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“One Nation in Four Countries”: Post-WWII United States Foreign Policy and the Kurdish Issue (1945-2010)

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Dedication

To the woman who has overcome countless challenges to earn the title of “Dr.” ... to me “Rima MOKEDDEM”.

To my parents, my husband, my daughters Israe & Basma, my brothers and my sister, who inspire me every day to reach my dreams.

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the evolution of the United States' foreign policy towards the Kurdish issue in Iraq, Turkey, Iran, and Syria between 1945 and 2010. As the largest stateless ethnic group in the Middle East, the Kurds have long struggled for recognition and autonomy within the states in which they live. Given the strategic importance of the region, the Kurdish issue has been influenced not only by domestic politics but also by the interests and policies of international powers, particularly the United States. This work explores how the US policy towards the Kurds developed over six decades and investigates the factors that shaped changes in the American attitudes and policies across different periods and contexts. The nature of the topic requires a mixed-methods approach, combining historical, qualitative, quantitative, and comparative analyses. It relies on a wide range of primary and secondary sources, including archival documents, governments' acts and reports, official speeches, books, articles, and statistical data. The findings reveal that the US policy towards the Kurdish question was driven mainly by strategic and geopolitical considerations. While regional developments encouraged engagement with the Iraqi Kurds, the American policy towards the Kurds in Turkey, Iran, and Syria remained cautious and closely tied to relations with the states' governments. The research concludes that the US policy was characterized by pragmatism and variation rather than by a consistent commitment to Kurdish self-determination. Furthermore, the varying experiences of the Kurdish communities across the region illustrate how changing geopolitical priorities shaped the American policy and influenced the development of the Kurdish question in the Middle East.

Keywords: United States, Kurds, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Syria, foreign policy

ملخص

تتناول هذه الأطروحة تطور السياسة الخارجية للولايات المتحدة الأمريكية تجاه القضية الكردية في العراق وتركيا وإيران وسوريا خلال الفترة الممتدة من سنة 1945 إلى سنة 2010. يعد الأكراد أكبر جماعة عرقية بلا دولة في الشرق الأوسط، وقد خاضوا على مدى عقود طويلة نضالاً من أجل الاعتراف بحقوقهم وتحقيق قدر من الحكم الذاتي داخل الدول التي يقيمون فيها. ونظراً للأهمية الإستراتيجية للمنطقة، فإن القضية الكردية لم تتأثر فقط بالعوامل السياسية الداخلية، بل أيضاً بمصالح وسياسات القوى الدولية، ولاسيما الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية. يسعى هذا العمل إلى تحليل تطور السياسة الأمريكية تجاه الأكراد على مدى ستة عقود، ودراسة العوامل التي أسهمت في تشكيل التغيرات التي طرأت على المواقف والسياسات الأمريكية عبر فترات وسياقات مختلفة. تقتضي طبيعة الموضوع اعتماد مقاربة منهجية متعددة تجمع بين التحليل التاريخي والنوعي والكمي والمقارن. تعتمد الدراسة على مجموعة واسعة من المصادر الأولية والثانوية، بما في ذلك الوثائق الأرشيفية، والقوانين والتقارير الحكومية، والخطابات الرسمية، والكتب، والمقالات العلمية، فضلاً عن البيانات الإحصائية. تكشف نتائج الدراسة أن السياسة الأمريكية تجاه القضية الكردية كانت مدفوعة أساساً باعتبارات استراتيجية وجيوسياسية. ففي حين شجعت التطورات الإقليمية على زيادة الانخراط الأمريكي مع أكراد العراق، ظلت السياسة الأمريكية تجاه الأكراد في تركيا وإيران وسوريا حذرة ومرتبطة إلى حد كبير بطبيعة العلاقات التي تربط الولايات المتحدة بحكومات تلك الدول. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن السياسة الأمريكية اتسمت بالبراغماتية والتباين أكثر من اتسامها بالتزام ثابت تجاه حق الأكراد في تقرير المصير. كما تُظهر التجارب المتباينة للمجتمعات الكردية في مختلف أنحاء المنطقة كيف أسهمت التحولات في الأولويات الجيوسياسية في تشكيل السياسة الأمريكية والتأثير في مسار القضية الكردية في الشرق الأوسط.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الولايات المتحدة، الأكراد، العراق، إيران، تركيا، سوريا، السياسة الخارجية

Résumé

Cette thèse examine l'évolution de la politique étrangère des États-Unis à l'égard de la question kurde en Irak, en Turquie, en Iran et en Syrie entre 1945 et 2010. En tant que plus grand groupe ethnique sans État du Moyen-Orient, les Kurdes ont longtemps lutté pour la reconnaissance et l'autonomie au sein des États dans lesquels ils vivent. Compte tenu de l'importance stratégique de la région, la question kurde a été influencée non seulement par les dynamiques politiques internes, mais également par les intérêts et les politiques des puissances internationales, en particulier ceux des États-Unis. Ce travail analyse l'évolution de la politique américaine à l'égard des Kurdes sur une période de six décennies et étudie les facteurs qui ont façonné les changements des attitudes et des politiques américaines à travers différentes périodes et différents contextes. La nature du sujet requiert une approche méthodologique mixte combinant des analyses historiques, qualitatives, quantitatives et comparatives. L'étude s'appuie sur un large éventail de sources primaires et secondaires, notamment des documents d'archives, des actes et rapports gouvernementaux, des discours officiels, des ouvrages, des articles scientifiques ainsi que des données statistiques. Les résultats montrent que la politique américaine à l'égard de la question kurde a été principalement déterminée par des considérations stratégiques et géopolitiques. Si les évolutions régionales ont favorisé un engagement accru auprès des Kurdes d'Irak, la politique américaine envers les Kurdes de Turquie, d'Iran et de Syrie est demeurée prudente et étroitement liée aux relations entretenues avec les gouvernements de ces États. La recherche conclut que la politique des États-Unis a été caractérisée par le pragmatisme et la variation plutôt que par un engagement constant en faveur de l'autodétermination kurde. En outre, les expériences contrastées des communautés kurdes à travers la région illustrent la manière dont l'évolution des priorités géopolitiques a façonné la politique américaine et influencé le développement de la question kurde au Moyen-Orient.

Mots-clés : Etats-Unis, Kurdes, Irak, Iran, Turquie, Syrie, politique étrangère

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABC	American Broadcasting Company
AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CNN	Cable News Network
EU	European Union
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KDPI	Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran
KDPPS	Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party of Syria
KDPS	Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NBN	National Broadband Network
NSDD-75	National Security Decision Directives 75
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
PJAK	Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistan (Free Life Party of Kurdistan)
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
SALTII	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks II
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
UAR	United Arab Republic
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
US	United States

USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WSJ	Wall Street Journal
WWI	World War One
WWII	World War Two
YPG	Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (People's Defense Units)

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Introduction

The Kurdish issue is a deep and complex question which extends across several countries in the Middle East, including Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Syria. The Kurds, who constitute a large ethnic group without their own state, have faced a long history of discrimination and oppression. Despite their large population and cultural and linguistic differences, they have often been marginalized and denied recognition by the states where they live.

The origins of the Kurdish issue go back to the post-World War I period. When the Ottoman Empire collapsed, the borders of the Middle Eastern countries were re-established. This change; however, led to the division of the Kurdish areas into different new states, which caused a long history of suffering for the Kurds who aimed to defend their existence as distinct people within these new nation-states. Therefore, from the twentieth century onwards, Kurdish national movements have occurred, including both political parties which called for autonomy, in addition to armed uprisings which have attempted to challenge the states' governments. However, these movements have been faced with brutal repression, including military campaigns and human rights abuses.

The Kurdish issue, that symbolizes the Kurds' struggle for identity and self-determination, is a testament to the complex nature of such issues in the field of international relations. Considering their position at the center of regional power rivalries and international interests, the Kurds have been subjected to both supportive and hostile external interventions that have greatly affected their demands for autonomy. In this case, foreign powers, especially the United States, have played a crucial role in shaping the path of the Kurdish movements and their aspirations.

In the years following World War II, the United States did not have a clear attitude towards the Kurdish question. The primary focus was on containing the Soviet influence in the region; therefore, the US avoided providing direct assistance to the Kurds for fear of souring its relations with significant regional allies like Turkey, Iraq and Iran. Throughout the Cold War period, the US policy towards the Kurdish issue was characterized by a combination of realpolitik, pragmatism, political realism and strategic calculations. In Iraq, for instance, the US sometimes supported the Kurds as part of its containment policy. However, this support was inconsistent and changed depending on regional and global

dynamics. In the aftermath of the Gulf War, the creation of a no-fly zone in northern Iraq marked the beginning of a new phase for the Iraqi Kurds and their relations with the United States as well. Moreover, the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 offered further opportunities for the Kurds, resulting in the establishment of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) which proved to be the best model of a successful Kurdish self-rule government, although this outcome was not originally intended to serve or support Kurdish aspirations.

Despite supporting the Kurds of Iraq, the United States' position on the Turkish Kurds has remained cautious and complex. Turkey, a NATO ally, has often been a priority for America, which has long tolerated the Turkish state's violations of the Kurdish human rights and designated the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) as a terrorist organization. Additionally, the extensive military aid, which America provided to Turkey in its fight against its Kurdish population, illustrates the US commitment to Turkey to combat what both countries view as a terrorist threat.

Regarding the Kurdish question in Iran and Syria, the US foreign policy was often determined according to regional and global dynamics. Unstable American relations with Iranian and Syrian regimes led to a very cautious US approach to Iranian and Syrian Kurds. Despite some rhetoric support for the Kurdish human rights in these two countries, the United States focused on national interests and regional stability in the Middle East rather than engaging in Kurdish minority groups' struggles.

While there is a large literature on the US foreign policy in the Middle East, there is a lack of a comprehensive and deep analysis that focuses mainly on the interaction between the US policy and the Kurdish issue over an extended period. Existing studies often focus on specific events or periods, such as the Gulf Wars or the Iraq War. This dissertation aims to fill this gap by providing a focused, detailed and coherent analysis of US foreign policy towards the Kurds, and examining how and why US strategies and policies have changed over time. To this end, this thesis will try to answer the following research questions: how did US foreign policy towards the Kurdish issue evolve from 1945 to 2010? What factors contributed to the inconsistency and variation in the US policy towards the Kurdish aspirations for autonomy across different contexts and time

periods? And how did changes in the political landscape of the Middle East influence shifts in US policy towards the Kurds?

The work suggests that US foreign policy towards the Kurdish issue shifted from ignorance and abandonment during the Cold War period to a more interventionist policy in post-1991, especially in Iraqi Kurdistan. This shift was, indeed, influenced mainly by strategic considerations, while humanitarian concerns played a secondary role. In addition, changes that took place in the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East, including the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the Gulf Wars and the US invasion of Iraq, forced the US to reconsider its approach to the Kurds in order to serve its strategic objectives in preserving regional stability and confronting emerging threats.

Many researchers have tackled the topic of the Kurdish issue, including David McDowall, Kerim Yildiz, Denise Natali, Martin Van Bruinessen, Wadie Jwaideh, Gareth Stansfield, Henri Barkey, Michael M. Gunter, Nader Entessar, Kreyenbroek and Sperls, Aliza Marcus, James Ciment and Robert Olson. However, they have either touched on the topic only with regard to the history of the Kurds in the countries in which they live, or examined the American policy towards the Kurdish issue by focusing mainly on the Kurds of Iraq while ignoring those in the neighboring states, especially in Iran and Syria. In fact, the only work that has dealt with the topic throughout different contexts and periods is Marianna Charountaki's book, *The Kurds and US Foreign Policy: International Relations in the Middle East since 1945*, which provides an analysis of the historical and strategic dimensions of US-Kurdish relations. The book is crucial in understanding the nature of US support for Kurdish aspirations; it closes a significant research gap in the field of Kurdish studies; however, the author has focused primarily on the Kurds of Iraq, while not much on the Kurds in Turkey, Iran and Syria. This may be due to the lack of sources available on this topic in the three countries mentioned. Another book of Meho and Nehme is also a significant publication, but his authors consider it as simply a sourcebook that aims to assist future researchers.

This dissertation seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexities that defined the US approach to the Kurdish issue over six decades, by tracing the historical evolution of US policy towards the Kurds, analyzing the factors that influenced shifts in policy, and exploring the interaction between US humanitarian

rhetoric and strategic interests in shaping policy decisions. Therefore, the nature of this topic requires the mixed methods approach. In addition to the qualitative method used to collect and analyze relevant data, the quantitative method is also used to analyze numerical data related to the topic such as military aid, economic assistance and diplomatic engagements. Moreover, the comparative approach is adopted to investigate simultaneously the case of the Kurds of Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria. This work also relies on a range of primary sources including archival documents, government acts, speeches and reports, in addition to secondary sources which comprise books, journals, newspapers' articles and websites.

To achieve the research objectives and answer the research questions, the dissertation is divided into four chapters. The first chapter entitled "Overview of US Foreign Policy up to 2010" is a tentative attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of the principles, trends and key factors that shaped the US foreign policy. It explores historical contexts, guiding ideologies and significant events that influenced America's approach to international relations until 2010.

The second chapter, labeled "The Kurdish Issue: Nationalism, Geopolitics, and Minority Rights in a Fragmented Landscape" sheds light on the complex nature of the Kurdish problem. It explores the diverse Kurdish communities in different countries (Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran), reflecting how their experiences affected their political objectives and approaches. Through a detailed analysis of the Kurdish national movement in each of the four countries, the chapter highlights the challenges and opportunities that the Kurds faced during their quest for recognition and self-determination.

The third chapter, "The US Foreign Policy toward the Kurdish Issue in Turkey and Syria", provides a deep analysis of the US position on the Kurdish problem in both Turkey and Syria from 1945 to 2010, examining its evolution within the geopolitical context of the Cold War and post-Cold War eras. It explores the US strategic balance between supporting Turkey, an important NATO ally, and addressing the Kurdish aspirations. Through critical analysis, this chapter highlights the complexities and contradictions of US engagements, and reveals the long-term implications for regional dynamics and the Kurdish quest for autonomy.

The final chapter, “The Kurds of Iraq and Iran in the US Foreign Policy”, examines the development of US foreign policy towards the Kurdish cause in Iraq and Iran during the period 1945-2010, focusing on the interplay between strategic interests and humanitarian considerations. The chapter sheds light on the shifting nature of the US stance on the Kurdish uprisings against their host states, which oscillated between support and abandonment according to the dictates of the American interests and regional changes as well. The chapter also explores the complex and cautious US approach to the Iranian Kurds, which was shaped by the context of US-Iranian relations and the strategic imperatives of containing Iranian influence. Through a thorough investigation of key events, the chapter reveals how the US leveraged the Kurdish groups to advance its geopolitical objectives, often grappling with the ethical and political challenges. The long-term impacts of these policies on Kurdish autonomy movements and regional stability are assessed, providing a clear understanding of the American foreign policy towards the Kurdish issue in Iraq and Iran.

Chapter One

Overview of US Foreign Policy up to 2010

1.1. Introduction

The history of the United States has been significantly shaped by its foreign policy. Broadly defined, foreign policy is the state's strategies and decisions in its interactions with other countries in order to achieve its national interests.¹ For the US, foreign policy has evolved over time, influenced by different political, ideological, economic and humanitarian factors.

Since its independence in 1776, the United States has faced a changing international climate, resulting in its shift from an isolationist state to a dominant global leader. In fact, this evolution has passed through several periods, in which the country experienced different challenges and responses. During the early years, the US Founding Fathers focused primarily on sovereignty and territorial integrity, paying off debts, and building an economy capable of ensuring the country's security. However, the US started to embrace an expansionist approach during the 19th century, under the pretext of Manifest Destiny, leading to the rise of America as a colonial power.

Additionally, the US involvement in both World Wars led to its absolute move from isolationism to interventionism. The subsequent Cold War also prompted America to engage in many initiatives to protect its strategic interests, adopting particularly a containment strategy to counter the spread of the Soviet influence and its communist ideology. After the Cold War, the US emerged as the sole dominant power, addressing several global challenges and leading military interventions in many regions, including the Middle East.

The beginning of the twenty-first century witnessed new international changes and security threats. The September 11th attacks had a significant impact on the US foreign policy, prompting the American policy-makers to take serious measures to confront such risks. Consequently, fighting terrorism and ceasing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction formed the core of the American foreign policy during this period.

¹ Fraenkel, Jack, et al. *Civics: Government and Citizenship*. Prentice Hall, 1990. p. 455.

This chapter aims to provide a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the US foreign policy up to 2010, by highlighting the major events and strategies that influenced it. Studying different historical periods and the changing goals that guided the American foreign policy enables a better understanding of the complexities of international relations as well as the American views on various global issues, including the Kurdish issue.

1.2. The United States: From Isolationism to Internationalism

Upon arrival in the New World, the White European colonizers asserted their presence through force. They persecuted the indigenous people (American Indians) and launched fierce wars against them. These wars enabled the Europeans to secure their lives in America, where they established thirteen colonies under the British rule. However, the discriminatory laws imposed by the British authorities compelled them to rebel against Britain. The Americans emerged victorious, and in 1776, Congress declared the independence of the Thirteen Colonies which unified to form the United States of America.²

In the post-independence era, the Americans feared that other powerful countries would attempt to colonize parts of the Americas. This concern led them to isolate the continent from the rest of the world. Moreover, America's Founding Fathers believed that foreign treaties and alliances threatened their independence and sovereignty, as Alexander Hamilton, one of the Founding Fathers, said:

It ought to teach us not to overrate foreign friendships and to be upon our guard against foreign attachments. The former will generally be found hollow and delusive ; the latter will have a natural tendency to lead us aside from our true interest, and to make us the dupes of foreign influence... foreign influence is truly the Grecian horse to a republic. We cannot be too careful to exclude its entrance.³

George Washington, the first president of the United States, added that “it is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world.”⁴ Hence,

² Cullen, Jim. *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that shaped a Nation*. Oxford University Press, 2003. p. 16.

