased to approximately 23 per cent by 1996, with a live birth-rate of 27.5 per thousand compared with a Turkish one of 14.9 per thousand.<sup>36</sup> The prospect was of progressive demographic change in favour of an increasingly dissident Kurdish community. Few could dismiss the conflict in the south-east as merely a guerrilla war as the armed forces chiefs tried to make out. On the contrary, the proliferation of the war, and the steady flow of body bags westwards was more suggestive of an incipient civil war. Most remarkably of all, it was clear by its exclusion of Kurdish political representation inside Turkey, that the state was bent upon repression rather than dialogue. Far-reaching steps to reconcile the Kurds were clearly needed, but at the beginning of 1996 there was no evidence of anyone with either the vision or ability to bring this about.

Given the might of the army, the government may continue to find military suppression a tempting solution. Such a solution clearly mistakes the symptom (the PKK insurgency) for the problem (the state's implacable denial of fundamental Kurdish rights). Suppressing the symptom is bound to intensify the problem, yet there is little indication that either the state or the Turkish people (save some relatively powerless individuals) have yet begun to recognize this. The prospects for everyone in Turkey appear increasingly ominous.

## Human rights violations in Turkish Kurdistan

The human rights situation in Turkey should be a cause for greater concern among European Union (EU) members than is currently the case. Turkey is a member of the Council of Europe, and has signed and ratified the European Convention on Human Rights. Moreover, the Convention has been incorporated into Turkey's domestic law and therefore, in theory, could be relied upon in Turkish courts. Yet Turkey's denial of freedom of speech, a free press, freedom of assembly, its widespread use of arbitrary arrest and torture, its use of extrajudicial killings by security forces, its barbarous and indiscriminate methods and practice of village evacuation and the coercion of people into its village militia force all violate this Convention. Other signatories have the means, through Article 24 of the Convention, to compel Turkey to account for its actions at the European Commission for Human Rights in Strasbourg. They are loathe to do so on account

of their political and trade relations with Turkey, arguably short-term gain at the expense of Turkey's long-term economic and political prospects. Individual Turkish citizens may also invoke the Convention if they have either exhausted or are denied access to domestic remedy (Articles 25, 26). Currently the UK-based Kurdish Human Rights Project has assisted over 50 applicants to the Commission in Strasbourg. In September 1996 the European Court found Turkey guilty of burning the village of a group of applicants.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, although Turkey denies that the Geneva Conventions apply, common Article 3 requires it to treat surrendered combatants and also non-combatants humanely and with dignity. Both Turkey and the PKK are grievously guilty of numerous breaches of this article. Common Article 1 requires other contracting parties to respect *and ensure* respect of these Conventions. Turkey's allies have been largely silent, despite their obligations.

Mention has already been made of the anti-terrorism law of April 1991 and its catch-all opening article. However, it is Article 8, which forbids 'written and oral propaganda and assemblies, meetings and demonstrations aimed at damaging the indivisible unity of the state' which has been most widely used to deny freedom of expression to politicians, journalists, writers, lawyers and human rights activists.

In the autumn of 1996 it looked likely that Turkey would repeal its State of Emergency legislation, as had been promised by several administrations following repeated criticism by the European Parliament. However, in early September it had introduced the Provinces Law (No. 4178), which conferred on the governor of each of Turkey's 76 provinces many of the martial law powers enjoyed by the governor-general of the emergency region. In other words, rather than remove it entirely from the statute book, the state seems to have effectively extended its possible application to the entire country.

The rule of law is fundamental to the survival of Turkey's seriously diminished democracy. It is in this context that the recently reported words of the President of the Constitutional Court serve as a reminder that the law will not be allowed to interfere with the imperatives of the state: 'The indivisible unity of the state comes first, and the law is subordinate to this requirement.'

# The Kurds in Iran

**K**urdish relations with the government of Iran have been little better than those with the Turkish government, although Iran has never exercised quite the same level of implacable brutality. Unlike Turkey, Iran has substantial Arab, Baluchi and Turkic minorities in addition to the Kurds. Kurds have more in common with Iranians in language and cultural affinity than with either Arabs or Turks.

## Under the Safavids and Qajars

**A**fter the defeat at Chaldiran in 1514, the Safavid shahs tried to consolidate power in their empire by direct rule, but subsequently recognized tribal and non-tribal paramount families. The most famous of these were the Mukri tribe, centred on Mahabad at the southern end of lake Urumiya, which held sway locally until the First World War, and the House of Ardalan, a non-tribal ruling dynasty based at Sanandaj, which was finally extinguished in 1865.

As in Turkey, border tribes often split into pro-Ottoman and pro-Iranian branches, intra and inter-tribal rivals seeking sponsorship when it could be obtained. This is what happened when Sheikh Ubaidullah invaded in 1880. Both the Safavid and the Qajar dynasties remained highly dependent on tribal levies, and never achieved the kind of standing army created by the Ottomans. Tribal contingents were generally maintained in the field by the chiefs at their own expense, but as a result they tended never to venture far from home and to abandon government service when they wished.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century tension in the border area heightened as a result of a number of factors. Russian influence in Tehran and encroachment in Azerbaijan grew from the late eighteenth century onwards; it was perceived to support the large Armenian and Assyrian Christian communities in the area. Meanwhile Britain began to apply pressure in Tehran and exert influence in southern Iran, partly to keep the Russians at bay, but also for commercial reasons. Turkey, worried by Russian intentions, wished to strengthen its position from Urumiya to Khoi. These tensions exploded into open conflict involving the Kurdish and Christian communities during the First World War, with the Qajar government remaining neutral and helpless.

## Under Reza Shah

**I**n such circumstances Tehran willingly gave local chiefs the authority to act on its behalf. Of these the most notable was Ismail 'Simko' Shikak, a man who had acted for the Russians before the war. From 1919 onwards he repudiated government authority and set about creating

an independent fiefdom. Following the coup by General Reza Khan (later Shah) in 1921, government forces marched against Simko, but he expanded his area of control of the western marches of Iran to extend from Khoi in the north to Baneh to the south. However, when he was defeated in August 1922 his fiefdom disintegrated immediately. Many Kurds view Simko as a nationalist, but it is important to recognize that he acted as a tribal chief, with little sense of solidarity with urban or peasant Kurds.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s Reza Khan ruthlessly sought to subjugate the tribes, exiling their chiefs to Tehran, as part of an unprecedented drive to centralize authority and 'modernize' the country. By the late 1930s the tribes had been beaten into resentful submission. Many chiefs, however, managed to make the transition to landlords, registering tribal and village lands as their own, and entering regional politics as a conservative force.

## The Mahabad republic

**T**he Second World War brought the Russian occupation of Azerbaijan, and a British sphere centred on Kermanshah. Reza Khan was compelled to abdicate, and tribal chiefs returned to their tribes which underwent a major revival. Tehran feared a Kurdish separatist movement. The Kurds found themselves partly within one or other Allied sphere, but mainly in the region in between, theoretically under Tehran but in fact free of external control. Britain urged Tehran to adopt a more liberal policy towards the Kurds but strongly discouraged any move towards autonomy. Russia was more ambiguous, sometimes encouraging and sometimes discouraging separatist ideas. In the meantime a small group of young teachers, clerks and other middle-class townspeople of Mahabad had quietly formed a nationalist party, Komala-i Jiyani Kurdistan in 1942. They saw tribalism as well as oppressive government as part of the Kurdish dilemma, and sought the involvement of neither tribal chiefs nor religious clerics. Instead they made contact with a similar movement in Iraq, Hiwa. They deliberately cultivated the Soviets, who in turn sought to bring this left-wing nationalist movement under the control of Kurdish notables, whom they recognized were more likely to follow the Soviet line. In early 1945 Komala reluctantly asked the leading cleric of Mahabad, Qazi Muhammad, to become its president. Under Soviet encouragement, Qazi Muhammad wound up Komala in favour of the formation of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (hereafter KDPI [Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran]). Thus the founders of Komala lost control of the nationalist movement to the notable class.

The former Soviet Union had an ulterior motive for encouraging both Azerbaijan and Kurdistan to form their own democratic parties, since it wished to pressure a reluctant Iran into giving it an oil concession. It therefore

wished to threaten Tehran with the secession of the whole of north-western Iran, and found the KDPI a willing instrument.

On 22 January 1946 Qazi Muhammad proclaimed the establishment of a Kurdish republic, a minuscule territory including the towns of Bukan, Mahabad, Naqqada and Ushnavia. Certain tribal chiefs lent their support to the new republic but many did not. Only the fortuitous acquisition of the Iraqi Kurdish leader Mulla Mustafa Barzani and his 3,000 followers, themselves fugitives from Iraq, gave Mahabad the credibility of a military force. Formally the new republic sought autonomy within Iran's borders, but Tehran was understandably nervous that, given the unilateral nature of the move, it was likely to lead to independence. Despite its title, there was little that was genuinely democratic about the republic; in particular it backed away from the central issue of rural society, land reform and the abolition of *gha* power.

The hope that the Soviets would stand by the republic of Mahabad proved ill-founded. Their position was pragmatic, not ideological. Once Tehran promised the Soviets the oil exploration concession it wanted (in fact never ratified by Iran's parliament), all Soviet forces left Iranian soil by late May 1946. Qazi Muhammad sought but was unable to obtain an agreement with Tehran, partly because of the weakening position of Prime Minister Qavam. By December most tribal chiefs had quietly made their peace with Tehran, and in the middle of that month its troops led by Kurdish tribespeople peacefully re-entered Mahabad. Qazi Muhammad was subsequently hanged, an utterly vindictive act in view of his persistent attempts to achieve a negotiated solution. Thus the republic's short history ended ingloriously, without any real ideological or social transformation, but with tribal opportunism still a dominant characteristic of Kurdish politics.

Mulla Mustafa who, despite his frosty relations with Qazi Muhammad, had proved a skilful and courageous commander, was ordered either to return to Iraq (where he faced likely execution) or to lay down his arms. Mulla Mustafa refused both options, and decided to fight his way out. He was hotly pursued as his column twisted and turned to dodge Iranian forces in the mountains. At one point he and his forces covered 220 miles of highland in 15 days, before finally escaping encirclement to cross the Araxes into the former Soviet Union on 15 June. The epic entered into legend, a potent symbol of skill, courage and endurance to inspire Kurds everywhere.

## Under Muhammad Reza Shah

Following the collapse of Mahabad, the KDPI effectively ceased to exist, except for a few individuals meeting clandestinely. But there was growing Kurdish loathing for the new shah and his encroaching dictatorship. Kurdistan remained effectively under martial law. During the 1960s the KDPI suffered a further setback. In his rebellion against Baghdad, Mulla Mustafa Barzani obtained the support of the shah, and willingly paid the price he demanded: that he thwart any KDPI activities against Tehran. When a KDPI Revolutionary Committee began a guerrilla war against the shah's regime in 1967–8,

Barzani caught those travelling through Iraqi Kurdistan, executing some and handing others over to SAVAK, the shah's secret police. Many Iranian Kurds never forgave Barzani for this act of betrayal.

During the 1960s a radical transformation took place in Iranian Kurdistan, thanks to the shah's major land reform programme. During the time of Reza Shah many chiefs and landlords managed to acquire land-holdings, and place themselves within the local political framework to protect their economic interests. Under US pressure Muhammad Reza Shah initiated a country-wide land reform programme which put a ceiling on landlord holdings. Although it failed to lead to peasant prosperity, it broke the *gha*/landlord class and the old class structure of Kurdistan. The mass of people now belonged either to a rural or a growing urban proletariat, as unemployed young people drifted to the towns of the region and further afield. However, Kurdistan itself remained under-developed and impoverished, on the periphery of Iran's economic development.