³ Smith, Marion. “The Myth of Isolationism, Part I American Leadership and the Cause of Liberty.” *The Heritage Foundation*, 6 Dec. 2010, www.heritage.org/global-politics/report/the-myth-isolationism-part-1-american-leadership-and-the-cause-liberty#_ftn9.

⁴ Herring, George C. *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776*. Oxford University Press, 2008. p. 83.

the Founders' initial goal was to preserve America's independence and sovereignty by avoiding long-term treaties and entanglements in the foreign world's affairs. However, this policy was not absolute; temporary alliances were permitted when necessary, as argued by Washington, "taking care always to keep ourselves, by suitable establishments, on a respectable defensive posture, we may safely trust to temporary alliances for extraordinary emergencies."⁵ This approach justified the treaty made between the US, Sweden and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies during the Tripolitan War when the American commercial ships were attacked by the Ottoman Empire in the Mediterranean Sea in the 1770's. In addition, other American ties were also made with France in 1778 like the Treaty of Amity and Commerce, which promoted trade between both countries, and the Treaty of Alliance which was signed on February 6, 1778, stating that in case of war with Great Britain, France would ally with the United States to fight their common enemy. This alliance lasted until 1793, when George Washington declared his Neutrality Proclamation speech in which he stated that the United States would remain neutral in the French Revolutionary Wars.⁶

In 1821, the Russian Czar declared that "all the area north of the fifty-first parallel and extending one hundred miles into the Pacific would be off-limits to non-Russians"⁷; however, John Quincy Adams, the American Secretary of State, strongly opposed this proclamation saying that "the American continents are no longer subjects of any new European colonial establishments."⁸ Around the same time, the Spanish colonies in Latin America became independent, though it was possible that Spain might restore control over them. In fact, the independence of these colonies aligned with the British and American interests, as both states aimed to prevent other European powers from interfering in Latin America, which was considered as a lucrative market for the British goods. Consequently, George Canning, the British Foreign Secretary, proposed a joint warning with the United States against any intervention in Latin America; however, his request was rejected.

These circumstances led President James Monroe to issue the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, declaring that "the American continents... are henceforth not to be considered as

⁵ Herring, George C.

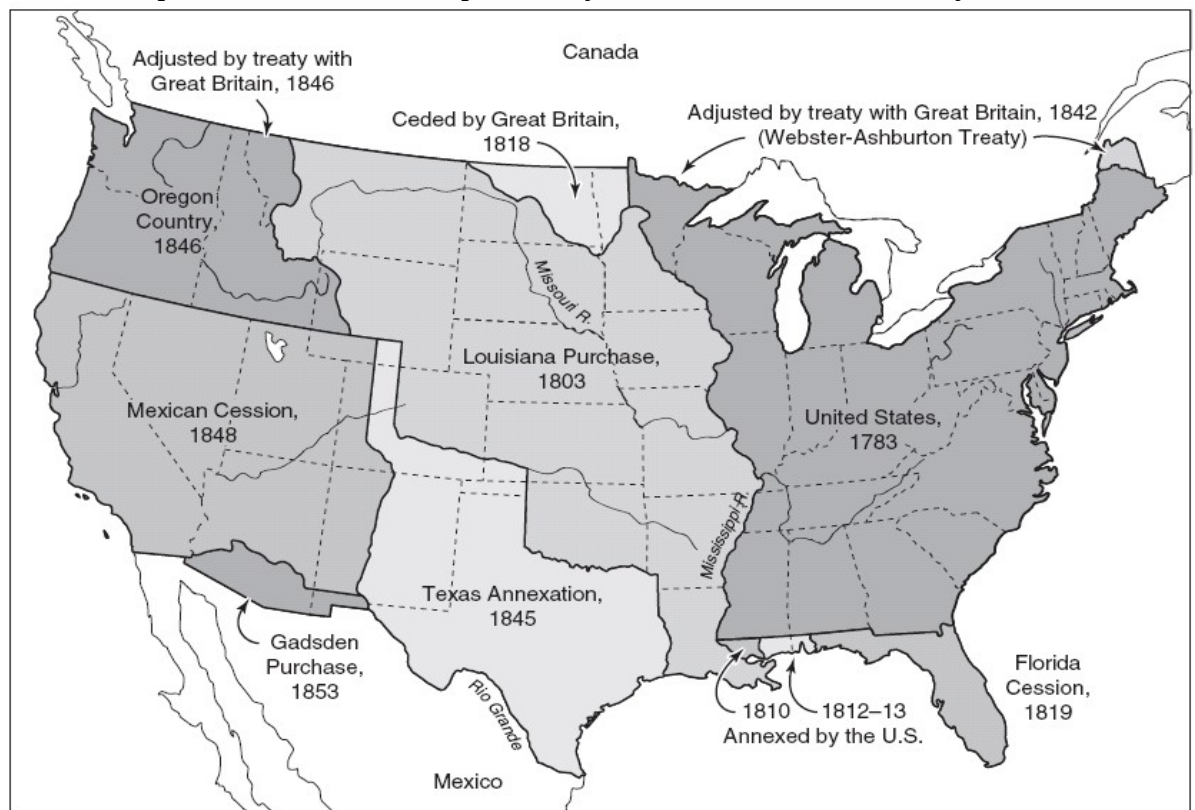
⁶ Herring, George C. pp. 4-6.

⁷ Smith, Garrett. *James Monroe and the Monroe Doctrine*. quizlet.com/113453372/james-monroe-and-the-monroe-doctrine-flash-cards/. Accessed 5 Oct. 2015.

⁸ Alvarez, Alejandro. *The Monroe Doctrine, Its Importance in the International Life of the States of the New World*. Oxford University Press, 1924. p. 7.

subjects for future colonization by any European Power.”⁹ The doctrine was supported in Latin America, believing that it would protect the region from foreign intervention. However, it is worthy to note here that the real intention of the United States was to establish itself as the sole power capable of dominating Latin America rather than merely protecting it. This ideology was later encapsulated in the concept of Manifest Destiny, which underscored the belief in the inevitable and justified expansion of US territory across the continent.¹⁰ The following map illustrates the US territorial expansion by the mid-nineteenth century.

Map 1.1. US Territorial Expansion by the Mid-Nineteenth Century



Source: LaFeber, Walter. p. 132.

Fearing European expansion in the American continent, especially because many Latin American countries were indebted to European powers, President Theodore Roosevelt reinforced the Monroe Doctrine by introducing what became known as

⁹ Root, Elihu. “The Real Monroe Doctrine.” *The American Journal of International Law*, vol. 8, no. 3, 1914, pp. 427-442.

¹⁰ LaFeber, Walter. *The American Age: United States Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad 1750 to the Present*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1994. p. 131.

Roosevelt Corollary. He presented this corollary in a message to Congress in 1904, in which he announced:

Chronic wrongdoing ... may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrong doing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power.¹¹

In fact, the US underwent a significant shift in its foreign policy by acquiring many territories in the Americas, moving from an absolute isolationism regarding military intervention to the beginning of international involvement. However, it was during the presidency of Woodrow Wilson that the American foreign policy took a different direction, initiating a heightened level of intervention. In 1914, a conflict erupted in Europe due to political miscalculations, alliance rivalries, and the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria by Serbian nationalists. Germany supported Austria while Russia backed Serbia, leading to the outbreak of a war between the Triple Entente (Britain, France, and Russia) and the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria, and Italy), starting the First World War that lasted over four years and resulted in the death and suffering of millions. President Wilson, along with most Americans, considered the war as a European conflict and advocated for an isolationist and neutralist policy to keep out of it. Wilson stated that “It was a war which we have nothing to do, whose causes cannot touch us”, and that they should be “impartial in thought as well as in action.”¹²

However, the American neutrality faced many challenges. Some Americans, indeed, were sympathized with the Allies because they viewed that the war was fought against their British ancestors. In addition, the Americans strongly supported democracy, and they considered the Allies as democratic states that were guarding against military autocracies; thus, they saw that it was their duty to support the war for democracy, especially when Germany invaded Belgium. Moreover, reports in the newspapers describing the German cruelty towards the neutral Belgian civilians exacerbated the situation.¹³

¹¹ Mitchener, Kris J, and Marc Weidenmeir. “Empire, Public Goods, and the Roosevelt Corollary.” *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. 65, no. 3, 2005, pp. 658-692.

¹² Quinn, Adam. *US Foreign Policy in Context: National Ideology from the Founders to the Bush Doctrine*. Routledge, 2010. p. 95.

¹³ O’Callaghan, Bryn. *An Illustrated History of the USA*. Longman Group Ltd, 1990. p. 88.

From the outbreak of the war, the Allies relied on the United States to provide them with weapons. America produced vast quantities of arms and sold them to the Allied powers, aiding the Triple Entente in the war but threatening the prospects of the Triple Alliance. In response, Germany threatened to sink all Allied ships around the British Isles in order to stop the armament supply. This threat became a real danger when a British ship, the Lusitania, was sunk, resulting in the death of 128 Americans.¹⁴ The accident raised the American tension and Wilson realized that he might decide to enter the war at any time. The president said:

I know that you are depending upon me to keep this nation out of the war ... therefore there may at any moment come a time when I cannot preserve both the honour and the peace of the United States. We want war, if it must come, to be something that springs out of the sentiments and principles and actions of the people themselves.¹⁵

Until early 1917, the American public opinion was against the US involvement in the First World War, and President Wilson tried hard to keep the country out of the conflict. However, the international circumstances worsened, and most of the American views altered dramatically when newspapers published reports mentioning that the German Foreign Secretary Arthur Zimmermann had sent a telegram asking Mexico to join Germany in the war. His telegram completely changed the American attitude towards the war, leaving no choice to Wilson but to join the Allies. On April 2, 1917, the president asked Congress to declare war on Germany; he justified the US involvement in the war as a battle against the German leaders, not the German people. He also said that the war was “to make the world safe for democracy, the war to end all wars.”¹⁶ The American intervention indeed altered the course of the war. The previously victorious German armies were defeated, and the German government asked for peace, bringing an end to the most devastating war on November 11, 1918.

In an effort to stop conflicts and promote peace and democracy, President Wilson outlined some principles in a speech to Congress on January 8, 1918. The principles, known as Wilson’s Fourteen Points, included free trade, self-determination, open agreements instead of secret treaties, reduction of armaments, and most importantly the

¹⁴ O’Callaghan, Bryn.

¹⁵ Morison, Samuel E, et al. *The Growth of the American Republic*. Oxford University Press, 1947. p. 213.

¹⁶ O’Callaghan, Bryn. p. 90.

creation of the League of Nations, an international association where the countries would resolve their disputes through discussion and peaceful ways rather than conflicts and wars. When the war ended, both Wilson and the Germans hoped to implement the principles of the Fourteen Points; however, the Versailles Treaty (1919) was much harsher in its treatment of Germany because the Allies believed that Germany was responsible for the war and all the damage it caused, making it difficult for Wilson to convince them to treat the Germans tolerantly.¹⁷

Despite the belief that the League of Nations would prevent future wars, the American people refused to join it because the First World War left a strong isolationist sentiment among them. Consequently, they wanted to return to the isolationist foreign policy of the Founding Fathers. In 1920, President Harding stated in his inaugural address that “the recorded progress of our Republic, materially and spiritually, in itself proves the wisdom of the inherited policy of non-involvement in Old World affairs.” He also declared that “America’s present need is not heroics but healing, not nostrums but normalcy, not revolution but restoration, not submergence in internationality but sustainment in triumphant nationality.”¹⁸ Although the US returned to its traditional isolationism, it was not entirely absent from the international scene. Following World War I, the US was the only country that offered loans to Europe for reconstructions in the damaged countries, indicating that American isolationism was not absolute.¹⁹

1.3. The Shift to Interventionism

The instability created by the First World War, along with the harsh terms of the Versailles Treaty and the severe punishments imposed on Germany, led to the outbreak of another disastrous war, the Second World War. During this period, the US was under the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the hero of the American people who rescued the country from the Great Depression (1929)²⁰. The successful New Deal program²¹ greatly

¹⁷ O’Callaghan, Bryn. p. 91.

¹⁸ Hodge, Carl, and Cathal Nolan. *U.S. Presidents and Foreign Policy from 1789 to the Present*. ABC CLIO, Inc., 2007. p. 226.

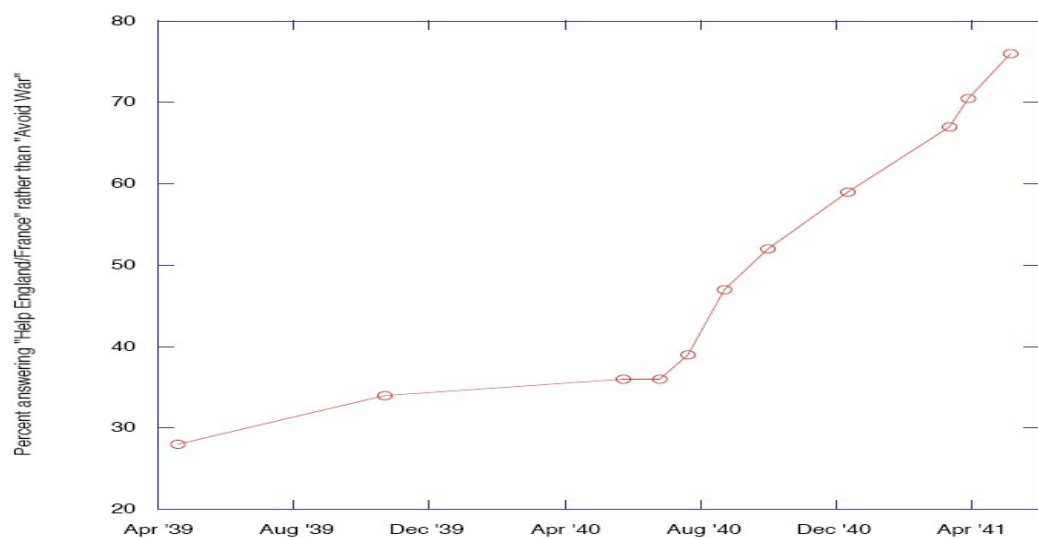
¹⁹ Mulder, Nicolas. “War Finance.” *International Encyclopaedia of the First World War*. 8 Feb. 2018. encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/war_finance.

²⁰ The Great Depression is defined as the economic downturn that began in 1929 and lasted until about 1939. www.britannica.com/event/Great-Depression. Accessed 9 Feb. 2018.

²¹ New Deal is the domestic program of the administration of U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt between 1933 and 1939, which took action to bring about immediate economic relief as well as reforms in industry, agriculture, finance, waterpower, labour and housing, vastly increasing the scope of the federal

enhanced the president's popularity and support among his people. Roosevelt was also popular and admired throughout the Americas for introducing the Good Neighbour Policy which aimed to foster good relations with Latin American countries and ensure that the US would no longer intervene in their affairs for private interests.²² Roosevelt, a proponent of internationalism, believed that the US should play an active role in the international affairs; however, he was opposed by the isolationist majority in Congress. As a result, when the Second World War began, the president could not immediately join the war because the American public opinion was against involvement. This situation changed dramatically after the surprise Japanese attack on the US Navy at Pearl Harbor in December 1941. The attack convinced the Americans, including the isolationists, that the US had to enter the war on the side of the Allies.

Figure 1.1. American Public Opinion on Aiding England/France vs. Avoiding War



Source: Braumoeller, Bear F. "The Myth of American Isolationism." *Foreign Policy Analysis*, vol. 6, no. 4, 2010, pp. 349-371.

History repeated itself, the United States' intervention in World War I changed the course of the war, and so it did in World War II. In August 1945, President Truman, who assumed office after the death of Roosevelt, ordered the dropping of two atomic bombs on

government's activities. www.britannica.com/event/New-Deal. Accessed 9 Feb. 2018.

²² Gurrant, Edward O. *Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy*. University of New Mexico Press, 1950. p. 17.

the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, leading to the surrendering of Japan and making thus the end of the Second World War. This event prompted a dramatic shift in the American foreign policy, which moved from isolationism and unilateralism to interventionism and multilateralism. While America had strongly refused to join the League of Nations, it supported and ratified the United Nations Charter. This shift was also illustrated by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which was signed in Washington in 1949 as a response to the spread of Communism. Fearing Stalin's expansion of communist influence to Western Europe, the US convinced many nations in the region to join NATO in order to collectively contain the Soviet threat.²³

In the aftermath of the war, America emerged as a dominant economic and military power in a new world order. However, it was not the sole superpower; the Soviet Union also rose as a powerful rival. Despite being allies against Germany during the Second World War, the US-Soviet relations deteriorated after the war due to their conflicting ideologies, Capitalism versus Communism. This ideological dispute indeed led to a new conflict that threatened the global security; however, it did not turn into a direct military confrontation but rather into a Cold War which divided the world into two ideological camps. President Truman noted that the American system “was based upon the will of the majority, and ... distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression,” while the Soviets’ system “was based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio, fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms.”²⁴ Consequently, Truman argued that “it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.”²⁵

During the Cold War, the United States adopted the strategy of containment, rather than engaging in direct confrontation with the Soviets. The Americans tried to counter Communism using many ways and programs such as the Marshall Plan, which provided thirteen billion dollars in low interest loans in an attempt to restore “the confidence of the

²³ Dobson, Alan, and Steve Marsh. *US Foreign Policy since 1945*. Routledge, 2001. pp. 22-23.