## Under the Islamic republic

The downfall of the shah in January 1979 and the disintegration of the state apparatus offered an unrivalled opportunity to gain autonomy. The KDPI, despite having been underground for so long, rapidly acquired a mass following as it took over much of the area from Mahabad to Sanandaj. It was led by the politically-astute intellectual Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou. It publicly proclaimed its aim: 'democracy for Iran and autonomy for Kurdistan'. In the first flush of revolution anything seemed possible. But almost immediately conflict arose with the *pasdaran*, the fervently Shi'i Revolutionary Guards, whose activities offended local Sunni sensibilities. Negotiations with Tehran repeatedly broke down, partly because neither the government nor the Kurds were able to speak with one voice. Ayatollah Ruhallah Khomeini, the new republic's ultimate political and religious authority, deliberately undermined any government hint of compromise, and insisted that theologically Islam could accept no difference between Muslims who belonged to different ethnic minorities, and would not 'divide' Islam by offering minority-based autonomy. Behind this theology, however, lay Iran's fears of the centrifugal force of autonomist leanings by minorities around Iran's periphery: Arabs, Baluchis, Kurds, Lurs and Turkomans.

Meanwhile, the KDPI found its own desire for a negotiated compromise challenged by Komala (the Revolutionary Organization of the Kurdish Toilers), a new group inspired by the Chinese revolution that sought the support of the rural and urban masses. While KDPI controlled the region around Mahabad, Komala was more strongly established in Sanandaj. Komala acceded to negotiations with Tehran reluctantly, but they chose as their interlocutor the controversially liberal Sunni cleric, Sheikh Izzedin al Hussein.

In any case, negotiations broke down. The new regime was at first too preoccupied with establishing itself in the capital and with purging the army in 1979. The following year it was faced with Iraq's invasion. It retained a tenuous grasp on Kurdish towns, but allowed the countryside to

fall into Kurdish nationalist hands. It was only in 1982 that Iranian forces launched a major offensive to recover undisputed control of the countryside and border area. As far as Tehran was concerned, the suspicion that Komala and the KDPI were receiving sustenance from Baghdad cast autonomist aspirations in a new light – one of treason. By the end of 1983 virtually all rebel-held territory had been recaptured, and in July 1984 the final border stronghold in Hawraman was cleared of KDPI fighters. In order to deny border areas to the rebels, the government evacuated and destroyed approximately 200 villages during the course of the 1980s, a modest work of destruction compared with that of Turkey and Iraq, but nevertheless a disaster for their populations. Thereafter KDPI and Komala were only able to wage a guerrilla war from across the border without any defensible bases inside Iran.

The Kurdish struggle now entered a period of major setbacks. The KDPI fell victim to schism and the expulsion of leading party veterans. Then Komala lost its particular commitment to Kurdish autonomy, reforming itself as part of the Communist Party of Iran, though remaining known as Komala in Kurdistan. Then Komala and the KDPI began fighting each other. Intermittent and bitter fighting between the two continued until 1988.

Following the end of the Iran-Iraq war it was clear that the KDPI could be a minor nuisance through guerrilla activity, but that only negotiations with Tehran could conceivably achieve any progress. Ghassemlou favoured negotiations, but this brought yet another wave of defections from the KDPI in 1988. Ghassemlou pressed ahead. A series of secret meetings took place in Vienna between December 1988 and January 1989. Tehran's emissaries were encouragingly non-committal regarding the autonomy issue. After a silence Ghassemlou learnt in June that Tehran wished to resume talks. He returned to Vienna but was assassinated at the meeting place. Six weeks later a senior Komala member was assassinated in Larnaca. Ghassemlou's successor, Sadiq Sharifkandi, met the same fate. He was shot dead along with three colleagues in Berlin in 1992. Since then several members of the KDPI have been assassinated, both in Iran and abroad.

In the early 1990s village destructions were resumed in Sanandaj province, where 24 were razed. These seem to have been punitive destructions, for the refusal of villagers to act as government agents. Another 113 villages were reportedly bombarded in the second half of 1993 when the government made a major attempt to expunge all KDPI activity in the region. The government also intermittently bombarded many locations in Iraqi Kurdistan suspected of harbouring KDPI fighters from August 1993 onwards, including a major incursion in July 1996. About 27,000 Iranian Kurds remain as refugees in Iraq, some in Iraqi Kurdistan but a greater number in southern and central Iraq.<sup>38</sup>

wait ahead, perhaps for a generation. The outlook is not promising, yet in the longer term circumstances could change in favour of severely reduced central control, and just possibly even formal decentralization. Iran's growing economic difficulties, including the problem of feeding a population that doubles every 20 years, should be borne in mind. There are also growing numbers of labour migrants and unemployed, including Kurds. Labour migrants, working for example in the oil industry, will not necessarily acquire an 'homogeneous' Iranian identity. Just as probably people from different communities will become more, not less, aware of their distinctive identities, especially in an atmosphere of scarce resources and jobs. With growing hunger and discontent with central control, there could be a growing movement for decentralization among Iran's minorities. Such a possibility must remain highly speculative, but it is difficult to see other fortuitous circumstances in which Kurds and other minorities could obtain greater control over their own affairs. Whether such possibilities are realized or not, there is no prospect of the Kurdish question fading away. One day state and minority needs will have to be reconciled if Iran is to realize its real potential.



## The future

With no current option for negotiations and no real future for its guerrilla struggles, the Kurdish movement in Iran can do little more than await a change of political climate. Kurdish leaders realize they have a long

# The Kurds in Iraq

Modern Iraq was created as a result of the British conquest of Mesopotamia, 1915–18. Kurdish areas of what became Iraq were, for the most part, only captured in the final months of the war and Mosul occupied – despite Ottoman protests – a few days after the Armistice of Mudros (30 October 1918).<sup>39</sup> Kurds falling within the British sphere almost universally welcomed the new authority for the simple reason that the region was ravaged by acute famine and British forces mounted an extensive relief operation.<sup>40</sup> Tribes outside the British area also sought British protection. Britain signed an agreement with 60 Kurdish chiefs, including Sheikh Mahmud Barzinji the leading notable of Sulaymaniya, on 1 December 1918. This agreement included three contradictory statements of intent:

(i) That the British intention was *‘the liberation of Eastern peoples ... and the grant of assistance to them in the establishment of their independence ...’*;

(ii) that *‘the (60) chiefs, as representatives of the people of Kurdistan, have asked His British Majesty’s Government to accept them also under British protection and to attach them to the Iraq ...’*;

(iii) that *‘if His British Majesty’s government extends its assistance and protection to them they undertook to accept His British Majesty’s orders and advice.’*<sup>41</sup>

Once the immediate exigencies of famine were past, Kurdish leaders and Britain began to review their respective prospects, and these contradictions became apparent. Britain had invested Sheikh Mahmud Barzinji as governor of Sulaymaniya and its hinterland, stretching from the Greater Zab to the Diyala river. At the outset it had vaguely envisaged a Kurdish entity separate from Arab Mesopotamia, but within a couple of months was thinking in terms of a mosaic of arrangements with local chiefs. This was largely because different Kurdish areas at this stage did not wish to be combined into one unit, were concerned about economic relations with the Mesopotamian plain, and had different political concerns. But even within particular areas unanimity was lacking on account of conflicting ambitions. For example, Sheikh Barzinji, a Qadiri sheikh who was easily the most influential single leader was nevertheless repudiated by a number of tribes, towns and sheikhs in Sulaymaniya region itself.<sup>42</sup> It was only a few months before Barzinji’s ambition to build Kurdish independence and Britain’s ambition that he should follow its directives, ended in a brief revolt in May 1919. Barzinji was exiled. Elsewhere, other chiefs took up arms when frustrated by British supervision – or interference as they saw it. Britain, short of troops, used the expedient of bombing villages from the air, deliberately

refining its techniques for future wars by experimenting with delayed-explosion bombs that caused hundreds of innocent casualties.

Britain also had to contain Turkish nationalist attempts to subvert British authority in southern Kurdistan, and during the period 1921–3 it lost control of large swathes of Kurdish country. For Britain, however, the compelling imperative to control southern Kurdistan was strategic. Acutely short of troops, Britain could not defend the Mesopotamian plain if hostile forces were in the hill country that ran in an arc around the north-eastern flank of Mesopotamia. Holding the land up to the Iranian border, and some of the hill country to the north, was a strategic imperative. Britain was only willing to concede the secession of southern Kurdistan if it joined with a Kurdish entity further north. That was the basis of its offer in the ill-fated Treaty of Sèvres of 1920. It was based on the idea that a Kurdish entity was bound to be friendly and dependent on Britain rather than on Turkey for guidance. There was never any question of Britain ceding southern Kurdistan if there was any risk of it becoming a springboard for hostile forces. This issue totally eclipsed any interest in Kirkuk oil (the enormous potential of which remained largely unrecognized until the mid-1920s).<sup>43</sup>

The strategic question was one reason for incorporating southern Kurdistan into Iraq, but the main reason lay in the problems within Arab Iraq, triggered by a major revolt of the Euphrates tribes in the summer of 1920. Following the revolt, the British recognized that they must allow for the creation of an indigenous government in Iraq if they were to avoid further unrest. They lit upon Faysal, the Hashemite ex-King of Syria now in search of a kingdom. Within four weeks of becoming King of Iraq in 1921, Faysal told the British that there could be no question of southern Kurdistan (the final status of which was still undecided) seceding for the simple but crucial reason that this would leave him ruling over an overwhelmingly Shi’i population, a recipe in Faysal’s view for a very insecure future. Thus the Kurds became confessional ballast to Britain’s Sunni-dominated puppet state of Iraq. One final factor decided the Kurds’ fate. During the period up to the final settlement of the Mosul dispute in 1926, Britain was anxious to avoid provoking Turkey. It knew Turkey feared that autonomy in southern Kurdistan would subvert Turkey’s own subject Kurds. Thus Britain step-by-step betrayed its promises of autonomy, let alone independence, in order to keep Baghdad and Ankara happy. The Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930, whereby Iraq became independent, did not even include the safeguards (Kurdish administrators, Kurdish-medium administration and education) Britain had promised the League of Nations it would uphold. Such was Britain’s ‘guardianship’ of its subject Kurdish people.

The Kurds fatefully failed to organize themselves against this political process. Their traditional chiefs were



all too preoccupied by their personal ambitions to be capable of forging a genuinely nationalist movement; it was only in the 1930s that a new but tiny class of urban intellectuals emerged capable of providing the ideology of ethnic nationalism. In the crucial first five years, 1918–23, they failed to respond to British offers. Had these been taken up in a determined and organized way, Britain would have found them difficult to set aside at a later date. The only organized resistance, already too late, was to the omission of safeguards for the Kurds as a recognized minority, in the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty.

If Britain had been morally irresponsible, newly independent Iraq proved negligent and insensitive to its Kurds. No sooner had Sheikh Mahmud Barzinji finally been defeated in 1931, than Baghdad found itself at loggerheads with the Barzani leaders in the north. It was not as if the Barzanis were nationalist. They were more concerned with religious eccentricity and with trouncing local rivals. But Baghdad, with British RAF help, decided to make some kind of example of them. Its punitive exile of Mulla Mustafa Barzani finally goaded him into escape and revolt in 1943, and the new intellectuals had no difficulty in harnessing this tribal leader to their more nationalist aims and to the service of the Mahabad republic in Iran.

The Hashemite monarchy governed by coopting the chiefly and notable classes of Iraq. Thus many Kurdish *aghhas* found their interests lay in the *status quo*, and they deplored the social and political agenda of the nationalists. In 1958 Brigadier Abd al Karim Qasim overthrew the Hashemite monarchy, and welcomed Mulla Mustafa back from exile in the former Soviet Union. Qasim announced a wide-ranging land reform which the *aghhas* naturally feared. The Iraq Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), founded following the fall of Mahabad, was now allowed to operate openly. It strongly supported the land reform for both socialist and nationalist reasons. Qasim also gave free reign to Mulla Mustafa to settle old scores with his tribal enemies in the mountains, and used Barzani forces in Mosul and elsewhere to silence his opponents. Barzani used this opportunity to expand his power base in Kurdistan.

By 1961 Qasim and Mulla Mustafa both had grounds for distrusting each other. As distrust slipped into conflict, Mulla Mustafa was able to mobilize chiefs hostile to the land reform. He soon demonstrated his superlative guerilla skills. When Qasim was overthrown in 1963, Mulla Mustafa and the KDP welcomed the new regime only to find it had no intention of recognizing Kurdish rights. Once more, fighting broke out.

It was at this juncture that Mulla Mustafa, theoretically the president of the KDP, fell out with the intellectual driving force of the party, the veteran Ibrahim Ahmad and the younger Jalal Talabani. Having struck a unilateral and unsatisfactory deal with the new regime following the coup of 1964, Mulla Mustafa chased his critics, Ahmad and Talabani, into Iran. The feud between the Barzanis and Talabani was destined to damage Iraqi Kurdish unity profoundly. Barzani's deal with the brief Arab nationalist government in Baghdad lasted only a few months. For the rest of the 1960s the Kurds remained secure in their mountains, strongly backed by Iran in return for denying Iraqi Kurdish territory to the shah's enemies.

There were many areas of disagreement between Barzani and the weaker Ahmad-Talabani faction. They were bitter rivals for control of the Kurdish movement. Barzani was, and behaved like, a tribal chief, appealing to tribal values, using tribespeople as his fighting force and distrusting urban intellectuals. By contrast Ahmad-Talabani were interested in the ideology of nationalism (and socialism), used tribal fighters and reluctantly saw tribalism as an impediment to national awareness. Barzani disliked the land reform programme and the interference in chiefly prerogatives which it implied. Ahmad and Talabani welcomed land reform as the means of realizing socio-economic rights, an essential step in their view in nation-building. In the event, regardless of their respective principles, the Barzani and Talabani groups behaved similarly, using tribes, and setting aside ideology for pragmatic reasons, striking alliances with apparent enemies of the Kurdish people.

## The Kurds and the Ba'ath

In 1968 the Ba'ath<sup>44</sup> seized power. It recognized the foolishness of fighting the Kurds unless the means were available for ensuring their defeat. It decided it was wiser to make peace with the Kurds while it consolidated its position politically. It offered to implement the offer made by Prime Minister Abdal Rahman Bazzaz (during his brief tenure in 1966). In principle the new regime preferred to deal with Jalal Talabani rather than Mulla Mustafa since his ideology and that of the Ba'ath were much closer, but was happy to allow both leaders to pay court to Baghdad. Mulla Mustafa was incontestably stronger and it was with him therefore that Saddam Hussein, the new Vice-President and dominant force of the regime, had to deal. In March 1970, after desultory discussions, Saddam struck a deal with Mulla Mustafa.

The 11 March 1970 Accord represented a milestone in government-Kurd relations, for it laid down the essential principles for autonomy; with the new state constitution to read: 'the Iraqi people is made up of two nationalities, the Arab nationality and the Kurdish nationality'; Kurds to have legislative power in a manner proportionate to its population in Iraq; a Kurd to be one of two state vice-presidents; unification of areas with a Kurdish majority as a self-governing unit; the use of Kurdish, alongside Arabic, as the official language and also the medium of school instruction in Kurdish majority areas; all officials in Kurdish majority areas to be Kurds; implementation of the agrarian reform (still incomplete from 1958); and provision of a Kurdistan development budget.

Both parties, however, soon had grounds for unease. The regime failed to form a National Assembly as it had promised, and it was clear that it had few political friends inside Iraq. Kurds began to realize how important their cooperation was to so isolated a regime. Baghdad began to pour development money into Kurdistan, and to appoint Kurds to cabinet positions. In the meantime the regime learnt that Mulla Mustafa had not severed all his connections with Baghdad's enemies: Iran, Israel and the USA. At the end of the year an attempt was made on the life of Mulla Mustafa's son, Idris, in Baghdad. A dispute arose

over Kirkuk, Khaniqin and Sinjar, three sensitive areas where Mulla Mustafa believed the regime was deliberately settling Arabs to change the demographic balance. Kirkuk, in particular with its vast oil resources became a sensitive and emotive issue on both sides. Then the government insisted that Faily Kurds – Shi'i Kurds many of whom were of Iranian origin – were really Iranians and expelled 50,000 of them from September 1971 onwards.

Publicly, Mulla Mustafa spoke of confidence-building, but in private he spoke of fighting for Kirkuk if necessary. He also appealed to the USA for aid, so it was hardly surprising that there was an attempt on his life that same month.

A month after the Iraqi-Soviet Treaty of Friendship was signed in April 1972, the USA decided to help Iran counter Soviet influence in the region. Then, in June, Iraq nationalized its oil facilities and the USA had an even more important reason for undermining the regime – to regain its previous stake in the oilfields. In September 1972 Mulla Mustafa began to receive assistance from Israel. In June 1973 he made a public statement about awarding Kirkuk oil rights to the USA if it supported him. Little did he understand the cynical motives behind the help he was receiving from outside:

*'Both Iran and the US hope to benefit from an unresolvable situation in which Iraq is intrinsically weakened by the Kurds' refusal to give up their semi-autonomy. Neither Iran nor the US would like to see the situation resolved either way.'*<sup>45</sup>

Nothing summed up more succinctly the limit of support on offer nor Mulla Mustafa's naivety in failing to recognize this limit. Both sides prepared for war. Kirkuk was now the major stumbling block. There could no longer be any doubt concerning the regime's efforts to change the demographic balance; nor that with the ten-fold increase in Iraq's oil revenues following nationalization, that the stakes were much higher.

In March 1974 the regime published its Kurdish Autonomy Law on a 'take it or leave it' basis. The offer omitted Kirkuk and left the regime with the whip hand regarding the appointment of officials. Mulla Mustafa and the KDP rejected it.

## The 1974–5 war

Mulla Mustafa probably had 50,000 *peshmergas* ('those who face death' – the romantic name given to Kurdish nationalist fighters) under arms and a similar number of irregulars. He planned to fight a conventional war, holding the arc of mountains from Zakhu to Darbandikan, but his troops proved no match for an army which had been training for precisely this moment and was equipped with all the heavy weapons and air power the Kurds lacked.

The Iraqi army drove up the main axes, capturing Amadiya, Aqra, Qala Diza, Raniya and Rawanduz by the autumn, and gave no indication of withdrawing for the winter as had happened in previous campaigns. By the new year only Iran's artillery and air power prevented Iraqi forces from driving up the last few miles to the border. As he had warned Mulla Mustafa in 1973, Saddam

now struck a deal with the shah in Algiers, ceding the *thalweg* (deepest point) demarcation of the Shatt al Arab waterway as Iran had wanted, in return for the shah's undertaking to withdraw all assistance from the Kurds. Offered a ceasefire by Baghdad in which to consider his position, Mulla Mustafa gave up the struggle.

The war had been costly not only in financial terms but also in human life. The victorious regime allowed some of those it had displaced to return to their homes, but it also razed at least 500 villages to create a *cordon sanitaire* with Iran, moving 600,000 villagers to *mujama'at* ('collective' resettlement camps).<sup>46</sup> The families of recalcitrants were exiled to southern Iraq.

# Road to genocide 1976-88

Many Kurds had deplored Mulla Mustafa's abandonment of the struggle, and were determined to continue. First into the field was Jalal Talabani with a new party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), a coalition of small groups. The KDP, led by Idris and Masud Barzani, also returned to the field. Other groups existed, for example, one (later the Socialist Party) led by an extremely able politician, Dr Mahmud Othman. It was not long before the KDP and PUK were devoting more energy to fighting each other than the common enemy. Both the KDP and PUK sought to form coalitions with non-Kurdish Iraqi resistance, with the main intention of excluding the other. In 1979 the KDP surpassed itself in widening its activities to attack the KDPI in Iran on behalf of the new Islamic republic. It was only in mid-1983 that the two competing factions inside Iraq agreed to abandon all hostilities against each other. But it took another four years before they agreed to act together against Baghdad.

It will be recalled that in September 1980 Iraq had invaded Iran, beginning a bloody war that dragged on until 1988. The Kurdish groups sought to exploit the conflict. At first Saddam was able to be contemptuous of Kurdish enemies more interested in feuding among themselves than offering any serious threat to the regime. But in July 1983 the KDP, working in conjunction with Iranian forces, seized Hajj Umran, an important border town on the road to Rawanduz. Further south, Iranian forces seized Panjwin and the high ground commanding Qala Diza.

Suddenly Iraq appeared to be in great danger. Saddam reacted in two characteristic ways. He took vengeance on the Barzani clan for KDP involvement in the loss of Hajj Umran. Eight thousand male members of the clan living mostly in the *mujama'at* of Qushtapa were seized, paraded through the streets of Baghdad and then executed. He also sought respite from the Kurdish threat, in order to release the large number of troops stationed in Kurdistan for redeployment against Iran. He had in fact had feelers out since 1982, hoping one of the main parties could be persuaded to abandon the struggle. In December 1983 he agreed a ceasefire with Talabani, with a view to renegotiating the autonomy law on a basis acceptable to the PUK.

Since it was so controversial, why did the PUK entertain this negotiation? Unlike the KDP, the PUK did not enjoy Iranian friendship. Indeed, when Iranian forces took Panjwin the PUK had to flee the area. It feared being ground between the millstones of Iraq and Iran. Like Saddam, Talabani badly needed a respite. And if he had succeeded in renegotiating the autonomy law satisfactorily, he would have brought peace to Kurdistan and cut the ground from under the feet of his rival, Masud Barzani.

However, the discussions failed, partly because agreement could not be reached over Khaniqin, Kirkuk and Sinjar, but more importantly because Saddam no longer

felt the need to negotiate. For it was at the end of 1983 that the USA and other states began to fear the danger of an Iranian victory and determined to ensure Iraq was supported with equipment and intelligence to avoid defeat. In January 1985 the ceasefire formally collapsed.

The PUK now found itself isolated and in great difficulty, having lost the backing of its external supporters, Libya and Syria, and forfeited the confidence of the greater mass of Kurds, and also other Iraqi opposition groups. In 1986 Talabani was able to achieve a *rapprochement* with Tehran. With Iranian assistance he was also able to obtain the PUK's re-admittance into the resistance movement, and this was formalized in 1987 with the formation of the Kurdistan Front, a coordinating body composed of the KDP, PUK and six other smaller parties.<sup>47</sup>

While Iranian offensives in the south slowly ground to a halt, the Kurdish front became more important. By mid-1987 the Kurds held virtually the whole border area. After dark most of the countryside of Kurdistan was unsafe for government forces. To Baghdad, the Kurdish movement now represented the Trojan horse whereby Iran might yet enter the Mesopotamian plain.

The Baghdad regime undertook savage excesses against the civil population. After the collapse of negotiations with the PUK, it adopted a systematic policy of razing villages and killing innocent non-combatants. In September 1985, for example, it rounded up approximately 500 children (aged 10-14) in Sulaymaniya (the PUK recruiting heartland) and tortured and killed a substantial number of them apparently to extort information about *peshmerga* movements, and to make *peshmerga* relatives give themselves up. In October a similar round-up took place in Arbil.

In March 1987 Saddam appointed his cousin, General Ali Hasan al Majid as governor of the north. He immediately began using chemical weapons against Kurdish targets.<sup>48</sup> Civilian survivors of such attacks who sought medical assistance were taken away and executed. He also decided on a scorched earth policy. In June 1987 a large swathe of Kurdistan was declared a prohibited area, and during that summer he razed 500 villages.

By January 1988 the threat to Baghdad had deepened, with Iranian forces penetrating deeper into Kurdistan. A breakthrough onto the Mesopotamian plain once the snows had melted now became a serious danger. However, the failure of Iran's exhausted forces to break through the southern front, released much needed Iraqi troops to fight in Kurdistan. With substantial reinforcements, al Majid started Operation Anfal. In February his forces bombarded and swept the Jafati valley near Sulaymaniya. Virtually all adult and teenage males who were arrested disappeared. On 15 March Iranian and PUK forces captured Halabja, strategically situated above the Darbandikan dam. The following day Iraq retaliated with a massive chemical attack on the town. Over 5,000

civilians perished. Baghdad's savagery had a shattering effect on Kurdish morale, for it indicated both the capacity and intention of Baghdad to slaughter on a scale previously unimaginable. The following week Iraqi troops destroyed the whole Kurdish presence in Qara Dagh, south of Sulaymaniya. Then they turned to the district of Garmiyan, south of Kirkuk, before moving northwards to 'cleanse' the area between Arbil, Kirkuk and Koi-Sanjaq. Three more Anfal operations during the course of the summer removed the population from Balizan and the mountains east of Shaqlawa. In each case chemical attack preceded massive troop sweeps of the surrounded areas.