²⁴ Quinn, Adam. p. 120.

²⁵ Quinn, Adam.

European people in the economic future of their own countries and of Europe as a whole.”²⁶ In addition, President Truman issued a containment policy known as Truman Doctrine, which boosted his popularity among the American people; however, his position weakened mainly due to the war in Korea. His failure demonstrated that the American power could not always shape and influence the global events according to the US desires. In fact, President Truman ruled the US in a very crucial period, marked by the departure from the Founders’ policies and a shift in the American strategic thinking. The coming era was characterized by the US involvement not only in the European affairs but also in other countries around the world.

Continuing the American fight against Communism, General Eisenhower, who became the 34th president of the US, said during his 1952 campaign for the presidency that “we can never rest until the enslaved nations of the world have in the fullness of freedom, the right to choose their own path, for then, and then only, can we say that there is a possible way of living peacefully and permanently with Communism in the world.”²⁷ In fact, Eisenhower was popular among the Americans because he promised to end the Korean War, using his experience in WWII to address the conflict, and he criticized Truman’s administration for failing to resolve it. Eisenhower did not rely primarily on military solutions, but he “seems to have believed that the United States would have to look to non-military instruments to protect its interests.” At the same time, the president threatened to use any force, even nuclear weapons, to end the war if peace negotiations failed.²⁸ Under this pressure, the Chinese Communists agreed to solve things peacefully. An armistice was signed on July 27, 1953, ending the war and establishing peaceful relations with the Soviet Union.

Eisenhower’s popularity secured him a second term as president. Following the end of the Korean War, the president faced a new conflict in Vietnam. However, he avoided direct military intervention in the country. Instead, he created treaties with several countries, such as the South East Asia Treaty Organization in 1954 and the Central Treaty Organization in 1955, which aimed to unite these countries against the Communist

²⁶ Peterson, James W. *American Foreign Policy: Alliance Politics in a Century of War, 1914-2014*. Bloomsbury Publishing Inc, 2014. p. 43.

²⁷ Ambrose, Stephen E, and Douglas Brinkley. *Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy since 1938*, 9th ed. Penguin Books, 2010. p. 131.

²⁸ Ambrose, Stephen E, and Douglas Brinkley. p. 132.

Soviets.²⁹ On the other hand, President Eisenhower tried to improve the US-Soviet relations, especially with the coming of Nikita Khrushchev, who became president after the death of Stalin in 1953. In July 1955, Eisenhower met with leaders from Russia, Britain, and France in Geneva and proposed an Open Skies policy but the Soviets rejected it.³⁰ In 1959, the US Vice President Richard Nixon visited Russia and Khrushchev also flew to the United States, indicating a potential improvement in relations. However, the situation deteriorated in 1960 due to events in Cuba and the failure of the Paris Summit Conference after a US spy plane was shot down by the Soviets.³¹ In fact, Eisenhower's presidency significantly changed the course of the American foreign policy. His leadership allowed the US to mature and adapt to a more sophisticated global role. It then became the responsibility of the new president John F. Kennedy to continue on his path and confront the emerging challenges.

President Kennedy, who emphasized the importance of image and style, stated that "(he) and his aides were especially interested in restoring the prestige and primacy of the presidency, which they felt had fallen under Eisenhower."³² Unlike his predecessor, Kennedy believed that military strength was the only way to confront the communist expansion; thus, he and his Defence Secretary Robert McNamara launched "the greatest arms race in the history of mankind."³³ When Kennedy assumed the presidency in 1961, fighting Communism was the principle goal of the American foreign policy. In his inauguration, he declared that the US "would pay any price and bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foes to assure the survival and success of liberty."³⁴ However, his presidency was short-lived because he was assassinated two years later.

In fact, Kennedy's foreign policy faced significant criticism. His failure in foreign affairs started only two months after being in office, when he ordered to invade Cuba and overthrow its president Fidel Castro. However, Castro's forces crushed the invaders in the Bay of Pigs. Fearing that the US would launch another invasion, Cuba decided to

²⁹ Burn, Adrian E. *From Containment to Détente: Aspects of American Foreign Policy under Johnson and Nixon*. 1985, The Australian National University, PhD dissertation. p. 12.

³⁰ Samuels, Richard J. *Encyclopedia of United States National Security*. Sage Publications Inc, 2006. p. 554.

³¹ O'Callaghan, Bryn. p. 122.

³² Burn, Adrian E. p. 17.

³³ Burn, Adrian E. p. 18.

³⁴ Ryan, Halford. *The Inaugural Addresses of the Twentieth Century American Presidents*. Praeger Publishers, 1993. p. 186.

cooperate with the Soviets, allowing them to establish nuclear missiles. That cooperation led to a new struggle known as the Missile Crisis, which exacerbated the US-Soviet relations. In a bid to prevent a nuclear war, President Kennedy accepted negotiations with the Soviet President Nikita Khrushchev, in which Kennedy promised not to invade Cuba, remove the American ballistic nuclear missiles based in Turkey and Italy, and lift the naval blockade of Cuba. Such actions, indeed, helped resolve the Missile Crisis and averted a nuclear war, but Kennedy was harshly criticised by many Americans who saw that it was a concession that should not be made by a superpower like the United States. After the crisis, “the need for peace and arms reductions replaced boasts about American military power.”³⁵

The tragic assassination of John F. Kennedy marked a new era in the presidency. It was now the moment for Lyndon B. Johnson, who became the 36th president of the United States, to earn the American people’s confidence and respect. He needed to demonstrate that he was not merely a political fixer, but “a man of principle, with a value system that would advance the interests of peace, freedom, and social justice.”³⁶ In his famous speech ‘Let Us Continue’, Johnson attempted to inspire the audience, saying:

This nation has experienced a profound shock ... and in this critical moment it is our duty – yours and mine – as the government of the United States – to do away with uncertainty, and doubt and delay to show that we are capable of decisive action – that from the brutal loss of our leader we will derive not weakness but strength – that we can and will act and act now.³⁷

President Johnson inherited many international challenges from Kennedy. He had to face the Vietnam War, a product of the Cold War. Like his predecessors, Johnson adopted the strategy of containment to justify the US intervention. In a speech delivered in February 1964 in St. Louis, the president stated that the war was caused by “those that are seeking to impose the communist system by direct or indirect aggression.”³⁸ Thus, the Johnson administration felt compelled to initiate a military intervention in Vietnam.

³⁵ Fursenko, Aleksandr, and Timothy Naftali. *One Hell of a Gamble: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964*. W.W. Norton, 1997. pp. 92-94.

³⁶ Barrett, Ashley. “Lyndon B. Johnson, ‘Let’s Continue’ (27 November 1963).” *Voices of Democracy*, vol. 4, 2009, pp. 97-119.

³⁷ “Transcript of the Johnson Address on Voting Rights to Joint Session of Congress.” *The New York Times*. 16 Mar. 1965. [Archive.nytimes.com/books/98/04/12/specials/Johnson-rightsadd.html](https://archive.nytimes.com/books/98/04/12/specials/Johnson-rightsadd.html).

³⁸ Proctor, Pat. *Containment and Credibility: the Ideology and Deception that plunged America into the Vietnam War*. Carrel Books, 2016. p. 21.

However, neither Congress nor the American public supported the war, because they saw that Vietnam “was going to turn into another Korean war, which will simply end in a stalemate after heavy American casualties.”³⁹ Therefore, the Johnson administration needed a provocation from North Vietnam to garner a congressional approval for direct military intervention in the country.

The pretext for the US military involvement emerged when North Vietnamese boats attacked American destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin. The incident urged President Johnson to seek a congressional resolution, known as the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, allowing the US forces to involve directly in Vietnam. However, this decision lacked support within the Atlantic Alliance. In 1966, the French President Charles de Gaulle criticized the US policies for being “increasingly provocative to the Soviet Union and the PRC menacing the peace of the world”⁴⁰; moreover, he decided to withdraw France from the NATO, leading to the relocation of the organization’s headquarters from Paris to Brussels. The president also asked to remove US bases from the French soil. Meanwhile, Britain was reducing its international commitments, which led to the loss of British support for the United States.⁴¹

During Johnson’s presidency, the US international affairs deteriorated. Those who were described as a “collection of nightriders in black pyjamas” became a central issue in the US policy.⁴² Many scholars argued that Americanizing the Vietnam War was a mistake that contributed to Johnson’s defeat in the elections and paved the way for Richard M. Nixon, who became president in 1969.⁴³ However, the new president faced a difficult situation, the US military resources were committed to Vietnam; thus, the American power declined while the Soviets increased theirs. Domestically, the nation experienced tensions marked by violence and protests. In his inaugural address in 1969, President Nixon said:

The greatest honour history can bestow is the title of peacemaker. This honour now beckons America... If we succeed, generations to come will say of us now living

³⁹ Proctor, Pat. p. 9.

⁴⁰ Burn, Adrian E. p. 35.

⁴¹ Burn, Adrian E.

⁴² Burn, Adrian E. p. 39.

⁴³ Bouguedra, Abdelmadjid. *The American Policy in the Persian Gulf under the Bush Jr. Administration, the Invasion of Iraq (2003), a case study*. 2010, University of Oran, PhD dissertation. p. 13.

that we mastered our moment; that we helped make the world safe for mankind. This is our summons to greatness.⁴⁴

During Nixon's presidency, the US foreign policy underwent significant changes due to the president's extensive experience in international affairs. He visited many countries after WWII, and such tours enabled him to garner experience and insights in different fields. In his electoral campaign, Nixon did not show his intentions towards the war in Vietnam, but he said that he had a 'secret plan' for peace. This secret plan aimed to vietnamize the war rather than Americanizing it. He announced that "his secret plan to end the war was in fact a plan to keep it going, but with lower American casualties."⁴⁵ Beyond Vietnam, Nixon also achieved other successful accomplishments. The president managed to mitigate the tensions of the Cold War through establishing relations with the People's Republic of China, and he pursued Détente with the Soviet Union. Nixon and the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev signed two agreements, a Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty and an Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, aiming at limiting the proliferation of nuclear arms. Other treaties in different fields such as trade and science were also negotiated.⁴⁶

During that period, another significant doctrine was introduced, the Nixon Doctrine, in which the president announced that "the United States would thereafter support allies facing military threats with economic and military aid rather than with ground troops"; however, the United States, "would continue to use its nuclear arsenal to shield US allies from nuclear threats."⁴⁷ This doctrine marked a significant shift in US foreign policy; it limited the US direct involvement in the world's conflicts in general, and in Vietnam specifically. "The defence of freedom is everybody's business, not just America's business. And it is particularly the responsibility of the people whose freedom is threatened ... In the previous administration, we Americanized the war in Vietnam. In this administration, we are vietnamizing the search for peace."⁴⁸ Through these words, President Nixon succeeded in finding an initial solution for the war that claimed thousands of lives and divided the American public. Nixon; thus, managed to restore the trust and

⁴⁴ Burn, Adrian E. p. 42.

⁴⁵ Burn, Adrian E. p. 45.

⁴⁶ Hughes, Ken. "Richard Nixon: Foreign Affairs." millercenter.org/president/nixon/foreign-affairs. Accessed 24 Jan. 2018.

⁴⁷ Samuels, Richard J. "Nixon Doctrine." Britannica. www.britannica.com/event/Nixon-Doctrine. Accessed 03 Feb. 2018.

⁴⁸ McKercher, Brian. J. *Britain, America, and the Special Relationship since 1941*. Routledge, 2017. p. 146.

support of the Americans, achieving the zenith of his fame and success in the early 1970's. However, all his achievements vanished after the Watergate Scandal in 1972, which led to his resignation from office in 1974.⁴⁹

Assuming the presidency with limited international experience, the Democrat Jimmy Carter became the 39th president of the United States in the 1977 elections. Carter pursued distinct foreign policy goals, emphasizing his belief in the principle of self-determination for all people. He said:

For too many years, we've been willing to adopt the flawed and erroneous principles and tactics of our adversaries, sometimes abandoning our own values for theirs. We've fought fire with fire, never thinking that fire is sometimes best quenched with water. This approach failed, with Vietnam the best example of its intellectual and moral poverty. But through failure we have now found our way back to our own principles and values, and we have regained our lost confidence.⁵⁰

He also added, "our policy is based on an historical vision of America's role. Our policy is derived from a larger view of global change. Our policy is rooted in our moral values, which never change. Our policy is reinforced by our material wealth and by our military power. Our policy is designed to serve mankind."⁵¹ President Carter believed that the United States should take the leadership in promoting human rights. He considered Communism as an anti-democratic regime which was suppressing freedom in the nations ruled by dictators. However, his emphasis on human rights was criticized, especially by some Conservative Republicans who argued that Carter's policy would weaken the US diplomatic relations with many countries such as the Soviet Union.

Additionally, Carter's presidency witnessed other achievements. The president negotiated the return of the Panama Canal to Panama; and two treaties, the Panama Canal Treaty and Neutrality Treaty, were signed between both countries in 1977. He also normalized relations with China, and pursued Détente with the Soviet Union by signing

⁴⁹ Watergate Scandal, interlocking political scandals of the administration of US President Richard M. Nixon that were revealed following the arrest of five burglars at Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate office-apartment-hotel complex in Washington D.C., on June 17, 1972. On August 1974, facing likely impeachment for his role in covering up the scandal, Nixon became the only U.S. president to resign. www.britannica.com/event/Watergate-Scandal. Accessed 20 Feb.2018.

⁵⁰ "Carter's Foreign Policy." *Office of the Historian*.

History.state.gov/departments/history/short-history/carter. Accessed 25 Feb. 2018.

⁵¹ "Carter's Foreign Policy." *Office of the Historian*.

the Strategic Arm Limitation Talks SALT II in 1979, which aimed at reducing nuclear missiles. However, relations strained between the two countries following the Soviet's invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. In the Middle East, Carter played a crucial role in brokering the peace negotiations between Egypt and Israel, which culminated in the Camp David Accords in 1978, ending hostilities between the two countries. Nevertheless, the 1979 Iran Hostage Crisis challenged the American support for the Carter administration. When an internal revolution by a radical Islamic group removed the Iranian leader Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (perceived by many Iranians as a Western puppet), and installed Ayatollah R. Khomeini as the new leader of the country. Pahlavi became refugee in the United States; this angered Muslims in Iran, leading some militants to overrun the American embassy in Tehran, where they seized sixty-six Americans and demanded Pahlavi's extradition in exchange for the hostages. Carter failed to solve the crisis which lasted until the presidency of Ronald Reagan.⁵²

Ronald Reagan assumed the presidency believing that the United States was losing its international prestige and power. He sought to restore America's position in the world. During his 1980 campaign, Reagan asked the public, "Is America as respected throughout the world as it was? Do you feel ... we're as strong as we were?"⁵³ From the beginning, President Reagan focused on containing the Soviet Union, which he called the evil empire. He criticized the Soviet expansionist policy during the terms of Ford and Carter, such as the invasion of Afghanistan. As a response, he formulated the Reagan Doctrine, which focused on three main points. First, to invalidate the Brezhnev Doctrine, a doctrine made by the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev stating that no country that became communist could leave the Soviet sphere of influence. Second, to help anti-communist rebels overthrow communist governments all over the world. Third, to weaken the Soviet economy by increasing the American military spending, aiming to provoke a Soviet economic collapse if they attempted to match American expenditures.⁵⁴

President Reagan adopted a strategy of "peace through strength." He believed that peace and freedom could be achieved only through military power; therefore, he focused

⁵² "Jimmy Carter Presidential Term." study.com/academy/lesson/jimmy-carter-as-president-election-foreign-policy-accomplishments.html. Accessed 13 Apr. 2018.

⁵³ Sandbrook, Dominic. "What Ronald Reagan Knew." *New Statesman America*. www.newstatesman.com/north-america/2010/04/reagan-carter-essay-brown. Accessed 16 Apr. 2018.

⁵⁴ Carpenter, Ted Galen. "U.S. Aid to Anti-Communist Rebels: the Reagan Doctrine and its Pitfalls." *Political Analysis*, no. 74, 1986, p. 2.

on the development of the US defense system, investing significantly in new military technologies. Reagan approved the National Security Defense Directive-75 (NSDD-75) to modernize American nuclear force. He also ordered the development of Strategic Defense Initiative, known as the Star Wars program, aiming at defeating Soviet missiles before they could reach the United States. In addition, Reagan's hostility was not directed only towards the Soviet Union, but included all the nations aligned with Communism. For this, he launched military actions against several countries, such as Libya in 1981 and Lebanon in 1982, leading to the escalation of the Cold War.⁵⁵ This approach threatened the president's popularity in the United States and challenged his chances for re-election. However, Reagan managed to secure a second term in 1984, winning 59% of the popular vote and a majority of 525 electoral votes, as shown in the following table:

Table 1.1. Results of the American Presidential Elections, 1984

Presidential Candidate	Political Party	Electoral votes	Popular votes
R. Reagan	Republican	525	54, 455,075
W. F. Mondale	Democratic	13	37, 577,185
Other	Other	-----	591,183

Source: Bouguedra, Abdelmadjid. p. 18.