On 22 July Iran accepted UN Resolution 598, setting out the requirements for a ceasefire. During the next four weeks Iraq massed its forces around Bahdinan, the territory still held by the KDP. On 25 August it launched a huge assault, including chemical attacks – the worst of which killed approximately 3,000 fugitives fleeing to Turkey along the Bazi gorge.

During the Anfal operations approximately 200,000 Kurds are believed to have perished. Some were killed during army assaults. But the vast majority, the adult and teenage male population, were driven to their fate at the execution grounds at Ramadi, Hatra and elsewhere. Moreover, the systematic destruction of rural Kurdistan was completed, with the razing of virtually every village (approximately 4,000) and several small towns, of which the most notable was Qala Diza.

Approximately 60,000 Kurds found their way into Turkey, and some 100,000 fled into Iran where there were already some 100,000 from before 1988. Turkey accepted these fugitives with great reluctance, conscious of their potential effect on Kurdish sentiment inside Turkey. As in Iran, they were put into camps from which their movements were highly restricted.

Nothing illustrated more clearly the vulnerability of the Kurdish people than the utterly supine failure of the international community to take any substantive steps to curb Iraq's savagery. No Western government was unaware of Iraq's use of chemical weapons, nor of its brutal treatment of those who fell into its hands.<sup>49</sup> No one tried to implement UN Security Council Resolution 620 of 26 August 1988, specifically adopted to ensure steps were taken against any country (but clearly with Iraq in mind) using chemical weapons. Western governments were far too interested in the enormous trade possibilities implicit in Iraq's reconstruction. In spring 1989 most such countries participated in a military fair in Baghdad – indicating the level of hypocrisy adopted by the West when discussing concepts like 'regional security', 'stability' and 'good governance'.

# Uprising and self-rule 1990-6

Psychologically, the defeat of 1988 was a good deal more devastating than that of 1975. However, despite Baghdad's unquestioned military superiority, the extent of Saddam's genocide made any kind of submission unthinkable. Both the KDP and PUK continued to wage guerrilla attacks wherever they could, supported by Syria. By mid-1990 the Kurdistan Front had the deepest foreboding that Iran and Iraq were moving towards a formal peace agreement, one that was bound to include sealing the border.

Before this could happen, Saddam invaded Kuwait in August 1990. The Kurdistan Front was enormously tempted to throw in its lot with the Coalition Forces assembling in Saudi Arabia but held back, anxious not to commit itself prematurely. But when Iraqi forces were routed the following February, and when the Shi'a population of Karbala and Najaf rose *en masse* against the defeated regime, Kurds spontaneously rose against the government forces.

Crucial to the success of the uprising were the government's Kurdish auxiliary forces, disparagingly known as *jash* (little donkeys), who defected to join the insurgents. The *jash* deserve some explanation. For centuries governments have played one tribe off against another in order to maintain control. The British and Hashemites both coopted 'friendly' tribes against 'unfriendly' ones. In reality of course such tribes were concerned with settling local feuds, and enjoying the power government patronage conferred. Out of such dynamics, governments since 1958 have also sought to coopt Kurdish fighters against the nationalists. In the 1960s there were plenty of chiefs with strong grievances against Mulla Mustafa willing to do the government's bidding. In the mid-1960s Jalal Talabani briefly cooperated with the government against Mulla Mustafa. During the Iran-Iraq war enrolment in the *jash* also became a means of avoiding serving in the regular forces on the feared southern front. And for those Kurds who operated the enrolment it proved highly profitable. Furthermore, the Kurdistan Front depended on friendly *jash* to provide intelligence, hide wounded *peshmergas*, and leave weapons and foodstocks where they might 'accidentally' fall into nationalist hands. Thus the *jash* represented many different tendencies and was not simply a collaborationist system.

Raniya fell to the insurgents on 4 March 1991, and one town after another followed during the next few days, until even Kirkuk fell on 19 March. This success, however, was short-lived, for Saddam despatched artillery, armoured and air forces northwards to retake rebel-held areas. On 28 March a massive counter-offensive drove the rebels out of Arbil, Dohuk, Kirkuk and Zakhu. Up to

100,000 Kurds and Turkomans (who also inhabited towns on the eastern fringe of the Mesopotamian plain) were captured and many executed.

Remembering the nightmare of the Anfal, mass panic gripped Kurdistan. Over 1.5 million Kurds abandoned their homes and fled in a stampede to reach the safety of Iran or Turkey. Iran allowed over 1 million to cross the border. Turkey refused to open its borders, Turkish troops beating people back with their rifle butts. This led to a further crisis to that already faced.<sup>50</sup> Many died of exposure.

It was at this juncture that the Coalition Forces, which had wanted to ignore the internal humanitarian disaster in Iraq, felt compelled to deter Saddam from further attack. They were forced to do so partly by the embarrassment faced by Turkey (which was cooperating in the blockade of Iraq), but mainly by the widespread outrage of the public in the West, who saw emotionally powerful and tragic footage of the suffering of the Kurdish people on virtually every television news service in the West.

On 5 April 1991 the UN Security Council had passed Resolution 688 which condemned 'the repression of the Iraqi civilian population in many parts of Iraq, including most recently in Kurdish populated areas', and demanded that Iraq: 'immediately end this repression and that Iraq allow immediate access to international humanitarian contribution organizations [aid agencies] to all those in need of assistance in all parts of Iraq'. It was the first time the UN had insisted on the right of interference in the internal affairs of a member state.<sup>51</sup>

The stiff resistance of a handful of KDP fighters at the hill resort of Salah al Din, and the threat of renewed Coalition attack on Iraqi troops, persuaded Baghdad to halt its advance. In mid-April the Coalition announced the establishment of a 'safe haven' for the Kurds, prohibiting Iraqi warplanes from flying north of the 36th parallel. On 28 April US and British troops began moving the Kurds off the mountains.

Briefly the Kurdish leaders, notably Masud Barzani and Jalal Talabani, opened autonomy negotiations with Baghdad, but the Kurdish demand for the inclusion of Khaniqin, Kirkuk and Mandali and the introduction of multi-party democracy in all Iraq both proved unacceptable to Baghdad. The Kurds, for their part, were unwilling to accept Baghdad's demand that the Kurds cut all their foreign contacts. By June such negotiations had lost credibility, and in July *peshmergas* took control of Arbil and Sulaymaniya, forcing Iraqi troops to redeploy outside these two cities. In October Saddam placed the whole *de facto* Kurdish autonomous region under economic siege.

Blockade and the failure of dialogue persuaded the Kurdistan Front to place its administration on a more reg-

ular footing. It also hoped it might gain international recognition. In May 1992 elections were held leading to the formation of a Kurdish government. The electoral result, in which the KDP and PUK acquired approximately 45 per cent of the vote apiece, led to a '50:50' agreement between the two parties. No other party achieved the 7 per cent threshold necessary for representation, although the Assyrians were given representation.

This election caused disquiet among Iraqi Kurdistan's neighbours and its protectors. Iran and Turkey disapproved of any self-government for the Kurds because this might inflame the ambitions of their own Kurdish minorities. Meanwhile, the Coalition also feared that an elected assembly might prove the first step towards a declaration of independence. They therefore refused to recognize the new Kurdish parliament and Kurdish regional government (KRG), insisting on dealing with the Kurdish *de facto* leaders. Barzani and Talabani therefore declined joint premiership in the new entity, but by so doing, robbed the Kurdish government of any power.

Power remained at the respective party headquarters, many government officers merely discharging their duties in the light of the party line. Those who sought to serve the community regardless of party affiliation risked replacement by party faithfuls. Since every ministry was headed by the representative of one party and deputized by one from the other, this led to a split in every field of government activity along party lines, officials vying against their opposite number to achieve some advantage. This competition, in a land starved of resources and employment opportunities, rapidly polarized Kurdish society, since it gave enormous and monopolistic powers of patronage to the two structures. Meanwhile, Barzani and Talabani carried out their foreign policy initiatives independently, each seeking to outdo the other. In the words of one politician:

*They do not trust each other. If you visit one all he can do is talk about the other. They are obsessed with their party rivalry ... they do not work out a common strategy. There is not strategy at all, except to get ahead of the other party.*<sup>52</sup>

Thus the demise of traditional tribalism as the prime form of socio-political organization until the 1970s was followed by the birth of what one might describe as neo-tribalism. Both leaders had their respective retinues – party apparatus and fighters, much the way paramount chiefs had retinues 150 years earlier. Under the umbrella of each party stood a large number of less closely-knit members, composed of chiefs with their own retinues. Some of these were parts of smaller parties, which had effectively ceased to operate following the 1992 elections, and others were *jash* chiefs with their followings. Some of these were tribal chiefs, but a large number were not of tribal origin but had the means to create retinues. These categories now bargained their loyalty in return for favours or rank within the party system. It was symptomatic of the mutual dislike between the parties that they proved incapable of convening a reconciliation committee.

The growing competition between the two parties finally exploded into open fighting in May 1994. Since both leaders had done so much to foster a spirit of rivalry

it was hardly surprising that both of them found it extraordinarily difficult to restrain their own forces. Several hundred were reportedly killed. The damage done was enormous and it began a process of informal partition within Kurdistan. A French-sponsored reconciliation between the two leaders in July collapsed within four weeks. Over 3,000 fighters and civilians were killed during the next year as each ceasefire was broken by one party or the other, each accusing the other of responsibility but both clearly more concerned with the struggle for ascendancy than with the orderly governance of Kurdistan. The worst round of fighting took place in December 1994, but dragged on intermittently until August 1995, when 300 were killed in fighting near Qala Diza, not far from where the first conflict had taken place. During the fighting of December 1994 the PUK seized Arbil, the seat of government, and by autumn 1995 it controlled over 70 per cent of free Kurdistan. Such was the intensity of personal rivalry and sense of competition between rival patronage systems, each with a clearly defined geographical and cultural base, that it seemed unlikely any genuine reconciliation could be achieved.

# Iraqi Kurdistan: an international cockpit

Since 1991 Turkey had allowed the Coalition the use of Incirlik airbase from which to mount its air protection of the Kurdish region. Turkish leaders had mixed feelings about this arrangement. They did not want hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing to the border again, but they also knew that *de facto* autonomy in Iraqi Kurdistan excited the ambitions of its own Kurds.

It was arguable that the outbreak of internecine warfare in May 1994 could have so discredited the Kurds that the Coalition Forces and neighbours might have abandoned the region. In fact the fighting had the opposite effect, for the instability began to offer opportunities to regional contestants. In July Saddam sent delegations individually to both the KDP and PUK offering renewed negotiations. His motive, clearly, was to play one contestant off against the other, to regain a foothold in the region. Barzani was willing to negotiate and was rewarded with weaponry. In September the USA, supported by Turkey, urgently sought to forge a new peace agreement through negotiations with the KDP and PUK leaderships at Drogheda, Ireland. The USA was only partly motivated by the restoration of relative stability in northern Iraq. It wanted to maintain the Kurdish region as a zone of latent pressure on Baghdad. It also feared, as did Turkey, a power vacuum that could be exploited by neighbouring powers. The Kurdish region had to be within the pro-Western orbit.

It was as much for this reason as the inability of Barzani and Talabani to settle their differences that, although the fighting died down, no peace agreement was forthcoming. Both Iran and Syria had good reason to fear US intentions. Both feared encirclement. Iran, already under an US economic boycott, was determined to keep the Iraqi Kurdish border open, the Kurds dependent on Iranian goodwill. Syria, already under US pressure regarding peace negotiations with Israel, feared being ringed by entities that were either pro-USA or susceptible to US pressure: Israel, Turkey and a dependent Iraqi Kurdistan. Syrian fears were subsequently strengthened by an Israeli-Turkish military cooperation agreement, which threatened the use of Israeli technology to seal Turkey's border (thus thwarting the PKK), and the possibility Israel would 'take out' the PKK leadership in Syria.

Syria and Iran therefore put pressure on the PUK, and possibly the KDP, not to reach an agreement under pro-Western auspices. The KDP, less willing to break with the USA and Turkey, came under further pressure when PKK fighters in the Iraq-Turkey border area attacked its positions, presumably at Syro-Iranian behest. Fighting persisted between the two groups from September to

December 1995 when Iran assisted the two parties to settle their differences. Meanwhile, with his traditionally good relations with Syria and seriously deteriorated relations with pro-Western Turkey, Talabani became a useful actor for Iran, which now abandoned its traditional pro-Barzani posture and began to show greater interest in the PUK. Thus, by early 1996, Syria and Iran seemed to favour the PUK, while Turkey and the USA seemed to favour the KDP. In April 1996 the USA made another unsuccessful attempt to forge a peace deal.

## A growing contest

During the summer of 1996 internal and external pressures, combined with the intense KDP-PUK rivalry brought full-scale conflict to the region. A growing number of skirmishes finally gave way to a major thrust by the PUK on the border town of Hajj Umran and the strategic Shuman valley in mid-August. The KDP accused the PUK of receiving Iranian assistance. At this point the USA made another major attempt to bring about a ceasefire. However, the KDP abandoned the talks, and shortly afterwards launched a major assault on PUK-held Arbil, in collaboration with the Iraqi army. It quickly captured the city, and then moved on alone to seize almost the whole region, including Sulaymaniya, at the beginning of September.

It now seemed as if the KDP had won the struggle to control Kurdistan outright. Many Kurds were utterly dismayed, however, by the KDP alliance with Saddam. In Arbil Iraqi agents rapidly rounded-up and executed members of the Iraqi opposition. Saddam's removal of the economic blockade of Kurdistan indicated a far-reaching understanding with the KDP, implicitly one that foresaw the reintegration of Kurdistan into Iraq, presumably with a new autonomy agreement which recognized Barzani's authority in the region.

However, in mid-October the PUK, which had been quietly regrouping in the border area, made a surprise assault whereby it re-captured Sulaymaniya and momentarily threatened Arbil, before withdrawing to Raniya and lake Dukan. The PUK was probably assisted logistically and materially by Iran, which was anxious to maintain a surrogate along the border to neutralize the activities of the KDPI (in which the PUK was Tehran's reluctant servant), and to deny the area to forces, be they KDP or Iraqi, favourable to Baghdad.

Although it is not possible to foresee the outcome of this contest, certain tentative conclusions may be drawn. First that the conflict fatally weakens the Kurdish position regarding Baghdad. A threshold has been crossed and

there is now little prospect of reviving representative Kurdish government. Each party is now likely to strive for complete control of the area. This suits Saddam. It makes Barzani more dependent on his support, but also weakens both Kurdish parties, one of which – probably the KDP – will eventually come, in Saddam’s own words, ‘on their knees’ to beg him for help. Saddam will be more able to impose an autonomy arrangement of his own choosing. The outcome also suits Iran, since Talabani is likewise more dependent on Tehran for support. Thus, the Kurdish protagonists are likely to find themselves increasingly fighting for the policy interests of their external patrons, rather than for any intrinsic Kurdish interest.

Along with the Kurds, the USA appears to be a loser. Its influence in the region has been greatly weakened by Saddam’s alliance with Barzani. It must now consider whether the Coalition air protection exercise, Operation Provide Comfort, has ceased to be a form of pressure on Saddam and has now become a foreign policy liability, since Saddam successfully defied it in the assault on Arbil. If the USA draws this conclusion, it may well indicate to Turkey that it does not wish the lease on Incirlik airbase to be renewed. If that happens, the Iraqi Kurds will be left to face Baghdad alone.





# The challenge of relief and rehabilitation

It is difficult to imagine the scale of relief and rehabilitation required in a country where human habitation had been extensively razed, its agriculture and livestock wiped out, and its population had fled. Yet this is what was undertaken following the establishment of the 'safe haven' in 1991. Relief agencies faced the challenge first of receiving back from the border areas over 1.5 million fugitives from Iraqi forces during the summer of 1991. These, and another 1.7 million people mainly in Arbil and Sulaymaniya, had initially to be fed, clothed and sheltered, but also to be helped into a viable means of life, which implied the progressive abandonment of the collective townships into which Saddam had herded them, and the revival of urban and rural life.

In the countryside the task has been enormous: the reconstruction of approximately 4,000 villages and hamlets; the clearance of extensive minefields laid by Iraqi forces to deny the countryside to the Kurdish forces and community; the reconstruction of wells which had been filled in to prevent rural life; the reconstruction of irrigation channels, and of access tracks in order to market produce; and the provision of breeding livestock, seed stock and basic agricultural equipment with which agrarian communities could once again be revived. Additionally, as a result of the killing of so many men during the Anfal, a large number of female-headed households required assistance in order to make return to village life possible. Moreover, other vital infrastructural facilities were urgently required in both town and country. Clean water and sanitation facilities, schools, hospitals and clinics all required repair and re-equipment. Factories, too, needed smashed or looted equipment to be replaced.

## Major setbacks

Such requirements would be daunting at the best of times. In the Kurdish case, however, the task has been beset with major setbacks. In the autumn of 1991 fighting between Kurdish and Iraqi forces around Sulaymaniya and Kifri-Kalar led to the fresh displacement of up to 100,000 people, and to the imposition of a blockade of the *de facto* autonomous region by Baghdad. Thus the Kurds found themselves under the double penalty of the UN blockade of all Iraq, and Saddam's blockade of the autonomous region. Food rations which the UN required Baghdad to allocate to the autonomous region dwindled to a fraction of those available to the rest of Iraq, and had to be offset by direct UN interventions. Furthermore, the region was subject to electricity cuts

and the denial of kerosene for generators, cooking and for winter heating. This in turn led to a massive destruction of trees in the desperate search for fuel.

Until the blockade, Saddam had also continued to pay salaries to government servants in the region, presumably on the assumption that the danger of withdrawal might woo the Kurds back into the Iraqi fold. With the blockade, however, such salaries were cut off, affecting not only government offices but also schools and hospitals, creating a major crisis in the region.

Another acute problem was the collapse of the Iraqi dinar, followed by the minting of new currency notes by Baghdad and the declaration that the old 25 dinar notes were invalid, wiping out a substantial proportion of individual savings overnight. Thus, few Kurds found themselves earning enough to subsist, the majority continuing to be dependent to some extent on international relief. By 1994 the KRG was effectively bankrupt because of international and Iraqi sanctions, because of smuggling, and because import tariffs were misappropriated by the political parties controlling the border crossings.

Then the intra-Kurdish fighting started in May 1994, creating major difficulties for those in areas of conflict.<sup>53</sup> Once again thousands fled their homes, creating considerable dislocation to rehabilitation programmes as relief agencies sought to assist those directly affected. Thus, by 1996 it could be said that far from achieving a measure of stability and political progress in the autonomous region, acute uncertainty beset a population governed by two warring factions, and dogged by the deeper fear of another attack by Baghdad.

Given such enormous disadvantages, the relief and rehabilitation programmes carried out by UN agencies and by local and foreign NGOs – like Oxfam and Save the Children Fund from Britain – have been a triumph over great adversity. Large numbers were still displaced. Approximately 600,000 were still in collective townships, in prefab housing or squatting in abandoned public buildings. These people generally lacked adequate land; faced land rights disputes; and their village lands were still mined or were in front line or border areas, or were even in Iraqi territory to which they feared to return. All these, and also families decimated by the Anfal, tended to be wholly dependent on continuing relief. On the other hand, many schools, hospitals and clinics had been repaired to the point where a greater problem was the provision of adequate staff. Potable water was available to an estimated 64 per cent of the population, no mean feat given the situation in 1991, access tracks were laid to facilitate the marketing of agricultural produce, and water-mills constructed for the local milling of flour.

These issues apart, rebuilding Kurdistan has proved far from straightforward, but some of the problems only slowly became apparent. For example, there are probably some 100,000 widows of the 'disappeared'. There has been strong pressure on many of these women not to remarry. Consequently they have become dependent on the charity of their in-laws. Some have become the victims of family exploitation. Others have become dependent on the charity of others, a handful have even been driven into prostitution.

The return to their villages of origin has also proved a mixed blessing. In the *mujama'at*, there had been access to education and health care. With a return to the village, these services have been far less accessible, adversely affecting women in particular. There is a very high drop-out rate for girls at secondary level. Expectant mothers in villages often have no qualified assistance either in childbirth or post-natal child care.

The overwhelming problem for those providing relief and rehabilitation lies in the political future of Iraqi Kurdistan (see below).

## Human rights

In view of the major human rights violations committed by all states in the region against their Kurdish minorities, it is appropriate to record Kurdish violations too. Mention has already been made of PKK breaches of common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, requiring humane and dignified treatment of all surrendered combatants and of all non-combatants.

In Iraqi Kurdistan serious violations have been committed since 1991 by the main parties, notably the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (IMK), KDP and PUK, and also by the KRG since 1992. These violations include the detention of political opponents, torture, executions following summary trials, unlawful killings (most notoriously the execution of prisoners), the elimination of smaller political groups and of judicial investigations by intimidation and assassination. Sixty unarmed Iraqi soldiers were executed in Sulaymaniya in October 1991 in response to the Iraqi shelling of the city. Although the suspected perpetrators were identified, they were not brought to trial. During the heavy fighting between the IMK, KDP and PUK, December 1993 to August 1995, all three parties seem to have been guilty of killing prisoners and other serious violations. In a detailed report listing such violations, Amnesty International stated:

*Political leaders have shown themselves unwilling to acknowledge the scale of human rights abuses carried out by their respective parties, to impose the necessary controls on the forces under their authority, or to introduce effective measures to ensure that those responsible are held accountable before the law. The fact that the perpetrators of numerous unlawful and deliberate killings and torture remain not only at liberty but also in positions of authority has undermined public confidence in the administration of justice and the rule of law. The knowledge that crime will go unpunished – and may even be rewarded – has contributed to the spi-*

*ral of violence in society at large, which has in turn escalated human rights abuses in Iraqi Kurdistan.*<sup>74</sup>

## The Iraqi Kurdish future

Perhaps the most depressing aspect of developments in Iraqi Kurdistan is the array of fearful certainties hanging over the region, even if the gloomy prognosis resulting from the KDP-PUK conflict in October 1996 is not fulfilled. The first of these is the socio-political dynamic of Kurdish society. Kurdish society, despite the promise of the 1992 election, has proved unable to free itself of the patrimonial shackles of neo-tribalism. The pervasive system of 'gift exchange', of loyalty to a leader in return for employment opportunities, protection or other rewards, thwarts democratic government and an open society. There is no prospect of this changing unless sufficient wealth and opportunity are generated to break the need of weaker people for the patronage of stronger ones. There is no perceptible prospect of this transition. The second is that any help provided by neighbouring states will not contribute to Kurdish self-determination (wherever that may lead), but will simply be a function of those neighbours' own political strategies which certainly exclude allowing the Kurds any form of independent power. The third, and most depressing certainty, is that the Kurds have no prospect of being strong enough to impose their wishes permanently on Baghdad. *De facto* autonomy is an interlude which, if they are fortunate, will persist until the demise of Saddam Hussein. But Kurdish leaders will still have to reach an accommodation with Baghdad in the knowledge that the government will have undisputed military power over Kurdistan. Any government in Baghdad is bound to insist upon control of Kirkuk oil, control of the frontiers, and cast-iron guarantees that no form of agreed autonomy will lead to secession, or offer a trojan horse to Iraq's neighbours. Therefore Baghdad will ensure that autonomy remains largely illusory and that real power will be exercised (if necessary behind the scenes) from Baghdad. It is also likely that government will play the same game as in the past, setting one Kurdish leader against another. In their rivalry Barzani and Talabani have given Baghdad the dream ticket for reasserting control by proxy, using one leader to diminish the other, and coopting the more promising candidate to serve the government's creeping system of control, albeit dressed up as autonomy.