Reagan's second term in office saw improved diplomatic relations with the USSR, mainly with the coming of the leader Mikail Gorbechev, who made political and economic reforms in the Soviet Union. Gorbechev also proposed peaceful discussions with the United States to address the Cold War, resulting in mutual reductions in nuclear weapons. He also agreed to withdraw Soviet forces from Afghanistan and concede control over states in Eastern Europe. In return, Reagan accepted to abandon his Stars War program. The agreement between the two superpowers managed to ease tensions; and Grobechev reforms led to the collapse and disintegration of the Soviet Union, marking the end of the Cold War. Now, a new era began in which the United States emerged as the sole superpower and global leader, transforming the world order from bipolar to unipolar. However, Reagan's achievements and successful management of the American foreign policy during the 1980's were tarnished following the Iran Contra affair, a scandal that

⁵⁵ Toaldo, Mattia. *The Reagan Administration and the Origins of the War on Terror: Lebanon, Libya and American Intervention in the Middle East*. Routledge, 2013. p. 73.

distorted the image of the Reagan's administration and threatened the president's credibility.⁵⁶ In 1988, Reagan supported his Vice President George H. W. Bush in the presidential elections.

George Herbert W. Bush assumed the presidency with extensive experience in foreign affairs, after serving as ambassador to the United Nations (1971-73), chief US liaison to China (1974-75), and director of the Central Intelligence Agency (1976-77). During the 1980s, he also served two terms as vice president of the United States. Bush advocated for diplomatic solutions for international issues. His first test was in 1989, when the Chinese military crushed demonstrations in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, resulting in the death of hundreds of peaceful demonstrators. In his attempt to maintain improved relations with China, Bush responded to these events by imposing sanctions, despite the Congress calls for serious actions against the Chinese government. However, diplomatic approaches were not always viable, as demonstrated in some cases, such as Panama, where Bush ordered military intervention to overthrow Manuel Noriega, who was indicted in drug charges.⁵⁷

Bush's presidency also witnessed the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the unification of Germany in 1989. The president proposed the Two-Plus-Four Agreement, aiming to foster peaceful cooperation among the United States, the Soviet Union, France, Britain, and both East and West Germany. Moreover, Bush demanded to include Germany in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. On the other hand, the Soviets agreed to withdraw their forces from the country. Bush's diplomatic efforts extended to relations with the Soviet Union; meetings between Bush and Gorbachev were held to discuss arms reductions. In 1991, they signed the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START). Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Bush formulated his vision for a New World Order, "where the rule of law governs the conduct of nations," and "in which a credible United Nations can use its peacekeeping role to fulfil the promise and vision of the UN's founders."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Iran-Contra Affair refers to the 1980s US political scandal in which the National Security Council became involved in secret weapons transactions and other activities that either were prohibited by the US Congress or violated the stated public policy of the government. www.britannica.com/event/Iran-Contra-Affair. Accessed 11 May 2018.

⁵⁷ Barilleaux, Ryan, and Mary Stuckey. *Leadership and the Bush Presidency: Prudence or Drift in an Era of Change?* Praeger, 1992. p. 168.

⁵⁸ Levantrosser, William, and Rosanna Perotti. *A Noble Calling: Character and the George H. W. Bush Presidency*. Praeger, 2004. p. 207.

Indeed, President Bush showed great interest in the Gulf region (see map 1.2.) due to the importance of oil for America and the industrialized countries. However, the region was facing severe tensions due to many geopolitical troubles that intensified during Bush's term of presidency, culminating in the Gulf War which was considered as one of the major events that the Bush administration faced.

Map 1.2. The Gulf Region

Source: Bouguedra, Abdelmadjid. p. 22.



Following its war with Iran which ended in 1988, Iraq was virtually bankrupt and in debt to many countries, namely Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, which refused Iraq's request for debts forgiveness. Accusing Kuwait of undermining Iraq's economy by exceeding its OPEC quotas and decreasing the oil prices, the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein warned the neighboring countries in an urgent Arab Summit Conference in Baghdad on 30 May 1990, saying, "I wish to tell those of our brothers who do not seek war, and those who do not intend to wage war on Iraq, that we cannot tolerate this type of economic warfare which is

being waged against Iraq.”⁵⁹ In another attempt to resolve the issue peacefully, President Hussein submitted an official complaint to the Arab League, noting that:

Such action is tantamount to military aggression ... the government of Kuwait is determined to cause a collapse of the Iraqi economy during this period when it is confronting the vicious imperialist Zionist threat, which is an aggression no less than military aggression.⁶⁰

However, Hussein’s grievances were ignored; consequently, he ordered an invasion of Kuwait, leading to the outbreak of the Gulf War on August 2, 1990. The invasion was condemned by the international community, and economic sanctions were imposed on Iraq by the UN Council Security. Moreover, the United States worried that Iraq would spread its power over other territories in the region such as Saudi Arabia, a significant oil supplier to the US, as shown in table 1.2. In this context, President Bush stated, “Our jobs, our way of life, our own freedom and the freedom of friendly countries around the world would all suffer if control of the world’s great oil reserves fell into the hands of Saddam Hussein.”⁶¹

Table 1.2. US Oil Imports

US Oil Imports: Average Volume per Day (1000 barrels)			
	1977	1983	1984
Total Gulf	2,438	440	520
Saudi Arabia	1,380	337	359
United Arab Emirates	335	30	108
Iran	535	48	11
Iraq, Qatar, Kuwait	188	25	42

Source: Richman, Sheldon. “The United States and the Persian Gulf.” *Cato Institute Policy Analysis*, no. 46, 1985, pp. 1-15.

Since the beginning of the war, President Bush believed that the use of military force was the only solution to protect the American interests and prevent the emergence of

⁵⁹ Abdullah, Thabit A. *Dictatorship, Imperialism & Chaos: Iraq since 1989*. Zed Books, 2006. p. 60.

⁶⁰ Alnasrawi, Abbas. *The Economy of Iraq: Oil, Wars, Destruction of Development and Protests, 1950-2010*. Greenwood Press, 1994. p. 117.

⁶¹ Geyer, Alan, and Barbara Green. *Lines in the Sand: Justice and the Gulf War*. Westminster John Knox Press, 1992. p. 77.

Iraq as a dominant power in the region. He said that “the most critics can claim is that it is possible sanctions might work. It is certain military force will work”⁶² However, his views faced opposition by many quarters. Firstly, the president needed to convince the American public and the members of Congress, who still carried memories of the Vietnam War, that this “would not be a new Vietnam War but a new victory,” and that the war was “to protect America’s interests in the region for their own well-being.”⁶³ Additionally, the Soviet Union was considered as another obstacle to the US involvement, since Iraq was within the Soviet sphere of influence. Bush feared that the Soviets would provide arms to Saddam Hussein, so he promised to withdraw from the region once Kuwait would be liberated. He also provided economic aid to President Gorbachev to support his policy of Perestroika.⁶⁴ These actions, indeed, enabled the US to secure Soviet support for the US intervention in the Gulf War. Now, the Bush administration focused on to garner the Arab States’ support. On 3 August 1990, Bush successfully convinced King Fahd of Saudi Arabia that Iraq intended to take control over his oil wells. This argument was reinforced by Hussein’s verbal attacks of the Saudi Kingdom, saying that the “US-supported Saudi state was an illegitimate and unworthy guardian of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina.”⁶⁵ Therefore, King Fahd accepted the American presence in Saudi Arabia to protect the country.

Additionally, Kuwait requested American military assistance, while other Arab nations, including Morocco and Egypt, supported the US intervention aimed at protecting Saudi Arabia. Therefore, American troops arrived to the region on August 8, 1990. The following day, the Arab states met in Cairo to discuss the issue of the war, and most of

⁶² Visser, Laurens J. *Going to War in the Persian Gulf: a Comparative History of the United States Decision to go to War with Iraq in 1991 and 2003*. 2014, RMIT University, PhD dissertation. p. 93.

⁶³ Bouguedra, Abdelmadjid. p. 27.

⁶⁴ Perestroika, a Russian term which means "restructuring", was a program introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev in the mid-1980s to reform the Soviet Union's economic and political policies. Gorbachev aimed to boost the Soviet economy to the level of capitalist countries like Germany, Japan, and the United States by decentralizing economic controls and encouraging enterprises to be self-financing. However, the economic bureaucracy resisted these changes, fearing the loss of their power and privileges. Additionally, Gorbachev sought to reduce the direct involvement of the Communist Party in governance and increase the authority of local governments. In 1988, a new parliament called the Soviet Congress of People’s Deputies was established, along with similar congresses in each Soviet republic. For the first time, elections to these bodies offered voters a choice of candidates, including noncommunists, though the Communist Party remained dominant. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, www.britannica.com/topic/perestroika-Soviet-government-policy. Accessed 30 Aug. 2018.

⁶⁵ Sciolino, Eliane. *The Outlaw State: Saddam Hussein’s Quest for Power and the Gulf Crisis*. John Wiley & Sons, 1991. p. 163.

them accepted United Nations Resolution 678, which permitted the use of force against Iraq if the Iraqi forces did not withdraw within a specified timeframe.⁶⁶

Since Iraq's military was the strongest in the Arab world at that time, the United States tried to minimize extensive damage. President Bush demanded financial contribution to cover the war costs, and many countries provided assistance, such as Saudi Arabia \$48 billion, Kuwait \$22,6 billion, other Gulf States \$4,4 billion, Japan \$13,4 billion, and Germany \$11,5 billion.⁶⁷ Moreover, Bush called for an international military coalition to ensure victory in the war. The US forces were joined by many Arab and non-Arab states to participate in the liberation of Kuwait. Massive aerial attacks, known as Operation Desert Storm, were launched against Iraq, resulting in the defeat of the Iraqi army. President Hussein withdrew his forces from Kuwait, and the United States took the opportunity to establish military bases to protect its interests in the region. In the aftermath of the war, Iraq accepted the terms imposed by the UN Security Council Resolution 687, which included respecting the existing borders with Kuwait, allowing UN inspectors on the Iraqi territory, and ceasing the production of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).⁶⁸

Former President Richard M. Nixon wrote in the New York Times that Bush's intervention in Kuwait was not because "Saddam is a cruel leader, nor because it would become a war for democracy," but because "Saddam Hussein has unlimited ambitions to dominate one of the most important strategic areas in the world, and if Bush did not take a stand against Saddam now, we will have to stop him later, when the cost in young American lives will be infinitely greater."⁶⁹ Moreover, some analysts argued that Bush's intervention in the war was driven by his fears of the emergence of China as an economic superpower, becoming thus the main competitor to the US for energy sources (see figure 1.2.).⁷⁰ This made the Persian Gulf Region a primary concern for the US as it contains 67% of the world's oil reserves.⁷¹ For this, the United States did not tolerate sharing control of the region with any other powers.

⁶⁶ Bouguedra, Abdelmadjid. p. 30.

⁶⁷ Bouguedra, Abdelmadjid. p. 32.

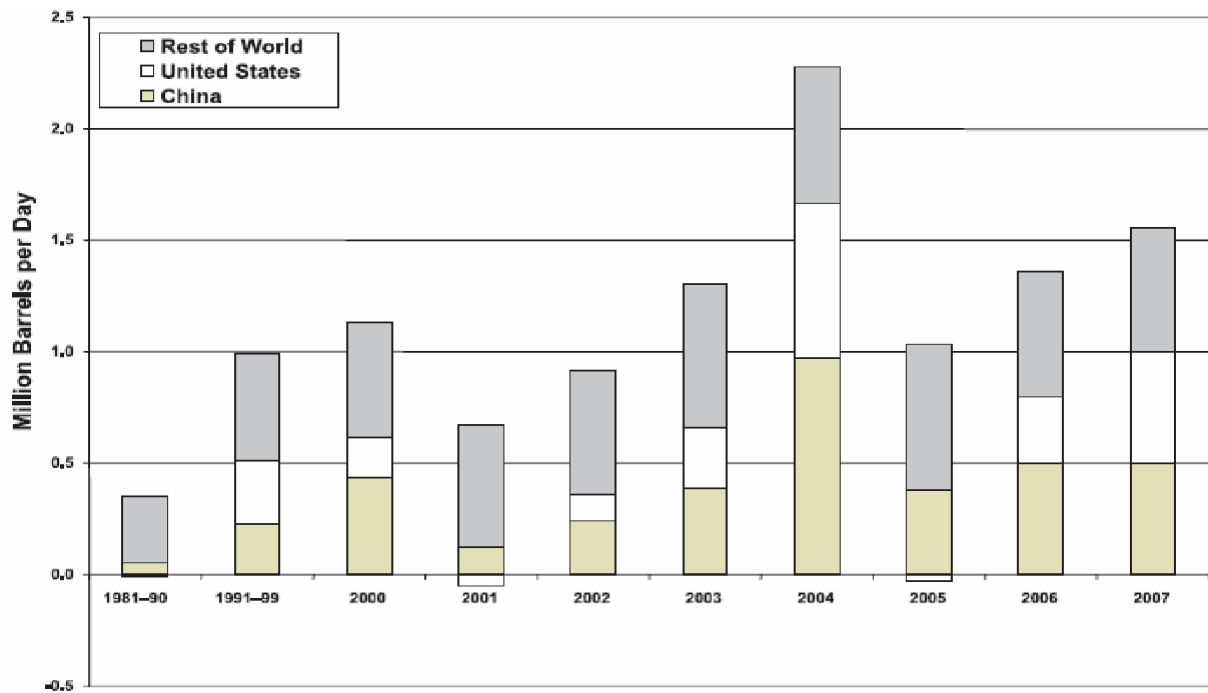
⁶⁸ Peterson, James W. p. 99.

⁶⁹ Laurens J. Visser. p. 93.

⁷⁰ Bouguedra, Abdelmadjid. p. 37.

⁷¹ Bouguedra, Abdelmadjid.

Figure 1.2. Annual Growth in World Oil Demand from 1981 to 2007



Source: Bouguedra, Abdelmadjid. p. 38.

Economically, the rise in oil prices due to the war led to inflation and recession in the United States, affecting its economy negatively. Additionally, in 1993, Al Qaeda attacked the World Trade Center, resulting in significant economic losses. These events prompted the Americans to question the reasons behind Bush's intervention in that foreign war. This situation threatened the president's credibility, as Kerry Mullins & Aaron Wildavsky wrote:

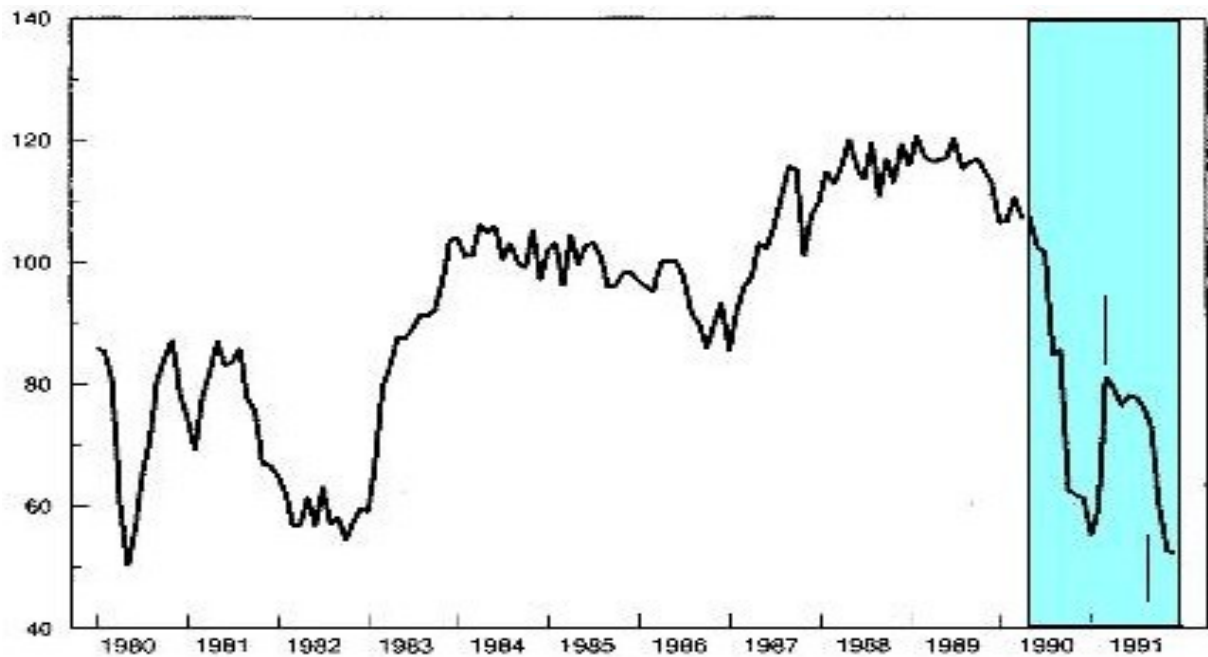
The Persian Gulf War raised Bush's approval ratings to the higher level of near 90 percent... As his second year began, Bush's 80 percent approval was second highest only to John F. Kennedy's after the Bay of Pigs, an irony soon to be realized. As the economy worsened in the latter half of 1991 and unemployment rose, the

president's popularity began to decline until it dropped below the 50 percent mark as 1992 began.⁷²

The following figure shows how the American people's confidence on the president decreased at the onset of the war, then restored in early 1991, and declined again at the end of the same year.

Figure 1.3. US Consumer Confidence

Source: Bouguedra, Abdelmadjid. p. 36.