# The Kurds in Syria and elsewhere

## Syria

The Kurds in Syria number about 8 per cent of the total population. They are found in three main areas: in Kurd Dagh, the rugged hill country in the north-west of Aleppo, in north-west Jazira (the 'island' between the Tigris and Euphrates) around Jarablus and Ain al Arab; also against the Turkish border; and third in their largest concentration in northern Jazira, around Qamishli and in the 'beak' of north-eastern Syria against the borders of Iraq and Turkey.

The inhabitants of Kurd Dagh, and some in the Jarablus area, have been living there for centuries. These, and smaller groups dating back to the mediaeval military 'camps' of Kurdish troops, in Damascus and elsewhere,<sup>55</sup> have virtually no long-standing relations with the Kurds of Turkey or Iraq. Although they may still speak Kurdish many are either partly or wholly 'arabicized', that is, they feel they now belong to the local Arab culture.

The largest community, in north Jazira, is formed of those who became permanently settled inside Syria's borders following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. A relatively small number of these had traditionally used northern Jazira as winter pasture, driving their livestock down from the anti-Taurus each autumn. They shared this area with Arab nomadic tribes, notably the Shammar, who also used the area during summer, when driven northwards by the heat and absence of grazing further south.

The overwhelming majority, however, were Kurds fleeing from Turkey in the years after 1920, and particularly after the collapse of Sheikh Said Piran's revolt and the subsequent risings. These settled what was a relatively uninhabited and fertile area. It is among these Kurds that national awareness, and tensions with the Arab majority in Syria have been most evident.

During the 1920s refugee Kurdish *aghas* from Anatolia continued to raid to and fro across the Syrian-Turkish border. The presence of a considerable number of Christians – mainly Armenian and Assyrian refugees from Anatolia, who hoped for relative freedom from Muslim rule in Damascus – contributed to the tension, particularly since the French mandatory authorities encouraged minority separatism in Syria. The latter made a practice of recruiting minorities, including the Kurds, into their local force, Les Troupes Spéciales du Levant. They also encouraged the Kurd nationalist party, Khoybun, thus giving Arab nationalists a reason for unease. During the 1930s Kurds maintained an ambivalent attitude towards Muslim Arab Damascus and also their Christian neighbours.

Following effective Syrian independence in 1945, the tension between Arabs and Kurds was initially neither con-

cerned with separatism, nor with minority persecution. On the contrary, the first three military coups in Syria, all in 1949, were carried out by officers with part-Kurd backgrounds. All of these relied on officers of a similar ethnic background. Some Arabs felt such behaviour was an undesirable carry-over from Kurdish participation in les Troupes Spéciales. Following President Adib Shishakli's fall in 1954 it is said that high-ranking Kurds were purged from the army, and certainly by 1958 this was the case.

The union of Syria and Egypt in the United Arab Republic in 1958 triggered the first round of oppressive behaviour towards the Kurds. This was partly because of the intensity of Arab national expression following President Gamal Abdal Nasser's triumphal first years in Egypt. It was also because some Kurdish intellectuals had founded the Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria (KDPS) a few months earlier. This called for recognition of the Kurds as an ethnic group, and for democratic government in Damascus, drawing attention to the lack of economic development for Kurdish areas, and also to the fact that the police and military academies were closed to Kurdish applicants. Psychologically, the timing could hardly have been worse. Those caught with Kurdish gramophone records or publications, which had hitherto been tolerated, saw them seized and destroyed, and themselves put into prison. In August 1960 the authorities arrested a number of the new KDPS leadership, and 5,000 'suspects'.

The question of ethnic and religious identity has bedevilled the development of political parties in Syria. Pressure on the Kurds intensified after the collapse of the union with Egypt in 1961. That year a census was carried out in Jazira as a result of which 120,000 Kurds were discounted as foreigners.<sup>56</sup> The following year a plan to create an 'Arab belt' along the border of Jazira began to be implemented, but was changed to one of establishing model farms, staffed by Arabs. Although these plans were never fully implemented they caused enough concern and distress for up to 60,000 Kurds to leave the area for Damascus, Turkey and mainly for Lebanon, where they found work during the 1960s building boom. However, those Kurds stripped of nationality still found themselves required to serve in the Syrian army.

There was no relief from persecution when the Ba'ath assumed power in 1963. This was partly on account of the Kurdish revolt against Baghdad, and fears of this spreading. The Ba'ath launched an absurd publicity campaign to 'save the Jazira from becoming a second Israel', a manifestly unconvincing slogan. Some Kurds were actually expelled, in addition to those already stripped of nationality and the state refused to implement land reforms where the beneficiaries were Kurdish rather than Arab peasantry.

There was also a sense of solidarity between the Ba'ath in Baghdad and Damascus before they split in 1966. The Syrian Ba'ath had already demonstrated its distrust of Kurds. When it had merged with the Arab Socialist Party (ASP) a decade earlier it had denied Kurdish peasant members of the ASP membership of the new party.

However, the Kurds were also strongly responsible for the failure of the Syrian Communist Party to attract a wider following. It was led for many years by the remarkable Khalid Baqdash, and dominated by other Kurds. One party member commented bitterly of the 'narrow nationalist chauvinism' of the party.<sup>57</sup> As for the KDPS, it broke up under the hostile pressure of government. Repeated arrests of its members and alleged torture had a divisive affect. Although it continued to struggle on it has never achieved a wide following, and its different factions reflect personality or local clashes more than any ideological difference.

Ba'ath persecution of the Kurds began to ease from 1967 onwards. In 1971 it implemented those land reforms in Kurdish areas already implemented elsewhere. However, it was not until 1976 that President Hafiz al Asad officially renounced the long-standing plan to transfer Kurdish and Arab populations in this sensitive area, a left-over from the 'Arab belt' policy of a decade earlier. Arabs already moved into predominantly Kurdish areas were allowed to stay, but the programme as such was halted.

During the mid-1980s the Kurds felt safer than they had done for several decades. However, they have remained victims of state-sponsored ethnic discrimination. The State of Emergency imposed in 1963 remains in force, and human rights guarantees enshrined in Syrian law thereby remain suspended. Those who protest against government policy towards the Kurdish minority remain liable to detention. In October 1992 four illegal Kurdish organizations published materials calling for civil equality rights for Kurds to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the law (Decree no. 93 of 1962) which stripped 120,000 Kurds of their citizenship and passports. Today this number stands by natural increase at approximately 180,000. These organizations also called for cultural rights in view of the limits the government places on cultural activities and the teaching of Kurdish. The government responded with the arrest of about 260 Kurds in al-Hassaka, Ras al 'Ain and al Qamishli in the north-east, and in Aleppo and Afrin in the north-west, 40 of whom were still in detention in 1993, most of them suspected members of the Kurdish Popular Union Party. It is indicative of continuing chauvinistic discrimination that a decree (no. 122 of September 1992) prohibits civil servants from registering children with Kurdish first names, that Kurdish intellectuals were prevented from travelling abroad in 1993, and Kurdish cultural centres, bookshops and other associations were prohibited. Local human rights organizations remain forbidden to carry out work inside the country. It is a predictable irony of the region that while Syria supports and to some extent sponsors the activities of the PKK, providing it with facilities in Lebanon and Syria, it continues to stifle its own Kurdish community's cultural and political aspirations.

## Lebanon

Until the civil war of 1975–91 there were about 70,000 Kurds living in Lebanon. The overwhelming majority hail from Mardin in south-east Anatolia. The earliest arrivals, during the French mandate, numbered about 15,000. These secured Lebanese citizenship. Since 1961 a few thousand more had residents permits which indicate that the question of citizenship is 'under study'. The majority of Kurds, however, have no permit at all. They arrived to participate in the building boom.

Both socially and economically the Kurds in Lebanon have been in a weak position, carrying out unskilled manual labour for which they have been ill-paid, and unable to press for better conditions for fear of deportation. Since the civil war began the Kurds have been among the most oppressed. They, together with other Syrians and Shi'ites from south Lebanon, caught the first round of Phalangist<sup>58</sup> fury in the sacking of Qarantina and of Naba. Some were massacred, others fled and since then have led a twilight existence in the beach slums of St Michel and Ouzai, south Beirut. The number of Kurds is believed to have dropped by at least 10,000 and possibly by a good deal more, as Kurds drifted back to Syria on account of the bleak outlook in Lebanon.

## Europe

Ever since the nineteenth century, the liberal democracies of Western Europe have provided the arena in which *émigré* intellectuals have been able to develop Kurdish nationalist ideology, intellectual debate, and also to begin to produce a body of literature and ideas essential to the creation of a national movement. From the 1960s, however, a quantum leap was made in the importance of European 'exile', with the demand for immigrant labour in Germany's expanding economy. Sufficient expatriate Kurds now produced publications on a scale hitherto unknown. Kurdish, essentially a 'village' language, was developed into a medium for the wide dissemination of ideas in print, despite dialect and script differences. Indeed, it is in exile that the various Kurdish languages have begun to meld into an acceptable *lingua franca* among Kurdish intellectuals from different countries.

With the growing self-awareness an increasing number of Turkish 'guest workers', mainly in Germany, considered their identity to be Turkish only in terms of citizenship as they 'rediscovered' their Kurdish identity. These of course, spoke only Turkish, but increasing interest grew in Kurdish, not necessarily as a functional language but as a symbol of national regeneration. As a result, while in the early 1980s estimates were made of approximately 600,000 Kurds in Europe, by the mid-1990s expert commentators were talking of 2 million, the result of 'rediscovery' rather than increased immigration.

With the modest liberalization in Turkey in 1991, many books previously only published abroad were now republished inside Turkey. In addition, a Kurdish television service, MED-TV was established in March 1995 in Brussels, London and Stockholm, to broadcast by satellite to

Kurdish-speakers in the Middle East. Although this was widely viewed as a propaganda instrument of the PKK, it offered those with satellite dishes, be it in Istanbul, Van or Kirmanji-speaking areas of northern Iraq, the opportunity to receive the nationalist message in spite of state strictures. The experience in exile is likely to remain a vital impetus wherever the Kurdish movement is denied an open forum for discussion on its native soil.

## Former Soviet Union

There are probably approximately 500,000 Kurds distributed thinly across the southern republics of the former Soviet Union, mainly in the Caucasus, but with some also in Turkmenistan and other Central Asian republics. It is difficult to be certain about the distribution of Kurds in the former Soviet Union, even in the Caucasus. One may estimate<sup>59</sup> that in the mid-1990s there were probably approximately 75,000 Kurds in the Armenian Republic, 200,000 in Azerbaijan, 40,000 in Georgia, 30,000 in Kazakhstan, 20,000 in Kirghizia, 30,000 in Krasnodar (east of Crimea), 35,000 in Siberia, probably over 50,000 in Turkmenistan and 10,000 in Uzbekistan. One cannot have much certainty about such figures, partly because of population movement since 1988, but also because Kurds previously assimilated into the culture where they live are rediscovering their Kurdish identity. On the other hand most Yazidis, although included in the above estimate, reportedly think of themselves primarily as Yazidis, rather than by their cultural origin as Kurds.

There have been Kurds in what became the Soviet Union for possibly a thousand years. The first real evidence of a Kurdish presence is the Shaddadid dynasty in the Caucasus in the tenth to the eleventh century, but Kurds were probably few in number and on the periphery of Kurdish expansion. At the end of the sixteenth century Kurdish tribespeople were forcibly settled in Khurasan, as a bulwark against the Turkoman tribes to the north. It is from this settlement that a few 'islets' of Kurds exist north of the Atrek river just across the present international border, inside Turkmenistan.

However, the presence of most Kurds inside the former Soviet Union's borders results from three processes. In the eighteenth century there was a migration of Kurdish tribes northwards into the Caucasus region. In the nineteenth century there was progressive encroachment southwards by Tsarist Russia across Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, thereby bringing more tribes under Russian rule. Finally, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the progressive Ottoman persecution of the Yazidis in northern Mesopotamia and eastern Anatolia prompted a substantial migration to the comparative safety of Christian Armenia and Georgia.

It is possible that as many as 500,000 Kurds found themselves incorporated into the nascent Soviet Union, but this figure is probably an exaggeration.<sup>60</sup> Certainly there were well over 100,000, forming one of over 100 recognized nationalities in the new empire. Kurds in Azerbaijan came under pressure to assimilate.<sup>61</sup>

In 1923 part of the territory of Azerbaijan which had a

predominantly Kurdish population was accorded the status of an autonomous region, with its capital at Lachin (and later at Shusha). This was an area, half the size of Lebanon, sandwiched between Armenia and Nagorny-Karabakh and extended southwards as far as the Iranian border.<sup>62</sup> It had a population of about 60,000 Kurds. It produced its own newspaper, *Sovyet Kurdistan*, and had its own Kurdish-medium schools. 'Red' Kurdistan was abolished in 1930 and the territory reincorporated into Azerbaijan.

The Kurds became victims of forced migration and purges. In 1937 thousands of Kurds were forcibly moved from Armenia and Azerbaijan to Kazakhstan, other Central Asian republics and Siberia. Many adult males simply disappeared. A similar fate overtook the Kurds of Georgia in 1944. Kurds were forbidden to leave their town or village without permission, with the risk of 25 years in prison for those who disobeyed.

There also seems to have been an official attempt to wipe out Kurdistan identity. The name of Kurdistan was suppressed, and publication in Kurdish, which had been steadily growing, now ceased. The Kurdish population was minimized in the official census. For example, in Azerbaijan the already minimized population of 41,000 in 1926, fell to 6,000 in 1939, 1,500 in 1959 and in 1979 was not reported at all. They had simply ceased to exist.<sup>63</sup> Partly the result of deportation, it was also explained by deliberately describing Muslim Kurds as Azerbaijanis. By 1989 the official number of Kurds throughout the former Soviet Union was only 153,000, scattered over nine republics.

*Glasnost* contributed to a resurgence of identity and expression, and also to a recognition of the repression of the Stalinist years. At the twenty-eighth Congress of the Communist Party in September 1989 a resolution promised: 'To take every measure in order to solve the problems of the Crimean Tartars, Soviet Germans, Greeks, Kurds, Meshketian Turks and others.'<sup>64</sup> At the end of 1989 the Supreme Soviet admitted illegal and repressive acts, including forcible resettlement of 12 nationalities in the former Soviet Union, among them the Kurds.

From 1990 onwards the Kurdish population in Armenia and Azerbaijan became caught in the conflict over Nagorny-Karabakh. Both republics put pressure on their Kurdish minority. Eighteen thousand Muslim Kurds in Armenia were expelled along with the Azeris living in Armenia. Two thousand Kurds in Azerbaijan also felt compelled to flee to avoid harassment or forced conscription. Most of these refugees went to Krasnodar (east of Crimea).

In 1992, following the defeat of the Azeris in Nagorny-Karabakh, there was a short-lived attempt to reconstitute the old autonomous region of Kurdistan. However, the following year Armenia established a broad corridor across this putative region to link Armenia with Nagorny-Karabakh, and those Kurds who had not already abandoned their homes now fled.

Further east it is also reported that several thousand Kurds fled Kirghizia during the period of instability following the end of the Soviet regime. These refugees also apparently went to Krasnodar.

As with Kurdish culture elsewhere, a weak written tradition has undermined national cohesion and growth. Kurdish remains essentially a language spoken at home.

Before 1921 there were virtually no books published in Kurdish and virtually no Kurd able to read them. The literacy rate among Kurds in the region at that time was reckoned at about one per thousand.<sup>65</sup> The first script used from 1921 was Armenian (since Armenia was the republic most amenable to Kurdish cultural expression). In 1927 the Turkish Latin alphabet was adopted, but in 1945 this was abandoned in favour of Cyrillic. Kurds in Azerbaijan apparently now publish using Turkish Latin script, while in Armenia and Georgia they retain Cyrillic, hardly a basis on which to advance a common literature.

During the 1920s Kurdish was the medium of instruction in 11 schools, and textbooks were produced in Kurdish. Publishing in Kurdish reached a peak between 1935 and 1937, when about 30 titles appeared yearly, but thereafter only one or two books appeared each year, reflecting the sudden repression of the Kurdish community. Publishing in Kurdish has apparently proliferated since 1992. There is limited Kurdish-medium radio broadcasting in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia but no television.

With their population dispersed over nine republics, Kurds naturally fear assimilation. Only Kurdish-medium education can really halt this process, but this does not exist, and while the language remains essentially only a spoken one, the future of Kurdish cultural identity must remain in jeopardy. Limited provision exists in Georgia and Armenia for the study of Kurdish language and literature.



# Recommendations

One can only make recommendations about the current predicament of the Kurdish people in the knowledge that governments of the region have so far shown themselves to be unresponsive to external appeals, and few Western governments have been willing to jeopardize their short-term trade relations with Turkey by taking a stand of principle despite the high level of torture and violence and the mass eviction of people from their homes in Turkish Kurdistan.

## General recommendations

- 1 The UN should consider how the unrepresented status of minorities such as the Kurdish people, can be further remedied.
- 2 The UN should seek implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992) in order to achieve a balance between the legitimate sovereign requirements of the states in the region, and the rights of the Kurdish communities to free cultural expression and a genuine measure of control over their own affairs.
- 3 The UN should encourage a political solution for the Kurdish people. In doing so, it should consider how the hope, expressed in Security Resolution No. 688 of 5 April 1991: 'that an open dialogue will take place to ensure that the human and political rights of all Iraqi citizens are respected' may also be applied in Iran and Turkey.

## Regarding Turkey

- 4 All governments should make the sale of weaponry and military equipment to Turkey conditional upon an undertaking that the Turkish forces will pursue the war against the PKK according to international law and convention regarding non-combatants and those combatants who have surrendered, and make the deployment of their own body of monitors a condition of sale.
- 5 Signatories of the Geneva Convention, particularly those governments with friendly relations with either party, should put pressure on Turkey and the PKK to respect humanitarian law and the customary laws of war and to apply their requirements rigorously.
- 6 European governments should require absolute respect for the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights and invoke their right to bring an interstate case against Turkey (Article 24) to ensure Turkey's accountability in particular regarding the right to life (Article 2); the prevention of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Article 3); the right to liberty and security of person (Article 5); the guaran-

tee that justice will be dispensed by an independent and impartial tribunal established by law according to accepted international norms (Article 6); the sanctity and privacy of family life and home (Article 8); freedom of thought, expression and assembly (Articles 9–11).

- 7 Turkey's NATO allies should put pressure on Turkey to revoke the State of Emergency legislation and decrees immediately, since they prevent domestic legal remedy for those in the region and permit the regional governor to violate Turkish and international law with impunity.
- 8 Turkey's NATO allies should insist on a halt to village evictions and the rehabilitation of the villages of the south-east and the return of the original Kurdish population. They should assist with the funding and implementation of this process.
- 9 Inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should consider how to assist south-eastern Turkey with regard to its acute under-development, its large-scale human displacement and its widespread human rights violations, particularly by providing support to local human rights organizations.
- 10 The Turkish government should facilitate the access of humanitarian NGOs to northern Iraq and ensure rapid transfer of materials and equipment from Turkey to Iraq to assist the NGOs in this work.
- 11 The international community should use all possible mechanisms to monitor the human and minority rights situation in Turkey.

## Regarding Iraq

- 12 The UN should remain committed to the protection of the Kurdish region, along the lines of UN Security Council Resolution 688, for as long as Saddam Hussein remains in power in Baghdad.
- 13 Once Saddam Hussein ceases to be in power, the UN should encourage negotiations between the Kurdish community and Baghdad to ensure a new agreement which provides Baghdad with undisputed sovereignty and the Kurds with a clear mandate for an agreed form of autonomy. It should encourage the resolution of territorial disputes regarding Kirkuk and other areas in a manner which guarantees the legitimate concerns of both parties.
- 14 The UN should encourage the return of displaced persons to their original place of abode, particularly Kurds deliberately removed from areas of contention, notably Kirkuk and Mosul.
- 15 The UN should establish a war crimes tribunal to determine those guilty of crimes against humanity, and of war crimes, and to ensure that these are tried. This should include Kurds guilty of committing war crimes, in particular the summary execution of prisoners of war since 1991. A human rights monitor should be established as a

permanent presence to remind the *de facto* Kurdish authorities that they, too, are required to uphold internationally agreed human rights norms. This arrangement should contain a training facility. The *de facto* Kurdish authorities should allow immediate and unrestricted access to human rights organizations seeking to investigate the situation in the region.

- 16 Inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations should continue to provide developmental assistance to the Kurdish region in order to help its recovery, build local capacity and include strategies for medium-term sustainability.
- 17 Minority rights should be embodied into any autonomy agreement for the Kurdish region for the Arabs, different Christian confessions, non-Sunni Kurds, Turkomans and Yazidis.

## Regarding Iran

- 18 Governments should make trade relations with Iran contingent on progress towards proper respect for human rights norms, in particular the abandonment of extrajudicial killings, torture and unlawful imprisonment.
- 19 Friendly governments should encourage Iran's government to appoint Kurds to the administration of the provinces of eastern and western Azerbaijan, Bakhtiran, and Kurdistan.
- 20 Iran should provide every assistance to Kurdish refugees on its borders fleeing from Iraq, and the international community should provide funds to enable Iran to do so in view of the heavy refugee burden it already bears.

## Regarding Syria

- 21 Governments with influence should encourage Syria to abandon its state of emergency, apply measures for human rights protection enshrined in the constitution and allow internal human rights groups to function.
- 22 With regard to the Kurdish community, Decree No. 93 of 1962 stripping Kurds of their citizenship should be revoked, and every Kurdish citizen of the state permitted a passport and freedom to travel.
- 23 Syria should permit its Kurds full cultural rights, including the freedom to teach and publish in the Kurdish language, and to form Kurdish associations.