Bush's popularity at home was tarnished by an economic recession. Despite his campaign promises of no new taxes, he disappointed some by raising tax revenues in an effort to solve the growing budget deficit. In 1992, Bush lost his re-election bid to Governor Bill Clinton of Arkansas. Clinton won 370 electoral votes and 43 percent of the popular vote, while Bush received 168 electoral votes and 37.5 percent of the popular vote.⁷³

In fact, the 42nd president of the United States, Bill Clinton, faced many challenges inherited from his predecessor, including debts which exceeded \$4 trillion, a budget deficit estimated at \$400 billion in 1992, and a trade deficit that made the United States the world's largest debtor. The country also experienced low economic growth rates and high

⁷² Bouguedra, Abdelmadjid. p. 35.

⁷³ "George Bush." *History*. 7 Jun. 2019. www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/george-bush.

poverty rates, with 7.52 % of Black Americans and 3.11 % of White Americans living below the poverty line.⁷⁴ This situation led President Clinton to focus on the domestic affairs, mainly the economic prosperity, over foreign policy. He contributed to the establishment of the World Trade Organization and implemented the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, which eliminated trade barriers between the United States, Canada, and Mexico. He also endorsed significant domestic legislation, including the Family and Medical Leave Act and the Violence against Women Act in 1994.⁷⁵

Moreover, Clinton believed that foreign policy is an extension of domestic policy, he stated:

The line between our domestic and foreign policies is disappearing that we must revitalize our economy if we are to sustain our military forces, foreign initiatives and global influence, and that we must engage actively abroad if we are to open foreign markets and create job for our people.⁷⁶

On the international stage, President Clinton faced several global events which required the US intervention. In the Middle East, for instance, Clinton participated in the peace process between Palestine and Israel, leading to the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 at the White House. During the Clinton administration, American foreign policy prioritized pragmatism, ensuring that any US involvement in foreign issues had to serve the US national interests. In this context, the president stated that “we can and we must take the difference through our engagement, but our involvement must be carefully tailored to secure our interest and priorities” He added, “the United States cannot and should not try to solve every problem in the world. But where our interests are clear and our values are at stake, where we can make a difference, we can act and we must lead.”⁷⁷ Despite the Whitewater scandal, Clinton remained popular at the end of his first term mainly due to his achievements in both domestic and foreign affairs, as noted by Todd Putnam:

⁷⁴ Brzezinski, Zbigniew. *Out of Control: Global Turmoil on the Eve of the Twenty-first Century*. Touchstone, 1995. pp. 89-91.

⁷⁵ Dobson, Alan P. pp. 53-54.

⁷⁶ National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement. nssarchive.us/NSSR/1995.pdf. Accessed 30 May 2018.

⁷⁷ Manham, Robert W. “Beyond the Clinton Doctrine: U.S. Military Intervention Policy.” www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1997/Lanham.htm. Accessed 15 Jun. 2018.

In the face of citizenry sceptical of governmental action at home and wary of commitment abroad, Mr. Clinton managed to shape a new kind of limited executive activism that kept the presidency in the thick of things, whether in modest domestic or efforts to promote peace and trade around the world.⁷⁸

Clinton's heroic image among the American people helped him secure his reelection in 1996, defeating the Republican Bob Dole with a majority of the electoral vote of 379 to 159.⁷⁹ Thus, he became the first Democrat since J. F. Kennedy to win a second term as president. During those years, the United States witnessed a period of progress and prosperity. Economy increased at an average of 4 percent annually since 1993. Over 22 million jobs were created, unemployment decreased from over 7% in 1993 to 4% by November 2000, and home ownership rate increased from 64,2% in 1992 to 67,7%.⁸⁰

Internationally, Iraq was a significant challenge that Clinton faced from the beginning of his presidency. In 1993, he authorized twenty three cruise missiles to strike Baghdad, accusing the Iraqi president Saddam Hussein of attempting to assassinate George H. W. Bush two months earlier during his visit to Kuwait to commemorate its liberation. In response to these attacks, Hussein stationed 80.000 troops in the Iraqi-Kuwaiti borders in 1994.⁸¹ This prompted Clinton to launch Operation Vigilant Warrior, forcing the Iraqi troops to withdraw. Furthermore, the US started to seek internal means, such as popular opposition by Shiites and Kurds, to oust Saddam from power, but these efforts were unsuccessful. The Clinton administration later got the opportunity for reprisal, when Richard Bulter, the head of U.N. Special Commission, claimed that there were obstacles to accessing some Iraqi sites for inspections. Consequently, the US launched Operation Desert Fox in December 1998; however, Saddam was not defeated, prompting the US to consider more serious ways to remove him. Yet, President Clinton showed no intention toward another direct American war in Iraq, because he was certain that war was unpopular among the Americans and that he would certainly lose popularity by taking such a decision.⁸²

⁷⁸ Dumbrell, John. *Clinton's Foreign Policy: Between the Bushes, 1992-2000*. Routledge, 2009. p. 2.

⁷⁹ Bouguedra, Abdelmadjid. p. 41.

⁸⁰ "The Clinton Presidency: a Historic Era of Progress and Prosperity."

clintonwhitehouse5.archives.gov/WH/Accomplishments/eightyears-01.html. Accessed 16 Jun. 2018.

⁸¹ Bouguedra, Abdelmadjid. p. 42.

⁸² Bouguedra, Abdelmadjid. p. 43.

Indeed, the US military actions against Iraq during the Clinton presidency contributed to the emergence of a transnational militant threat associated with Osama bin Laden and the organization al-Qaeda. American sites were targeted in different locations in the world. After the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Centre, which killed six and injured 1,000, subsequent attacks included the 1995 bombing in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, which killed 5 US military personnel, followed by the 1996 bombing of al-Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, resulting in the killing of 19 and the wounding of 200 US military personnel. In addition, the 1998 US embassy bombings in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania resulted in 257 deaths and 5,000 injuries, and also the 2000 bombing of the USS Cole, which killed 17 American sailors and injured 3 others.⁸³

Yet, President Clinton faced another scandal when he was accused of having a sexual relationship with a White House intern called Monica Lewinsky. This led to his impeachment for the obstruction of justice; thus, Bill Clinton became the second president in American history to face impeachment. However, Clinton was later acquitted, and at the end of the trial, he apologised saying that he was profoundly sorry for the disturbance he caused to Congress and to the Americans.⁸⁴ Despite the scandal, President Clinton maintained his charismatic image among the American people. Moreover, his popularity increased after recording budget surpluses in the last three years of his presidency.⁸⁵

After the end of Clinton's presidency, views on his policies were divided. Domestically, many Americans saw the 1990's as a period of peace and prosperity. They considered the president as a hero who saved the country from economic turmoil, crediting him for his cautious approach towards US engagement in foreign wars.⁸⁶ However, Clinton was criticized for lacking clear objectives in the American foreign policy. Robert and Lansford noted that the president "inherited a world of unprecedented American advantage and opportunity and did little with it," adding that Clinton "mostly took an ad hoc crisis management approach to international affairs rather than articulating a foreign

⁸³ "Clinton Administration and Terrorists: Did the Clinton administration fail to track down the perpetrators of several terrorist attacks against Americans?" www.snopes.com/fact-check/dead-on-the-tracks/. Accessed 21 Jun. 2018.

⁸⁴ "Clinton Impeachment Trial Begins." *History*, 9 Feb. 2010. www.history.com/this-day-in-history/clinton-impeachment-trial-begins.

⁸⁵ "Clinton, William J. 42nd President of the United States." *Academy of Achievement*. www.achievement.org/achiever/william-j-clinton. Accessed 22 Jun. 2018.

⁸⁶ Troy, Gil. "A Bill Clinton Balance Sheet: Peace, Prosperity, Pluralism, and Progress." *Brookings*, 3 Dec. 2015. www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2015/12/03/a-bill-clinton-balance-sheet-peace-prosperity-pluralism-and-progress/

policy strategy that could have a lasting impact” and that he (Clinton) “wasted an opportunity to use US influence to build a more secure world.”⁸⁷ In addition, Clinton was blamed for failing to capture Osama bin Laden despite the several opportunities. His failure in counterterrorism contributed to the rise of other terrorist activities in the United States and abroad, making it more complex for subsequent administrations to address the issue.⁸⁸

From the early 1990s onwards, the United States achieved a position of unrivalled dominant global power, described by Zbigniew Brzezinski as “the first, only, and last truly global superpower...never before in history has a single power been so paramount.”⁸⁹ Other researchers also described the US as an informal and non-territorial empire. According to Bill Emmott, the United States “is the mightiest colossus, in both absolute and relative terms, the world has ever seen, it is indeed an empire, although in the informal sense, i.e., without having to occupy other countries like nineteenth-century Britain.”⁹⁰ In fact, the emergence of this powerful empire led to the rise of many questions at the beginning of the twenty-first century, including questions about its foreign policy. However, the 2000 elections provided clear answers. During the campaign, the Republicans focused on the importance of military strength in foreign relations, stating, “We commit ourselves to rebuilding the American military and returning to a foreign policy of strength ... we will develop the weapons and strategies needed to win the battles in this technological era.”⁹¹ However, George W. Bush assumed the presidency with limited experience, particularly in foreign affairs. This was well demonstrated when he said to his advisors in a meeting:

I want to have a plan for how we begin the administration for at least the first six weeks... I saw what happened to my dad, who got elected and came in and then said, what do we do? ... I want a plan... based on fulfilling the things we did in the campaign.⁹²

⁸⁷ Pauly, Robert, and Tom Lansford. *Strategic Preemption: US Foreign Policy and the Second Iraq War*. Routledge, 2017. p. 19.

⁸⁸ Malanowsky, Jamie. “Kill Bill: the Relentless Effort to blame 9/11 on President Clinton.” *The Washington Monthly*, vol. 35, no. 11, 2003, p. 35.

⁸⁹ Brzezinski, Zbigniew. *Second Chance: Three Presidents and the Crisis of American Superpower*. Basic Books, 2008. p. 3.

⁹⁰ Emmott, Bill. *20:21 Vision: the Lessons of the 20th Century for the 21st*. Penguin, 2003. pp. 28-29.

⁹¹ Emmott, Bill.

⁹² Bruke, John P. *Becoming President, the Bush Transition 2000-2003*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004. p. 55.

From the beginning of his presidency, Bush and his administration adopted a unilateralist approach to the US foreign policy. The president ordered the US withdrawal from the Anti Ballistic Missiles Agreement signed in 1972. He also rejected the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, and refused to sign the Rome Treaty to create an International Criminal Court.⁹³

Economically, oil and energy were key aspects of Bush's policy. Therefore, the Persian Gulf Region remained of significant interest for the United States, despite the diplomatic sensitivities with some governments in the region like Iraq. In this context, President Bush said:

America imports 50% of its oil, more than 10 million barrels per day. And the figure is rising. This is dependence on foreign oil. And this dependence is a challenge to our economic security, because dependence can lead to price shocks and fuel shortages. And this dependence on foreign oil is a matter of national security. To put it bluntly, sometimes we rely upon energy sources from countries that don't particularly like us.⁹⁴

1.4. The Impact of 9/11 Attacks on the US Foreign Policy

As President Bush was still formulating his policies, the situation changed suddenly due to the 9/11 attacks. On September 11, 2001, 19 elements of Al Qaeda hijacked four commercial US passenger aircraft. Two planes crashed into the Twin Towers of New York's World Trade Centre, another hit the Pentagon, while the fourth plane crashed in Pennsylvania before reaching its target. Nearly 3,000 people were killed in the attacks, which Osama Bin Laden claimed responsibility for in response to the American intervention in the Islamic countries.⁹⁵ Consequently, the United States bore the consequences of its interventionist policy.

The 9/11 attacks marked a turning point in the US history, setting a new course for the American foreign policy and national security strategy. The Bush administration

⁹³ Lind, Nancy, and Bernard Tamas. *Controversies of the George W. Bush Presidency: pro and con documents*. Greenwood, 2007. pp. 100-101.

⁹⁴ "President promotes Energy efficiency through Technology." *The White House*, 25 Feb. 2002. www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/02/20020225-5.html.

⁹⁵ Bergen, Peter L. "September 11 Attacks." *Britannica*. www.britannica.com/event/September-11-attacks. Accessed 22 Jul. 2018.

considered the attacks as an act of war, prompting the president to immediately declare war on terrorism. Bush said, “the deliberate and deadly attacks which were carried out yesterday against our country were more than acts of terror. They were acts of war.”⁹⁶ However, terrorism was not limited to a specific region, which means that the US was facing a hidden and unpredictable global threat. This was acknowledged in the US National Security Strategy, which stated that “the United States of America is fighting a war against terrorists of global reach. The enemy is terrorism- premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against innocents.”⁹⁷

A new doctrine emerged in the wake of 9/11, known as the Bush Doctrine, which based on three principles: first, preemptive strategy, where the US declared that it would attack the enemy before being attacked; in other words, the US would eliminate the threat before reaching the American soil, as stated in the National Security Strategy, “history will judge harshly those who saw this coming danger but failed to act. In the new world we have entered, the only path to peace and security is the path of action. Defending the United States, the American people, and our interests at home and abroad by identifying and destroying the threat before it reaches our borders.”⁹⁸ Second, Unilateralism, meaning that the United States would act alone if necessary to serve its security and its interests as well, regardless of other nations’ decisions, as President Bush declared, “we will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to prevent terrorist attacks and defend the country and its people from any threat.” The president added that “all free nations have a stake in preventing sudden and catastrophic attacks... yet the course of this nation does not depend on the decisions of others whatever action is required, whenever action is necessary, I will defend the freedom and security of the American people.”⁹⁹ However, Bush was criticized for adopting such a strategy. Jean-Marc Coicaud described it as a shift from the “international solidarity of the 1990s to an unabashed embrace of a unilateralist foreign policy.”¹⁰⁰ Similarly, G. John Ikenberry noted that “a half century of US leadership in constructing an international order around multilateral institutions, rule-based agreements,

⁹⁶ “Remarks by the President in Photo Opportunity with the National Security Team.” *The White House*, 12 Sept. 2001. www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010912-4.html.

⁹⁷ “The National Security Strategy of the United States.” *The White House*, 12 Sept. 2001. www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nssall.html.

⁹⁸ “The National Security Strategy of the United States.”

⁹⁹ “The National Security Strategy of the United States.”

¹⁰⁰ Coicaud, Jean Marc. *Beyond the National Interest: the Future of UN Peacekeeping and Multilateralism in an Era of U.S. Primacy*. United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007. p. 3.

and alliance partnerships seems to be giving way to a new assertive -even defiant-unilateralism.”¹⁰¹ Third, hegemony, since the United States believed that it could ensure its national security only through making a stable international order sustained by American leadership. The Bush administration also believed that the US had to practice its role as the global harbor of peace, democracy, and freedom, using even military strength if necessary. Thus, the 9/11 attacks served to reinforce the US ambitions of hegemony. Noam Chomsky described the Bush doctrine as “an imperial grand strategy designed to secure unilateral world domination through absolute moral superiority.”¹⁰²

Essentially, President Bush mentioned that in the war of terror, there is no difference between terrorists and nations that harbor terrorism. He presented the world with a binary choice: either stand with the United States or align with terrorists. Bush said:

We will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.¹⁰³

Although the attacks resulted in significant human and material losses, they also benefited some entities. According to David R. Griffin, “the principal beneficiaries of the destruction of the World Trade Centre are in the United States: the Bush administration, the Pentagon, the CIA, the FBI, the weapons industry, the oil industry.”¹⁰⁴ This was evident in the events that followed the attacks. For example, the CIA director, George Tenet, had a developed plan known as World Wide Attacks Matrix , but it was only after the 9/11 attacks that he could secure funding for its implementation. Moreover, the war needed weaponry, so President Bush requested a defense budget of \$48 billion in January 2002 to conduct his war on terror.¹⁰⁵ Figure 1.4. illustrates the increase in the defense budget following the September 11th attacks.

¹⁰¹ Ikenberry, John G. “Is American Multilateralism in Decline?” *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2003, pp. 533-550.

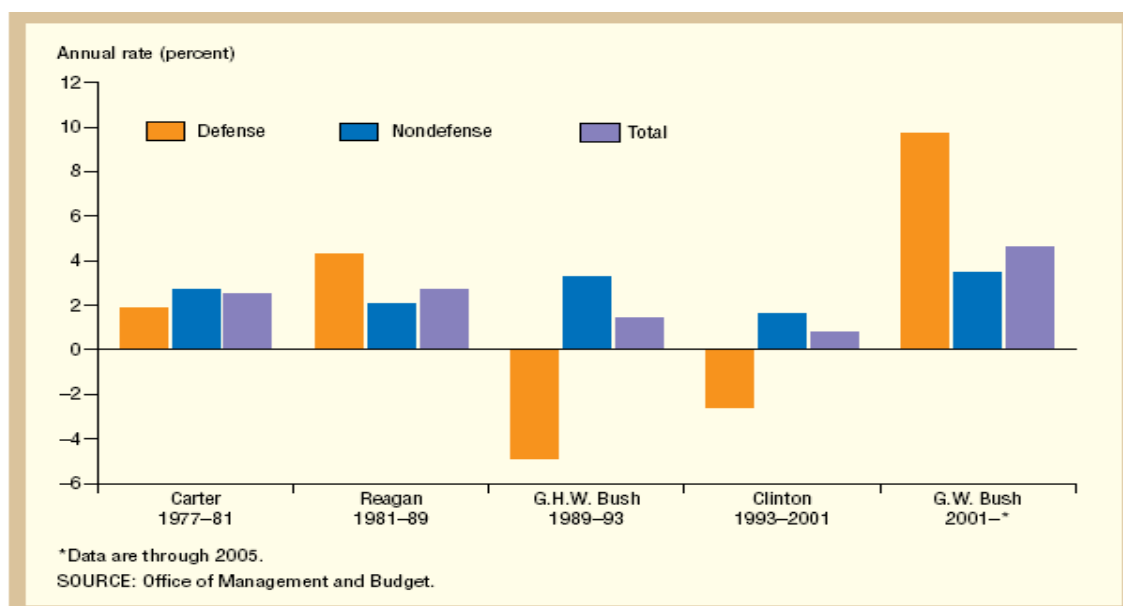
¹⁰² Chomsky, Noam. *Hegemony or Survival: America’s Quest for Global Dominance*. Penguin Books, 2003. p. 46.

¹⁰³ Hastings Dunn, David. “Bush, 11 September and the Conflicting Strategies of the ‘War on Terrorism’”. *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, vol. 16, 2005, pp. 11-33.

¹⁰⁴ Griffin, David Ray. *The New Pearl Harbor: disturbing questions about the Bush administration and 9/11*. Olive Branch Press, 2004. p. 19.

¹⁰⁵ Bouguedra, Abdelmadjid. p. 81.

Figure 1.4. (Spending Growth) Deficit and Surplus Facts and Projections



Source: Bouguedra, Abdelmadjid. p. 82.

In fact, these attacks were largely to George W. Bush's advantage, providing him a great opportunity to demonstrate his skills in crises' management and foreign affairs. Following 9/11, Bush's popularity increased, Donald Rumsfeld noted that "September 11 has turned George W. Bush from a minority president whose party lost control of the Senate into arguably the most powerful US president in recent times."¹⁰⁶ Bush managed to win over the American public opinion; the fear caused by the attacks led the American people to give the president a free hand to take military actions against enemies; thus, Bush exploited that fear to advance his policy of military intervention globally. Chomsky mentioned that Bush "seems to be free to do practically anything he wants both inside and outside the United States. It's an unheard-of, frightening situation."¹⁰⁷ In addition, the attacks were advantageous for the US economy, as Bush used the war on terror as justification to secure control over vital energy resources in countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Bouguedra, Abdelmadjid. p. 83.

¹⁰⁷ Chomsky, Noam. *Imperial Ambitions: Conversations with Noam Chomsky on the Post-9/11 World*. Penguin Books, 2006. p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ Mahdi, Ahmed S. *US Foreign Policy and Energy Resources during the George W. Bush Administration*. 2010, University of Birmingham, PhD dissertation. p. 18.

At the beginning, the Americans supported the War on Terror and the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, because they were successfully convinced that both governments were major sources of terrorism. However, things altered significantly when no weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq and as the long-term objectives of political transformation in the region were only partially achieved. Additionally, internal tensions in the US increased, and the American people preferred to allocate those huge sums of money on the domestic affairs rather than spending them on wars.¹⁰⁹

Several major American media outlets, such as ABC, NBC, The Wall Street Journal and The Washington Post, conducted extensive surveys from the outset of the war. These surveys consistently highlighted the war's lack of popularity among American taxpayers. NBC and the WSJ posed the question, "When it comes to the war in Iraq, do you think that removing Saddam Hussein from power was or was not worth the number of US military casualties and the financial costs of the war?" From the start, the response was largely negative. By November 2003, 45% of respondents thought it was "worth it," while 46% saw it was "not worth it." By October 2006, support had dwindled to 37%, with 54% opposing. Similarly, ABC and The Washington Post conducted a poll asking, whether, over all, considering the costs versus the benefits to the United States, the Iraq War was worth fighting. The proportion of citizens who answered "yes" to this question dropped from 70% in 2003 to 58%, and then to 40% by January 2007.¹¹⁰ Hence, the events of 9/11 placed the War on Terror at the heart of the American strategic thinking and contributed dramatically to reshaping the American leaders' views, leading to major changes in the US foreign relations and policies.

When Barack Obama assumed the presidency, new hope emerged in the United States and abroad. However, the 44th president inherited various challenges. Domestically, the country was experiencing a financial crisis during that period; and internationally, Obama inherited two complex wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. He also needed to repair relations with many countries that had deteriorated during the previous presidency. Obama, indeed, inherited the United States whose international standing had been significantly affected by the policies and actions of the Bush administration. A Stern magazine poll indicated that two-thirds of Germans viewed the United States as a greater

¹⁰⁹ Brigham, Robert K. *Is Iraq Another Vietnam?* Public Affairs, 2006. p. 109.

¹¹⁰ Bouguedra, Abdelmadjid. p. 166.

threat to world peace than Iran.¹¹¹ Indeed, the overuse of military force during the Bush years conflicted with American values of peace and democracy. In this context, Obama declared in Cairo, “The 9/11 trauma led us to act contrary to our traditions and our ideals. We are taking concrete actions to change course. I have unequivocally prohibited the use of torture, and I have ordered the prison at Guantanamo Bay to be closed by early next year.”¹¹² In his efforts to bring about change, President Obama favored non-military solutions over weapons and wars. He believed that “security and wealth of Americans were strongly connected to the security and wealth of people living beyond the borders of the United States of America.”¹¹³ Thus, Obama perceived it as his responsibility to restore the international image of America. A poll in October 2009 indicated that 60% of the public believed that Obama would “increase respect for the United States abroad.”¹¹⁴

Obama also sought to repair relations with the Muslim world. His 2009 speech in Cairo aimed to restore trust and promote mutual respect and common interests between the United States and the Muslim countries. He also stressed the importance of discussion in addressing grievances that could spark extremism.¹¹⁵ However, challenges continued to hamper the Obama administration’s efforts, including the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Although Obama advocated for a two-state solution and participated in several peace talks, serious solutions remained elusive.¹¹⁶ Factually, Obama’s foreign policy towards the Middle East during his first term reflected a balanced approach, replacing the use of military actions with active diplomatic efforts.

Counterterrorism remained a major priority during Obama’s first term. While the president aimed to end the US military interventions, he continued to pursue militant groups’ locations globally using more sophisticated means, such as drone strikes in countries like Pakistan and Yemen to eliminate militants. The most significant event

¹¹¹ MacAskill, Ewen. “US seen as a bigger threat to peace than Iran, worldwide poll suggests.” *The Guardian*, 15 Jun. 2006. www.theguardian.com/world/2006/jun/15/usa.iran.

¹¹² Guyer, Jonathan. “Addresses by President Barack Obama on the Middle East.” *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, 2012. www.thecaireview.com/texts/addresses-by-president-barack-obama-on-the-middle-east/.

¹¹³ Peters, Gerhard, and John Woolley. “Remarks to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs.” *The American Presidency Project*, 23 Apr. 2007. www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-chicago-council-global-affairs.

¹¹⁴ Eichenberg, Richard C. “Public Opinion and Foreign Policy in the Obama Era.” *Politique Américaine*, vol. 2, no. 14, 2009, pp. 11-24.

¹¹⁵ Amr, Hady. “President Obama’s Cairo Speech: Healing the Wounds?” *Brookings*, 11 Jun. 2009. www.brookings.edu/articles/president-obamas-cairo-speech-healing-the-wounds/.

¹¹⁶ Amr, Hady.

during Obama's presidency was the killing of Osama bin Laden in 2011. However, the president was criticized for the use of drones because of civilian casualties caused by such tactics.¹¹⁷ As a matter of fact, President Obama's foreign policy contributed significantly to improving America's standing on the global stage. During his first term in office, the country saw a shift from unilateral actions to building up alliances and trust with nations abroad. His foreign policy created the framework for a more cooperative and less interventionist American role in global affairs.

1.5. The United States and the Middle East: Interests and Attitudes

Up to First World War, the US interaction with the Middle East (see Map 1.3.) was limited to commerce and missionary. American grain and fish were in great demand in the Levant, and Turkish raisins, figs, and opium were shipped to the United States. Missionaries also contributed to the promotion of education in the region, many institutions were founded such as Robert College of Istanbul in 1863, Syrian Protestant College in 1866 (later renamed the American University of Beirut), and the University of Cairo in 1919.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Philips, Macon. "Osama Bin Laden Dead." *The White House*, 2 May 2011. obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2011/05/02/osama-bin-laden-dead.

¹¹⁸ Al Sarhan, Atallah S. "United States Foreign Policy and the Middle East." *Open Journal of Political Science*, vol. 7, no 4, 2017, pp. 454-472.

Map 1.3. The Middle East Region



Source: www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/me.htm.

The Middle East has great geostrategic significance due to its position at the intersection of three continents (Europe, Asia and Africa), coupled with key landmarks like the Turkish Straits, the Persian Gulf, and the Suez Canal. These features contributed to increase the European scramble for the region. Furthermore, the decline of the Ottoman Empire in 1918 paved the way for Western powers, particularly Britain and France, to take control over the Middle East, while the United States did not show any interest in the region due to its isolationist policy. Indeed, lacking imperial ambitions gave America a good reputation among the Middle Eastern states. Additionally, following WWI, President Woodrow Wilson's principle of self-determination was strongly supported in the colonized countries in the region, leading to the strengthening of Arab nationalism. Until the creation of Israel in 1948, the US enjoyed widespread prestige in the Arab world.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Crabb, Cecil V. *American Foreign Policy in the Nuclear Age*, 4th ed. Harper & Row Publishers, Inc, 1983. p. 400.

During the interwar years, the US started to show more economic interest in the Middle East by increasing American petroleum companies mainly in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. Two American companies, Standard Oil of California and Texaco, were the first to explore for oil in Saudi Arabia in the 1930's.¹²⁰ Varady argues that "before 1947, the United States did not have a clearly thought-through policy in its dealing with the Middle East ... the United States relied on Britain and France to represent and protect its vital interests."¹²¹

It was not until the post-war period that the region gained high importance for the US; since then, America became a permanent player in the Middle East. Meanwhile, France started to withdraw from its colonies in the region, and Britain could no longer maintain control over its Middle Eastern colonies due to the war losses. Consequently, at the end of 1945, the British announced that "they are no longer able to keep the Middle East in order without US help."¹²² This led the United States to issue the Truman Doctrine in 1947, declaring that it would take over Britain's commitments to Greece and Turkey. On March 12, the US provided four hundred million dollars of economic and military aid to Greece and Turkey in an effort to secure their allegiance during the Cold War.¹²³ This action indicated that the United States was gradually replacing the European powers in the Middle East. The Cold War, indeed, marked a shift in the American foreign policy in the region, moving from a policy of non-intervention to full engagement in the Middle Eastern affairs.

Indeed, several instances illustrate the US intervention in the Middle East during the Cold War. When the Soviet Union broke its promise to withdraw from Iran at the end of WWII and started to pressure Iran to form a Soviet-Iranian oil company, the US, at Iran's request, backed the Iranian government; this enabled Iran to reject the Soviets' demand and limited the communist expansion in the country by creating a pro-US regime under

¹²⁰ Pollack, Josh. "Saudi Arabia and the United States, 1931-2002." *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2002, pp. 77-102.

¹²¹ Varady, Corrin. *US Foreign Policy and the Multinational Force in Lebanon: Vigorous Self-Defense*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2017. p. 49.

¹²² Little, Douglas. *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2002. pp. 119-120.

¹²³ Samaan, Ahed G. *The Policy of Containment and the Middle East, 1946-1958*. 1972, Portland State University, PhD dissertation. p . 86.

the leadership of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, which persisted until his deposition in the Iranian Revolution of 1979.¹²⁴

Another aspect emerged in the US involvement in the Middle East, Israel, an American ally which served as a bulwark against Communism and Arab nationalism in the region. However, the American support of Israel deteriorated the US- Arabs relations. In this context, Evan Wilson wrote that “it is no exaggeration to say that our relations with the entire Arab world have never recovered from the events of 1947-1948 when we sided with the Jews against the Arabs and advocated a solution in Palestine which went contrary to self-determination as far as the majority population of the country was concerned.”¹²⁵ In fact, the American support of Israel revealed the intentions of the United States and the inconsistency of its foreign policy. While the US always insisted on implementing the international resolutions and sanctions imposed on many Arab countries, it often ignored Israel’s transgressions. As a result, the Arab perception of the US as a champion of anti-colonialism diminished. This perception also tarnished following the announcement of the Eisenhower Doctrine in 1957, which stated that the US would aid any state threatened by international Communism. However, the doctrine allowed the US to back the friendly rulers who felt threatened by their own people, such as King Hussein of Jordan in 1957, and President Camille Chamoun of Lebanon in 1958. These actions increased anti-American sentiments among Arab and Muslim communities.¹²⁶

In fact, preventing the communist expansion in the Middle East, supporting Israel, and ensuring the continued flow of oil at low prices appeared to be the main objectives of the US policy in the Middle East until the 1970’s. Moreover, new dimensions were added to the US policy during the following decades as a result of the rise of Khomeinism in Iran and the Persian Gulf War. Hence, protecting the Gulf region became increasingly important for saving the US interests, leading Iraq and Iran to dominate US foreign policy concerns till the present time.¹²⁷ In the post-Cold War era, political instability in the Middle East, including the 2003 Iraq War, concerns over Iraq’s alleged development of

¹²⁴ Bonakdarian, Mansour. “U.S.-Iranian Relations, 1911-1951.” *Arizona State University*. www.files.ethz.ch/isn/58235/MESV3-2.pdf. Accessed 21 Oct. 2018.

¹²⁵ Wilson, Evan M. *Decision on Palestine: How the U.S. Came to Recognize Israel*. Hoover Institution Press, 1979. p. 154.

¹²⁶ El Mansour, Mohamed. “U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East since the 19th Century.” *Teach Mideast*. teachmideast.org/u-s-foreign-policy-in-the-middle-east-since-the-19th-century/. Accessed 23 Oct. 2018.

¹²⁷ Gerges, Fawaz A. “Islam and Muslims in the Mind of America.” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 588, pp. 73-89.

chemical weapons, reports of human rights violations by state authorities, particularly against opposition groups, and the rise of religious extremism, contributed to a shift in US regional policy. This shift included a greater emphasis on counterterrorism, support for Israel, and efforts to prevent states such as Iraq and Iran from posing threats to US interests. These factors, indeed, increased the importance of the Middle East and significantly influenced the US policy in the region.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the US foreign policy in the Middle East was affected by the attacks of September 11, 2001, which led to the American War on Terror, launching military operations in Afghanistan in 2001 to eliminate al-Qaeda networks; and the invasion of Iraq in 2003, justified by Saddam Hussein's aggressive rule and his possession of weapons of mass destruction. Moreover, the political turmoil and sectarian conflicts that emerged in Iraq enabled the US to justify extending its military presence in the country, arguing that continued involvement was necessary to manage stability and contain potential regional unrest.¹²⁸

On the other hand, the US tried to promote regional stability through non-military means. Relations with allies like Saudi Arabia and Egypt were highly prioritized, providing military support and aid to these countries. Despite its explicit support to Israel, the US also brokered peace processes to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, without achieving effective results.¹²⁹ Economic sanctions were also used, imposed mainly on Iran for having a nuclear program and harboring extremist groups.¹³⁰ Therefore, the period up to 2010 saw the US grappling to balance between addressing the complexities of the politics of the Middle East and securing its interests in the region.

1.6. Conclusion

The United States' foreign policy experienced a significant shift from isolationism to internationalism. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the US adopted isolationist principles, focusing on internal development and avoiding involvement in European conflicts. However, this situation changed completely after World War II;

¹²⁸ Bacevich, Andrew J. *The New American Militarism: How Americans are seduced by War*. Oxford University Press, 2005. pp. 213-214.

¹²⁹ Quandt, William B. *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*. University of California Press, 2005. p. 301.

¹³⁰ Fitzpatrick, Mark. *The Iranian Nuclear Crisis: Avoiding Worst-Case Outcomes*. Routledge, 2008. p. 37.

events such as Pearl Harbor attacks prompted the US to consider the need to participate in global affairs to protect its security and national interests. The US move from its isolationist policy was illustrated in several instances such as its commitment to international cooperation, including the creation of the United Nations and NATO. This period also saw the emergence of the United States as a global leader.

As tensions of the Cold War increased, the US intensified its interventionist approach in an attempt to confront the communist expansion globally. The containment policy, embodied through various means like the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan that provided economic and military support to many countries, aimed at securing allegiance to the United States. This policy often justified the US support of authoritarian regimes which served as bulwarks against Communism, revealing the pragmatic nature of the US foreign policy.

The American foreign policy underwent a significant shift in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 attacks. The Bush administration declared the War on Terror, leading to the invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent 2003 war on Iraq, justified by fighting terrorism and promoting stability in the Middle East. By 2010, the US policy remained complex and cautious, especially towards the Middle Eastern states, mainly due to the US desire to protect oil resources and Israel's security. However, the American failure in Afghanistan and Iraq exposed the United States to criticism, particularly regarding its military interventions.

Chapter Two

The Kurdish Issue: Nationalism, Geopolitics, and Minority Rights in a Fragmented Landscape

2.1. Introduction

The Kurdish issue has been a complex and ongoing problem in the Middle East. It began with historical conflicts over cultural differences and became an important national movement. This chapter examines how the Kurdish problem started and evolved, focusing on how past events and politics influenced Kurdish identity and goals. Kurdish nationalism comes in two forms: ethnic and civic. The differences between these forms show the varied ideas about the future of Kurdish communities. Understanding these differences helps in seeing the wider impact of Kurdish nationalism in countries with large Kurdish populations.