- 1 Governments, anxious for their territorial integrity, have feared secession, while neighbouring states have used Kurdish groups to foment unrest across a hostile border.
- 2 See for example the maps in Vanly, I.C., *Le Kurd Irakien Entite Nationale*, Neuchatel, 1970; and that illustrating Kurdish claims at the Peace Conference 1919 in Nikitine, B., *Les Kurdes, Etude Sociologique et Historique*, Paris, 1956.
- 3 I have chosen to rely on van Bruinessen, M., *Agha, Shaikh and State*, London, 1992, pp. 14–15 for guidance, because of his careful attempt at an objective estimate for 1975. I have tried to update the figures based on the same percentages he used then: in the case of the Iraqi Kurds it is assumed that the Kurds were reliability counted in 1922, and again in 1935 when they constituted approximately 23 per cent of the population. In the case of Iran, the assessment is based on religion, where 10 per cent of the population is Sunni Muslim, of which 1 per cent or so are non-Kurd, and this is offset by the Shi'i Kurds living around Kermanshah. The figure for Turkey is based on van Bruinessen's careful scrutiny of the 1970 census results by sub-province. Given that Kurds have a significantly higher birth-rate than Turks, I have increased van Bruinessen's estimate from 19 per cent (1975) to 22 per cent (1993). The unreliability implicit in all these assumptions needs no elaboration. For comparison, More, C., *Les Kurdes aujourd'hui, mouvement nationale et partis politiques*, Paris, Edition Harmattan, 1984, gives the following Kurdish population percentages: Iran 16 per cent; Iraq 27 per cent; Syria 9 per cent; Turkey 24 per cent; giving a numerical total for that year of 20.1 million.
- 4 Sunni Muslims regard the Quran supplemented by the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad as the sole and sufficient repository of the faith. They do not accept a priesthood to mediate the faith to believers or for an infallible interpretation of the scriptures. That infallibility, difficult to pinpoint in practice, belongs to the community as a whole, although the business of interpreting the Quran and traditions has been carried out over the centuries through the consensus of jurists and theologians. Historically the Sunnis spring from the succession struggle following the Prophet's death, regarding the responsibility of 'caretaker' for the community as having passed to the first four 'righteous' *caliphs*, and following them to the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties. Sunni Islam was the official confession of the Ottoman state, and this gives the Sunni community within the ex-Ottoman lands, regardless of ethnicity, an implicitly superior status to Shi'is and members of other faiths.
- 5 There are 10–15 million Alevi in Turkey of whom at least 3 million are Kurdish. Kurdish Alevi live predominantly in the triangle of territory between Erzurum, Maras and Sivas. It is impossible to have any accurate numerical estimate because the term Alevi (follower of Ali) is a generic one used to embrace virtually all non-Sunni Muslims in Turkey. However, Kurdish Alevi are of Qizilbash origin. Qizilbash beliefs emerged in the late fifteenth century, associated with the rise to power of the Safavids in Iran. It appears to be a mixture of Shi'i Islam, Persian Mazdeism, Christianity and possibly Turkoman ideas. It was carried into Anatolia by invading Turkoman tribespeople, and seems to have been adopted by certain Kurdish tribes. Alevism is on the fringes of Islam. Alevi do not observe any of the five fundamental Islamic requirements: the statement of faith (*shahada*), the performance of prayer five times daily (*salat*), almsgiving (*zakat*), fasting during Ramadan (*sawm*), performance of the Mecca pilgrimage (*hajj*). Alevi, particularly Kurdish Alevi, are widely reviled and harassed in Turkey as ritually unclean and of dubious loyalty to the state.
- 6 The Shi'is were the opponents of the Sunnis in the succession struggle, being partisans of the Prophet's son-in-law, Ali. Although they lost the struggle, they have clung to the Alid cause with fervent devotion, intensified by the persecution Shi'is have experienced from time to time. They believe in a succession of *imams*, infallible in the interpretation of law and doctrine, whose essential qualification was membership of the Prophet's family, to which Shi'ites have an almost mystical devotion. Ithna'ashari Shi'ism, the mainstream form of Shi'ism, became the established religion of Iran from the early sixteenth century, although only a minority of Kurds in southern Kurdistan adopted it.
- 7 They are also called the Ali-Ilahi, misleadingly since Ali (the Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law) is not the principal figure in their religious system. Their central belief is in seven successive manifestations of the Divinity, and they have in common with the Alawis and the Druzes a veneration for Ali, though he is far overshadowed by the founder of their religion and the fourth 'theophany' the divinity Sheikh or Sultan Sahak, who ushered in the fourth divine epoch, of Haqiqi, (the Real Truth).
- 8 Its influences include Jewish (prohibition of certain foods), pagan, Manichean (the Persian gnosis), Muslim (fasting, sacrifice, pilgrimage), Nestorian Christian (baptism, drinking of wine, eucharistic rites) and Zoroastrian (echoes of Persian dualism) elements and Isma'ili and Sufi beliefs (esoteric doctrine, ecstasy and reverence for a large number of initiate sheikhs), and Sabaeen and shamanistic features.
- 9 Space does not permit an examination of Yazidi beliefs here, but those interested should consult 'Yazidis' in *The Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden and London, 1961, pp. 641–4; Lescot, R., *Enquête sur les Yazidis*, Beirut, Librairie du Liban, 1975 (reprint of 1938 edition); Drower, E.S., *Peacock Angel*, London, John Murray, 1941; and Layard, A.H., *Nineveh and its Remains*, London, John Murray, 1850.
- 10 On the establishment of Israel, see McDowall, D., *The Palestinians: The Road to Nationhood*, London, Minority Rights Publications, 1995.
- 11 This section is based on van Bruinessen's outstanding work, and on the studies by Leach, E. and Barth, F., of Kurdish villages in the 1930s and 1940s, summarized in Coon, C., *Caravan*, New York, 1958, pp. 298–304, and in Kinnane, D., *The Kurds and Kurdistan*, London, 1964, pp. 10–15. See also Soane, E.B., *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan in Disguise*, London, 1912; and Sykes, M., *The Caliph's Last Heritage*, London, Macmillan, 1915, pp. 553–8.
- 12 Water is the most frequent source of quarrels, provoking bitter fights during the irrigation season.

- 13 See Ghassemlou, A.R., *Kurdistan and the Kurds*, London, Collet's, 1965, p. 118; and Kendal, 'Kurdistan in Turkey', in Chaliand, G. (ed), *People without a Country*, London, Zed, 1993, p. 50.
- 14 Coon, C., *Op. Cit.*, p. 304.
- 15 *Parliamentary Papers*, Turkey, no. 5, Sheikh Obeidallah to Dr Cochran, 5 August 1880 .
- 16 For a discussion see McDowall, D., *A Modern History of the Kurds*, London, I.B. Tauris, 1996, pp. 53–9.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 105.
- 18 See Walker, C.J. (ed), *Armenia and Karabagh: The Struggle for Unity*, London, Minority Rights Publications, 1991, pp. 23–9.
- 19 Had Britain properly appreciated the Kirkuk oil potential, it is not credible that it would have made such a rash undertaking to cede easily the richest oil-bearing region under its control. But at the time it was preoccupied with strategic rather than economic considerations, McDowall, D., *A Modern History of the Kurds*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 135–6.
- 20 First adumbrated in the Amasya Protocol, and repeated in the National Pact of 1920, see Kendal in Chaliand, G. (ed), *People without a Country*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 56.
- 21 FO 371/12255 Clerk to Chamberlain, Ankara, 4 January 1927, in McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p. 200.
- 22 The then Minister of Justice was Mahmut Esat Bozhurt, *Milliyet*, no. 1655, 16 September 1930, quoted by Kendal in Chaliand, *Op. Cit.*, p. 66.
- 23 McDowall, D., *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p. 209.
- 24 Kendal, in Chaliand, G., *Op. Cit.*, p. 97.
- 25 McDowall, D., *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p. 413.
- 26 By June 1996, these provinces had increased to 10: Batman, Bingol, Bitlis, Diyarbakir, Hakkari, Mardin, Siirt, Sirmak, Tunceli and Van.
- 27 For a general discussion see Medico International and Kurdish Human Rights Project, *The Destruction of Villages in South-east Turkey*, London, 1996; for a detailed regional study, see Stichting Nederland-Koerdistan, *Forced Evictions and Destruction of Villages in Dersim (Tunceli) and the Western Part of Bingol, Turkish Kurdistan*, September–November 1994, Amsterdam, 1995.
- 28 Akbulut, Y., *Middle East International*, no. 296, 20 March 1987.
- 29 *Middle East International*, no. 415, 12 December 1991.
- 30 The Law of Political Parties (Law No. 2820) Article 81. For a discussion of this general election, see Lustgarten, L., McDowall, D., Nolan, C., *A Fearful Land*, London, Kurdish Human Rights Project, March 1996, pp. 4–14.
- 31 Rugman, J. and Hutchings, R., *Ataturk's Children*, London, 1966, p. 55.
- 32 The 'Law to fight terrorism', *Official Gazette*, 12 April 1991 and Helsinki Watch, *New Restrictive Anti-terror Law*, Washington, 10 June 1991.
- 33 Turkey, Prime Ministry State Planning Organization, *The South East Anatolia Project (GAP): Final Master Plan Report*, vol. 1, Ankara, 1989.
- 34 All these facts are set out in Turkey, Prime Ministry State Planning Organization, *The South East Anatolia Project: Final Master Plan Report*, *Ibid.*
- 35 In July 1995 the Union of Turkish Chambers of Commerce published an opinion survey of 1,267 Kurds entitled *Dogu Sonunu* (The Eastern Question). It caused a furore. Among other things this survey revealed that 35 per cent of respondents had a friend or relative in the PKK. More significantly the remaining 65 per cent declined to answer this question.
- 36 State Institute for Statistics, *1991 Statistical Yearbook*, Ankara, 1992, p. 93.
- 37 Judgment in the case of Akdivar and others, European Court of Human Rights, Strasbourg, no. 488, 16 September 1966.
- 38 Fédération International des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH), *Fact-Finding Mission on the Human Rights Situation: Kurdistan*, Brussels, January 1995, pp. 37–8, 76–83, 97–8.
- 39 The province of Mosul included virtually all the predominantly Kurdish areas under British occupation. Turkey very reluctantly conceded the loss of Mosul in 1926, but there has always remained a sense of injustice in Turkey that the Mosul province is rightfully theirs.
- 40 For details, see McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, pp. 108–9.
- 41 Great Britain, *Iraq: Review of Administration from 1914 to the Summer of 1920*, Cmd 1061, London, 1920, p. 61.
- 42 These were the formidable Bajilan and Jaf tribes, the towns of Kifri and Kirkuk, the Qadiri Talabani sheikhs and the Naqshbandi sheikhs of Biyara and Tawila.
- 43 McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, pp. 135, 142.
- 44 The Ba'ath Party is a socialist pan-Arab movement which took power in Syria in 1963 and Iraq in 1968.
- 45 'The Pike Commission Report to the House of Representatives', 19 January 1976, quoted in the *Village Voice*, New York, 23 February 1976.
- 46 McDowall, D., *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p. 339.
- 47 Besides the KDP and PUK, the other members were the Assyrian Democratic Movement, the Kurdistan Popular Democratic Party, Kurdistan Socialist Party, Pasok, the Toiler's Party and the Kurdish section of the Iraq Communist Party.
- 48 The following literature is relevant to the use of chemical weapons by Baghdad: Alaaldin, D., *Death Clouds: Saddam Hussein's Chemical War against the Kurds*, London, 1991; Gesellschaft für Bedroure Völker, *Germany and Genocide in Iraq's Persecution and Extermination of Kurds and Assyrian Christians 1968–90*, Göttingen, 1991; Middle East Watch/Human Rights Watch, *Genocide in Iraq: The Anfal Campaign against the Kurds*, New York/Washington, 1994; US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Staff Report, *Chemical Weapons Use in Kurdistan: Iraq's final offensive*, Washington, 1988.
- 49 For further information see McDowall, D., *A Modern History of the Kurds*, pp. 361–3.
- 50 *The Independent*, London, 11 April 1991.
- 51 It was also the first Resolution to mention the Kurds by name since the League's arbitration of the Mosul province in 1925–6.
- 52 Mahmud Othman to David McDowall, interview, London, 11 November 1992.
- 53 Many of those engaged in the fighting had only enrolled in order to earn a living for their families.
- 54 Amnesty International, *Iraq: Human Rights Abuses in Iraqi Kurdistan since 1991*, MDE 14/01/95, London, 28 February 1995, p. 22.

- 55 *Ibid.*, p. 22.
- 56 Vanly, I., 'The Kurds in Syria', in Kreyenbroek, P. and Sperl, S., *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, London and New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 151.
- 57 van Dam, N., *The Struggle for Power in Syria*, London, Croome Helme, 1979, p. 44; Seale, P., *The Struggle for Syria*, London, Oxford University Press, 1965, p. 160.
- 58 The Phalange are a right-wing Maronite-dominated paramilitary organization with a political wing.
- 59 The estimate here is based upon information in *The World Directory of Minorities*, London, Minority Rights Publications, 1997; Vanly, I., 'The Kurds in the Soviet Union', in Kreyenbroek, P. and Sperl, S., *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, *Op. Cit.*; Heyderi, J., 'The Kurds of the USSR', unpublished mimeograph, February 1991; Potier, T., 'The Kurds and other minorities of the Caucasus republics' unpublished mimeograph, August 1996.
- 60 Nadirov, N., 'Position of the Kurds in USSR', paper presented at Kurdish symposium at Pantheion University, Athens, 6 June 1991, p. 4.
- 61 Heyderi, J., *Op. Cit.*, p. 3.
- 62 Besides Lachin, it comprised the principal towns of Kalbajar, Kubatli and Zangelan, and the administrative subdivisions of Karakushlak, Koturli, Murad-Khanli and Kurd-Haji.
- 63 Vanly, I., 'The Kurds in the Soviet Union', *Op. Cit.* p. 204; Nadirov, N., 'Position of Kurds in USSR', *Op. Cit.*, p. 4; Heyderi, J., *Op. Cit.*, p. 2.
- 64 Quoted by Nadirov, J., *Op. Cit.*, p. 6.
- 65 Hassanpour, A., *Nationalism and Language, 1918–85*, San Francisco, 1992, p. 212.



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