The Kurdish regions are important from a geopolitical perspective because they lie at the crossroads of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. Each of these countries has its own viewpoint on the Kurdish issue, creating rivalries that make the region less stable. These areas are also important due to their natural resources and their role in regional power politics, adding more complexity to the Kurdish fight for self-determination. In fact, the journey toward self-determination is full of challenges, including government crackdowns, divisions among Kurds, and the competing interests of regional and global powers. Hence, this chapter also looks at the broader issue of minority rights, focusing on how the Kurds' quest for autonomy and recognition often clashes with the principles of national sovereignty.

The Kurdish issue is closely linked to the rivalries between Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, the countries where the Kurds live. Their conflicting interests impact Kurdish goals and affect the entire Middle East region. Understanding this complex situation is important. Therefore, this analysis will provide a clear view of the Kurdish issue and how it fits into broader topics like nationalism, minority rights and the right to self-determination.

2.2. An Ethnographic Profile of the Kurds

Kurdistan, also known as the Land of the Kurds, is a historical and cultural region where Kurds make up the majority of the population, although it is not officially recognized as a sovereign state under international law. It has an area of approximately 500,000 square kilometers, situated across the states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria¹³¹, as map 2.1. shows.

Map 2.1. Predominantly Kurdish Inhabited Areas



Source: Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection.
www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/turkey_ne_2002.jpg.

The Kurdish region covers mainly the mountainous parts of the central and northern Zagros, the eastern sections of the Taurus and Pontus, and the northern half of the Amanus ranges. In the central regions, precipitation ranges from 60 to 80 inches annually, while in the lower regions, it ranges from 20 to 40 inches, mostly as snow. Snowfall can

¹³¹ Chaliand, Gérard. *People without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan*. Zed Books, 1980. p. 47.

last up to six months in some places, leading to permanent glaciers in the highlands, which feed a network of rivers, including the Tigris and Euphrates. In Kurdistan, the average temperature is usually between 15 and 20 C°, but it becomes colder in higher areas. Even though the region is known for its mountainous landscape, it has more farmland than many other countries in the Middle East. Kurdistan is not just rich in oil; it also has important minerals like chrome, copper, iron, and coal.¹³²

The history of the Kurds has long been a subject of research by historians and researchers. Though their origins are uncertain, the most prominent hypothesis suggests that the Kurds are “a mix of a series of Indo-European tribes that immigrated to Kurdistan 4.000 years ago.”¹³³ These tribes are believed to have merged with the indigenous people of the Zagros and Taurus Mountains, leading to the emergence of the Kurdish populations. Therefore, this theory argues that the Kurds became a distinct group through an ongoing complex process of linguistic and cultural assimilation over thousands of years.

Other researchers believe that the Kurds are descendants of the Medes, Iranian people who ruled Iran and parts of Iraq.¹³⁴ Vladimir Minorsky noted that “the Medes, who widely inhabited the land where currently the Kurds form the majority, are likely to be the forefathers of the modern Kurds.”¹³⁵ In fact, the Kurdish history has been greatly influenced by the Medes, especially their conquest of Nineveh, an event that shaped their identity and historical narrative. This is evident in the Kurdish calendar which begins in 612 BC, the date of the fall of Nineveh. Their calendar starts in March, and coincides with the festival of Newruz, the Kurdish New Year.¹³⁶

Indeed, the Kurds are the fourth largest ethnicity in the Middle East and the largest ethnic group in the world without a state of their own. The Kurdish population is nearly 26.3 million, though figures are not accurate. In order to emphasize their significance, Kurdish sources often inflate their numbers, with some claiming as many as 35 million.

¹³² Bulloch, John, and Harvey Morris. *No Friends but the Mountains: The Tragic History of the Kurds*. Oxford University Press, 1992. p. 53.

¹³³ Charountaki, Marianna. *The Kurds and US Foreign Policy: International Relations in the Middle East since 1945*. Routledge, 2011. p. 33.

¹³⁴ The Medes, an Indo-Iranian-speaking group originating from Central Asia, migrated westward and entered northern Iran towards the close of the 2nd millennium BC. Settling in the mountainous Zagros region, they established the Kingdom of Media (Mada in Old Persian) by the late 7th century BC. Choubineh, Nathalie. “Medes.” *World History Encyclopedia*, 17 Jan. 2024. www.worldhistory.org/Medes/.

¹³⁵ Minorsky, Vladimir. “Median Empire.” www.crystalinks.com/media.html. Accessed 25 Jul. 2019.

¹³⁶ Minorsky, Vladimir.

However, the governments in the region tend to underestimate the number for clear political reasons. According to estimates, 52% of Kurds reside in Turkey, where they constitute 24% of the population; 26% in Iran, representing 12% of the population; 16% in Iraq, accounting for 24% of the population; and 5% in Syria, forming 9% of the total population.¹³⁷ The following table shows other estimates collected by some researchers regarding the size of the Kurdish population.

Table 2.1. Estimates on the size of the Kurdish population

Source	Year	Turkey		Iraq		Iran		Syria		Other	World
		Pop.	%	Pop.	%	Pop.	%	Pop.	%	Pop.	Pop.
Mutlu 1996 ¹	1965	3.13	10.0								
Vanly 1971 ²	1965	6.7	21.5	2.3	27.5	4.5	18.3	0.5	9	0.4	14.4
Van Bruinessen 1992 ³	1975	7.5	19	2-2.5	23	3.5	10	0.5	8.5	0.1	13.5-15
McDowell 2004 ⁴	2000	15.4	23	4.2	23	5.7	10	1.0	6.1	2	24-27
Table 1 - Total Kurdish population (Pop.) is reported in millions. The percentage indicates the share of the Kurdish population in the respective country.											

Source: Esposti, Nicola D. *Whose Kurdistan? Class Politics and Kurdish Nationalism in the Middle East, 1918-2018*. 2020, London School of Economics and Political Science, PhD dissertation. p. 26.

A shared language is an important element of ethno-nationalism. The Kurds have common languages that belong to the Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family, specifically the northwestern group. Most Kurds speak Kurmanji, which is the most widely used language among them. Kurmanji is predominantly spoken by Kurds living in Syria, Turkey, and the northern parts of Iran and Iraq. In contrast, Sorani is mainly spoken in the southern part of Kurdistan. Kurmanji and Sorani are not dialects; they are distinct languages, making them mutually unintelligible. Additionally, many Kurds are multilingual and speak three other languages. In the southeast, Kurds speak Laki, a language which is more closely related to Farsi than it is to Sorani. Gurani is spoken in parts of Southern Kurdistan and is closely related to Zaza, which is found in regions of Turkey. Both Gurani and Zaza likely stem from an earlier language once native to the area. The arrival of Kurmanji and Sorani speakers disrupted that indigenous

¹³⁷ Meho, Lokman I. *The Kurds and Kurdistan: A Selective and Annotated Bibliography*. Greenwood Press, 1997. p. 1.

language, causing it to grow apart and, over time, evolve into distinct Kurdish languages.¹³⁸

The Kurds find many difficulties in communication because they do not have a common language or alphabet. In Iran and Iraq, speakers of Sorani use a special version of the Perso-Arabic alphabet. In Turkey, Kurmanji-speaking Kurds use an adapted Latin alphabet in some Kurdish publications, which have only been permitted since 1991. Kurmanji speakers used the Armenian alphabet in the 1920s, and then adopted the Latin alphabet in 1927, and later the Cyrillic alphabet in 1945. Currently, they still use both the Cyrillic and Latin alphabets; while those who speak Gurani use the Persian alphabet.¹³⁹

Factually, there have been several failed attempts to create one unified Kurdish language with a single alphabet. This can be attributed to the existence of many different Kurdish languages and dialects, and these differences make it difficult to agree on one common language. Additionally, the difficult living conditions of the Kurds made it hard for them to achieve progress in language and literature. In Turkey; for instance, speaking Kurdish was banned between 1938 and 1991. The terms Kurds and Kurdistan were also prevented in official use during that time. While Kurds are now allowed to speak their language privately, they still face restrictions because Kurdish is not taught in schools and cannot be used freely in print or broadcast media.¹⁴⁰ In addition to illiteracy, the Kurds suffered from extreme poverty, which made their pursuit of a livelihood more important than which alphabet or language to use when writing.

The Kurdish people adhere to various faiths, but most of them, over 60%, are Sunni Muslims. This includes the majority of Kurmanji speakers; while a smaller group, around 5-7% found mainly in Khurasan and southern Kurdistan, follows Twelver Shi'a Islam. Many Muslim Kurds belong to various Sufi groups that played a significant role in different Kurdish uprisings. Leaders of these Sufi orders, known as shaykhs, are important figures. They train deputies to manage followers across different areas and to gather support and dues. To become a member of the Sufi order, one must go through a specific process. Once joined, these members, called as murids, can participate in the Sufi spiritual

¹³⁸ Meho, Lokman I. p. 3.

¹³⁹ Meho, Lokman I. p. 4.

¹⁴⁰ Meho, Lokman I.

practices, including some dances, chants, and prayers. Throughout history, murids have shown their loyalty by fighting for their leaders, such as Shaykh Ubaydullah, Shaykh Said, Shaykh Ahmad Barzani, and Shaykh Mahmud Barzanji during their uprisings. Today, the bond between a murid and his shaykh plays an important role in political elections. Political parties are keen to gain the favor of the shaykhs, hoping this will lead to gaining the murids' votes and support.¹⁴¹

Indeed, the Qadiri is the oldest Sufi group followed by the Kurdish people. Many leaders in the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), especially from the Talabani tribe, are Qadiris. Shaykh Mahmud, who led various Kurdish uprisings in Iran and Iraq, was a Qadiri too. However, the number of Qadiris reduced because the Naqshbandi group has become more popular. The Naqshbandi is mainly connected to the Iraqi Kurdish Democratic Party and the well-known Barzani tribe. Another famous Sufi group is the Baktashi, known as the “whirling dervishes.” The Naqshbandi tend to use chanting and meditation, while the Qadiri and Baktashi include complex dances, musical instruments, and chanting to reach ecstasy in their rituals. Additionally, there is another small Sufi group known as the Rafa, which believes that the spirit transcends the body. During their ceremonies, they engage in cruel practices such as walking barefoot on hot coal, swallowing swords, and stabbing their bodies with sharp objects. Surprisingly, they are not harmed after these strenuous practices. Other small numbers of the Kurds are affiliated to the Cult of Angels, an ancient indigenous faith. There are currently three branches of this sect: Yazidism, to which 2% of the Kurds belong; Alawism, which is followed by about 20% of the Kurds; and Yarsanism, embraced by 13% of them. One of the basic tenets of this sect is the belief in soul transmigration and the unique meaning and significance of the number seven.¹⁴²

The Kurds have traditionally lived in tribal communities founded on shared ancestry. The size and ideology of each tribe are shaped by various factors, including economic conditions, the character of tribal leaders, and relationships with both neighboring tribes and surrounding states. Regardless of the tribe's origin, members typically direct their strongest political loyalty toward the tribal chief. For centuries, regional states have exploited this loyalty, often by securing the support of a tribal leader

¹⁴¹ Izady, Mehrdad. *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook*. Taylor & Francis, 1992. p. 158.

¹⁴² Izady, Mehrdad. pp. 160-161.

and encouraging conflict with rival tribes or other states, as a way to prevent Kurdish unity and strength. While tribalism has declined in recent years, governments continue to foster internal divisions among Kurds. In Kurdish society, tribal allegiance remains a central element. In the absence of a unified Kurdish state, shared language, or common religion, the tribe continues to be the primary source of authority and identity for many Kurds.¹⁴³

2.3. The Emergence and Evolution of the Kurdish Issue

The Kurdish people are ethnically different from Persians, Turks, and Arabs; consequently, these groups attempted throughout history to assimilate them, leading to an ongoing Kurdish resistance and struggle for identity and autonomy. Additionally, the geographical position of the Kurdish regions had made them vulnerable to raids by numerous external powers, starting with the Assyrian and Scythian Empires in the 9th century, followed by the invasions of Alexander the Great, Arab Muslims, the Seljuk Turks in the 11th century, and the Mogol and Timurid conquests in the 13th and 14th centuries. These military campaigns were generally directed against the states that controlled territories inhabited by the Kurds; nevertheless, they affected the Kurdish populations, contributing to periods of displacement and the persistence of nomadic lifestyles among Kurdish communities for centuries.¹⁴⁴

However, following the Ottoman victory over the Safavids at the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514, new borders were established between the Ottoman and the Persian Empires, resulting in the partition of Kurdistan according to the Qasr-e-Shirin Treaty. Consequently, most Kurds fell under the Ottoman Empire, while the rest went under the Persian control. Under the Ottoman rule, society was categorized by religion rather than ethnicity. Turks, Arabs, and Kurds were all considered as Sunni Muslims. Ethno-linguistic differences did not exist; and thus, the concepts of nationality and minority had no legal standing.¹⁴⁵ The Kurds were granted autonomy and the freedom to establish independent principalities (emirates), where they ruled their internal affairs. In return, they provided

¹⁴³ McDowall, David. *A Modern History of the Kurds*. I.B. Tauris, 1996. p. 13.

¹⁴⁴ Ocalan, Abdullah. *War and Peace in Kurdistan: Perspectives for a Political Solution of the Kurdish Question*. International Initiative, 2009. p. 14.

¹⁴⁵ Yegen, Mesut. "The Kurdish Question in Turkish State Discourse." *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 34, no. 4, 1999, pp. 555-568.

the Ottoman Sultan with taxes and soldiers. This system functioned effectively until the 19th century.¹⁴⁶

During the 19th century, Kurdish-Ottoman relations were affected by many factors, including the wars between the Ottoman Empire, Iran, and Russia, which had significant impact on the Kurdish areas. This turmoil led to some Kurdish rebellions, but these revolts did not have a nationalistic nature, as the rebel leaders still regarded themselves as Sunni Muslim subjects of a fundamentally Islamic empire. Their primary goal was to protect their lands from foreign interventions. However, the emergence and spread of nationalist independence movements, such as the Armenian and Greek nationalism in Anatolia, contributed to the growth of Kurdish national awareness.¹⁴⁷

During the Tanzimat period,¹⁴⁸ the Ottoman Empire adopted a severe centralization policy in an effort to prevent its collapse. The Kurdish local authorities were replaced by governors appointed by the central government, leading to conflicts with the Kurds who wished to keep their autonomy within their communities. Consequently, around fifty Kurdish revolts occurred, including the Babanzade revolt in 1806, the Revanduz revolt in 1834-1835, and the Nehirli Sheik Ubeydullah revolt in 1880. However, these uprisings failed and were suppressed at the cost of many lives.¹⁴⁹

The end of World War I and the decline of the Ottoman Empire in 1918 were very significant for the Kurdish Issue. Following the war, the victorious Allies immediately sought to break apart the Ottoman Empire, which had lost its power. The United States became involved in planning for the future of the Middle East as part of setting up the Mandate System. Even before the war ended, President Woodrow Wilson wanted to figure out America's goals for the post-war period. To achieve this, he asked his advisor, Colonel

¹⁴⁶ McDowall, David. p. 28.

¹⁴⁷ McDowall, David. p. 49.

¹⁴⁸ The Tanzimat period refers to a series of reforms implemented in the Ottoman Empire between 1839 and 1876. The word Tanzimat means reorganization in Turkish. These reforms were aimed at modernizing the Ottoman state and were influenced by European models of governance and legal structures. Key reforms during the Tanzimat period included the restructuring of the military, the establishment of a modern banking system, the decriminalization of homosexuality, and the replacement of religious laws with secular ones. Additionally, efforts were made to improve civil liberties and build infrastructure to support trade and transport. However, these reforms faced resistance from various factions within the empire and were seen by some as foreign influences. Shaw, Stanford, and Malcolm Yapp. "The Tanzimat Reforms (1839-76)." *Britannica*, 5 Jun. 2024. www.britannica.com/biography/Adelaer.

¹⁴⁹ Uzun, Adem. "Living Freedom: The Evolution of the Kurdish Conflict in Turkey and the Efforts to Resolve it." *Berghof Transitions*, series no. 11, 2014, p. 11.

House, to put together a group of experts called The Inquiry. This group studied the situation and came up with recommendations for how the United States should handle the lands that previously belonged to the defeated powers, including the Ottoman Empire.¹⁵⁰

The Inquiry's report to the president contained two parts. The first part covered the main principles and goals towards Germany; while the second section focused on the United States' stance on several regions, including Turkey. This report, indeed, marked the beginning of President Wilson's early ideas, which would later shape his Fourteen Points. Wilson was aware of the British and French intentions towards the fragmented Ottoman Empire; thus, his plans for America's role in the post-war peace discussions were influenced by his strong opposition to the 1916 Sykes-Picot Treaty and the 1917 Treaty of St. Jean de Maurienne. House stated that in his meeting with Wilson on October 13, 1917, "I (House) added that it should be stated that Turkey must not be partitioned away by the belligerents, but must become autonomous in its several parts according to racial lines. He (Wilson) accepted this."¹⁵¹

In fact, this attitude towards Turkey was adopted by Wilson before his Fourteen Points Speech on January 8, 1918. In a letter to Colonel House, the president noted that "The Turkish portions of the present Turkish Empire must be assured a secure sovereignty and the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule must be assured full opportunity of autonomous development."¹⁵² When Wilson addressed a joint session of Congress, his policy did not change. In point XII of his speech, he stated that "The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development."¹⁵³

Initially, officials at the Paris Peace Conference welcomed Wilson's Fourteen Points. Shortly after the declaration of these points, the US provided further explanation to clarify its vague meaning. Part of this explanation involved emphasizing the need for

¹⁵⁰ Heater, Derek. *National Self Determination: Woodrow Wilson and his legacy*. St. Martin's Press, 1994. p. 40.

¹⁵¹ Seymour, Charles. *Intimate Papers of Colonial House: Into the World War, Vol III*. Houghton Mifflin CO., 1928. p. 323.

¹⁵² Seymour, Charles. p. 324.

¹⁵³ Heater, Derek. p. 41.

European powers to have some control in the region. However, there were no detailed plans mentioned regarding granting independence to minority groups within the Ottoman Empire. The Kurdish aspirations; therefore, were ignored during the Paris Peace Conference. It was not until the creation of a Mesopotamian state that the United States mentioned the Kurds, linked to the upcoming mandates: “The Mesopotamian state is a racial unit. There is an Arab linguistic unit south of a line drawn from Alexandretta to the Persian border. Above this line live Arabs, Armenians, Turks, Kurds, and Assyrians...”¹⁵⁴ So, Kurdistan was included in this document as part of Mesopotamia, even though it did not specifically mention independence for the Kurds.

Moreover, the King-Crane Commission was conducted in 1919 to examine the US involvement in managing control in Anatolia. The commission suggested that a new region, Kurdistan, should be created. They believed that this was the best way to provide autonomy for any minority group in Anatolia not yet assigned to other regions. The commission recommended setting up a new area between the Mesopotamian and the Armenian mandates. Politically, there were two main ideas: one opinion was for the area to eventually become independent on its own; alternatively, it could join with nearby regions to form a larger group that governed itself. The commission also proposed that Iraq should be the main supervisory power for the Kurdish autonomous area. This was based on the fact that most of the Kurdish population lived in the southern part of Kurdistan, making it geographically closer to Iraq than to Armenia. The notion of autonomous Kurdistan was implicitly expressed in the commission’s final report, which mentioned that “with the clear understanding that the rights of the Assyrians, Chaldean, and all minorities in the whole region shall be carefully guarded.”¹⁵⁵

When it became clear that the United States would not be able to take control over Armenia and Constantinople, Britain’s scramble for Kurdistan increased. In June 1920, the US Senate rejected an American mandate over Armenia. This prompted Britain to promote discussions between Sharif Pasha and Boghos Nubar Pasha, Kurdish and Armenian representatives in Paris. Consequently, Nubar Pasha decided to cooperate with the Kurds to confront the growing power of Turkey, as he was concerned about Mustafa

¹⁵⁴ Lambert, Peter J. *The U.S. and the Kurds: Case Studies in U.S. Engagement*. 1997, Master’s Thesis, Monterey Naval Postgraduate School. p. 7.

¹⁵⁵ Lambert, Peter J. p. 9.

Kemal's hostile actions against non-Muslim minorities in Anatolia. For this, Sharif and Nubar issued a joint announcement on November 20, 1919, noting that:

We are in complete agreement in jointly seeking from the [Peace] Conference the constitution, in accordance with the principles of nationalities of a united and independent Armenia and an independent Kurdistan, with the assistance of a Great Power.... We confirm moreover our complete agreement to respect the legitimate rights of the minorities in the two states.¹⁵⁶

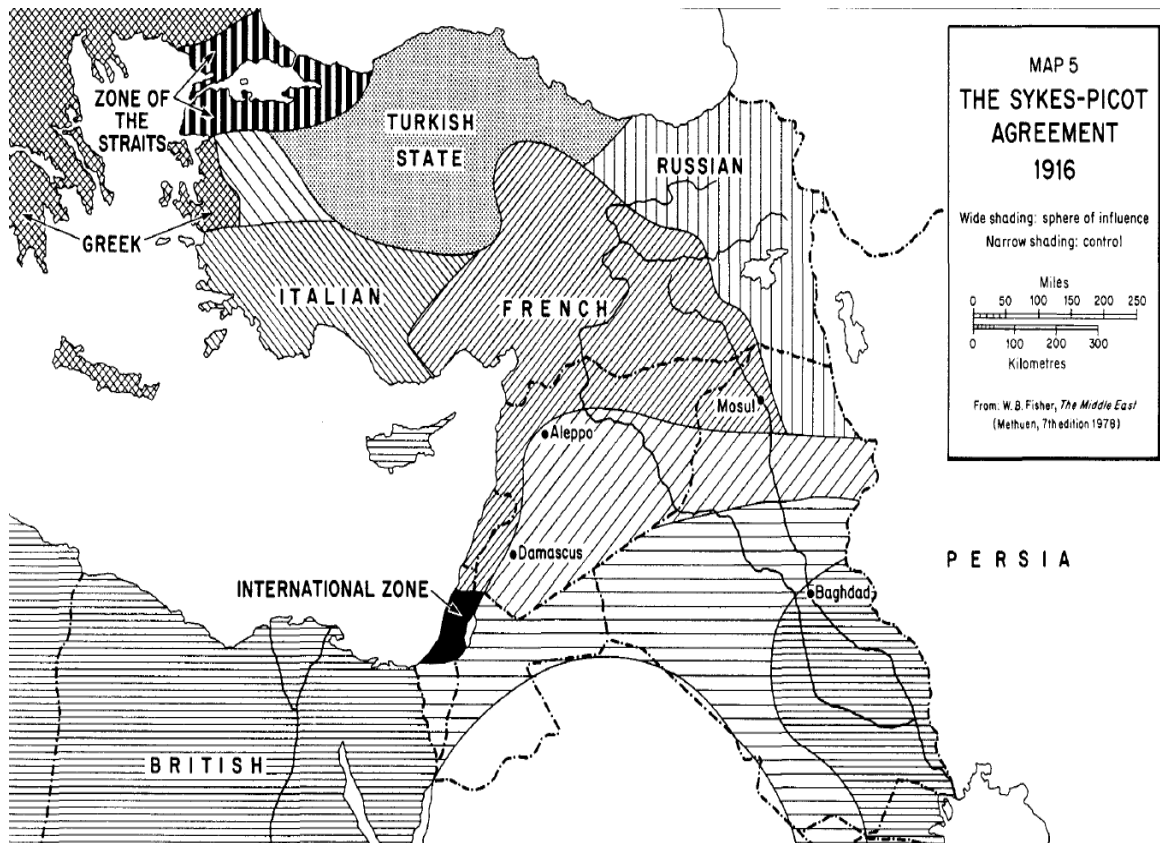
At most, this declaration fulfilled the alleged goals of the Western powers, including protecting minority rights in Mesopotamia and Armenia, and creating a buffer state between them.

However, arguments concerning Kurdish autonomy continued, especially following a rumor which stated that the French and the British planned to split up Kurdistan, a matter that had been settled between both countries in the Sykes-Picot Treaty, as Map 2.2. shows. Moreover, Damad Farid Pasha, a former Ottoman official, demanded the Kurdish tribes' support against Mustafa Kemal's forces in Eastern Anatolia and, in return, promised them autonomy. However, the Kurdish leaders refused to offer any help unless they received guarantees of protection from Britain if the plan failed.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ McDowall, David. p. 131.

¹⁵⁷ McDowall, David. p. 132.

Map 2.2. The Sykes-Picot Agreement 1916



Source: McDowall, Donald. p. 116.

Additionally, the Young Kurds, a group of Kurdish intellectuals in Istanbul, asked Sharif Pasha to join the Ottoman government, which pledged to offer the Kurds some local autonomy and the right to participate in the Turkish parliament. For many Kurds, this partnership was a better choice than dividing their regions into new non-Kurdish states. They believed that joining the Ottoman side would serve their interests more effectively than losing their identity and territory to unfamiliar states.¹⁵⁸

On the other hand, some leading Kurdish figures, such as Abd al-Qadir of the Istanbul Kurdish Club, supported the formation of a united Kurdistan that would ideally be protected by Britain. Although he strongly opposed any cooperation with the Armenians, he did not reject the creation of an autonomous Kurdish region that might be governed by Turkey.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ McDowall, David.

¹⁵⁹ McDowall, David.

In fact, the divisions among the Kurdish leaders constituted a major challenge for promoting Kurdish independence. These divisions became more intense following the revelation of Sharif Pasha's agreement with the Armenians in Paris, exacerbating Kurdish factionalism even more. Disagreements got worse as many Kurds, who had been hesitant about severing ties with Turkey, changed their stance and stopped their support completely. Also, many who advocated total autonomy felt that the Armenian plan offered limited autonomy for the Kurds. This situation forced Sharif Pasha to backtrack, accusing Armenia of claiming too much territory. Sharif Pasha laid out the Wilsonian right of self-determination for Kurdistan, emphasizing the importance of the Kurds having the authority to determine their future.¹⁶⁰

However, due to the disputes and divisions among Kurdish political leaders, Sharif Pasha resigned from his position as the Kurdish representative to the British ambassador during the Paris Peace talks. With his departure, the Kurds were left without representation in the British delegation by the end of the conference. This meant that the Kurdish future was left in the hands of the Great Powers, whose interests often did not match those of the Kurds.¹⁶¹

The Treaty of Sevres, which was signed in 1920, marked a turning point for the Kurdish Issue. Articles 62 and 64 of the treaty provided great hope for the establishment of an independent Kurdistan. Map 2.3. shows the boundaries of Kurdistan, as outlined in the Treaty of Sèvres.

Map 2.2.The Treaty of Sèvres

¹⁶⁰ McDowall, David. p. 133.

¹⁶¹ McDowall, David.



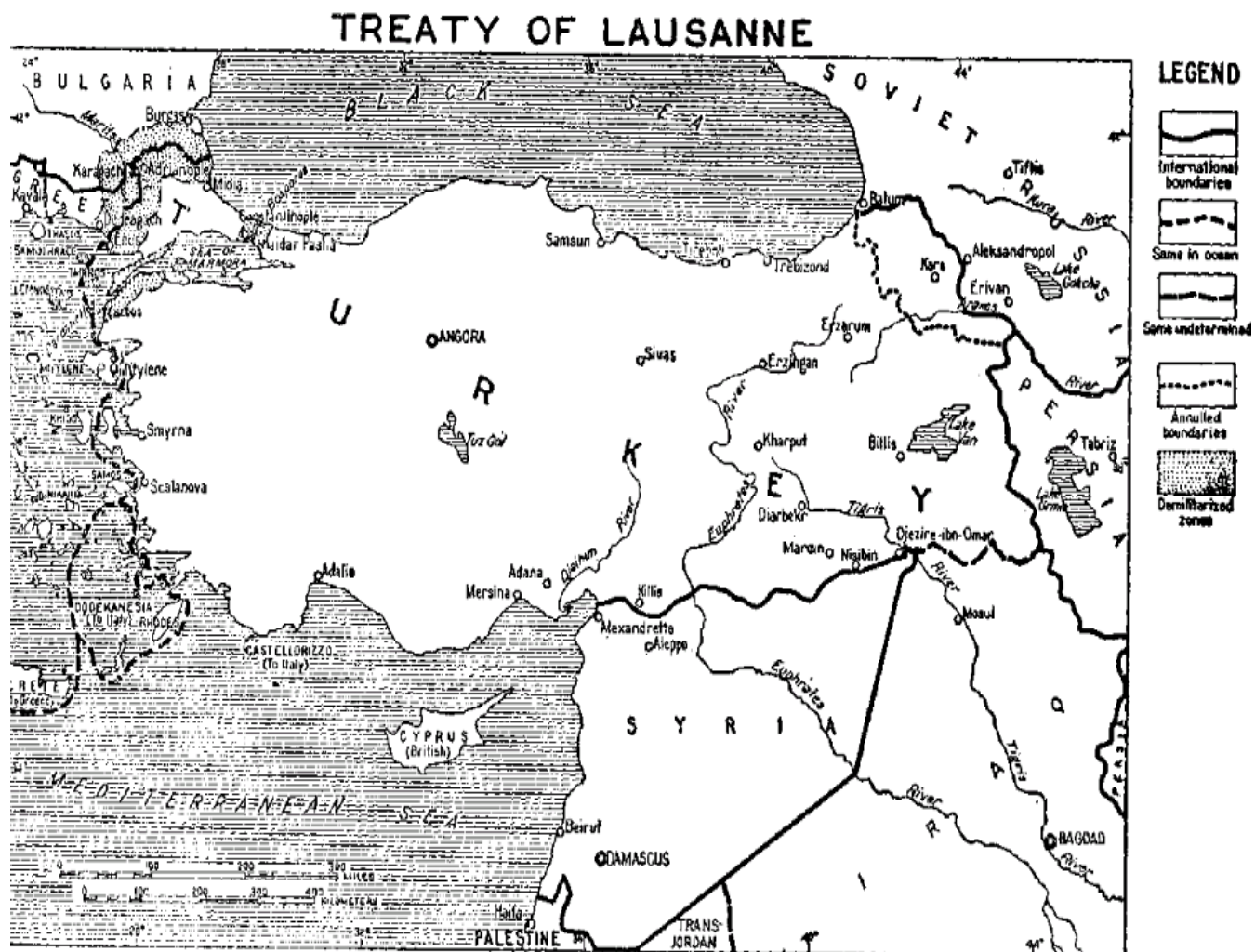
Source: The Treaty of Sèvres. wwi.lib.byu.edu/images/1/14/TreatyOfSevresMapOfTurkey.gif. Accessed 30 Aug. 2019.

However, the treaty needed to be amended because it was criticized for “methodically aiming at carving up the Turkish territories, and was profoundly unjust and humiliating for the Turkish people.”¹⁶² Thus, when Young Turks assumed power in Turkey in 1923, they asked to re-draw the boundaries set by the Treaty of Sèvres. This led to the creation of another agreement, known as the Treaty of Lausanne (see map N° 2.4.), where new boundaries were established, resulting in the exclusion of a Kurdish state. Consequently, the failure of the Kurds to form an independent state of their own in the

¹⁶² Chaliand, Gérard. p. 44.

aftermath of WWI led to the rise of Kurdish nationalist movements in the following decades.

Map 2.4. The Treaty of Lausanne



Source: The Treaty of Lausanne. www.hri.org/docs/lausanne/turkey.gif Accessed 02 Sept. 2019.

During their mandate in Iraq and Syria, colonial countries, namely Britain and Syria, had a significant impact on the Kurds, since these powers aimed to reshape the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. In Iraq, the British granted some autonomy to the Kurds, who were ruled by Kurdish leaders like Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji. However, Kurdish hope for full self-governance was not fulfilled, leading to sporadic tensions and uprisings.¹⁶³ In Syria, which was under the French mandate, the Kurds also enjoyed certain

¹⁶³ McDowall, David. pp. 156-160.

administrative autonomy, though there was some unrest. The policy of divide and rule fueled internal divisions among the Kurds, and this enabled the French to maintain control over vital territories and resources.¹⁶⁴ The Kurdish leaders struggled to achieve more autonomy within these states; however, colonial powers, driven by their own interests, prioritized stability and control over Kurdish demands for self-rule.

During the interwar years (1919-1939), many Kurdish uprisings took place in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. This demonstrates the growing nationalist feelings and desires for autonomy despite regional instability. In Turkey, Atatürk's policies of centralization and assimilation led to the outbreak of Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925, followed by other uprisings. Additionally, the Kurdish revolt led by Sheikh Ahmed Barzani in Iraq in 1930-1931, followed by other revolts in the 1940's revealed the Kurdish dissatisfaction with the Iraqi government, which failed to fulfill its pledges of autonomy. In Iran, the Kurds continued to challenge the state's authorities, leading to the establishment of the Republic of Mahabad in 1946. Indeed, these uprisings reflect the grievances over the cultural marginalization and oppression experienced by the Kurdish people.

In fact, the Kurdish aspirations faced more challenges during the Cold War, as external powers like the United States and the Soviet Union tried to influence the Kurdish political parties. The Cold War conflicts, which intertwined with the Kurdish struggle for autonomy, fueled internal differences among the Kurds, resulting in strong rivalry and armed conflict among the Kurdish communities. Meanwhile, attempts were made to unify the Kurds across national borders; some political entities emerged as active participants in the pan-Kurdish movement. For instance, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which was founded by Abdullah Ocalan in 1978, initially sought Kurdish independence from Turkey and the creation of Greater Kurdistan, but later changed its stance to support Kurdish political and cultural rights within the Turkish state.¹⁶⁵

Despite several challenges, such as internal divisions and state repression, the Kurdish fight for identity continued over time, sharing a common language, cultural traditions and a persistent struggle for autonomy. The creation of Kurdistan Regional

¹⁶⁴ McDowall, David. p. 468.

¹⁶⁵ Gunter, Michael. "An Historical Overview to the Kurdish Problem." *The Copernicus Journal of Political Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2013, pp. 159-182.

Government (KGR) in Iraq in 1991 marked a significant turning point in the history of the Kurdish issue, though it emerged in a fragile geopolitical climate influenced by foreign interference in a volatile region. Human rights violations, rival regional and global interests, and regional stability appeared as major obstacles for Kurdish nationalism during this period. Despite these obstacles, Kurdish aspirations for self-determination persisted, demonstrating the Kurds' ongoing fight for liberty and statehood within the Middle East and beyond.

During the 1990s, the Kurdish issue underwent significant developments and changes. The establishment of a no-fly zone over Iraq and the creation of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in 1991 marked a crucial turning point in the history of the Kurds. Despite this significant achievement, internal conflicts continued between the Kurdish leadership, leading to a civil war that lasted four years (1994-1998) and caused instability in northern Iraq. In Turkey, the decade was marked by intensified escalation in the Kurdish insurgency led by the PKK, which faced violent military repression by the Turkish forces, resulting in thousands of casualties in southern Turkey. However, Iran and Syria did not witness major rebellions during this period, though marginalization and repression of the Kurdish people continued.¹⁶⁶

Furthermore, the first decade of the twenty-first century was very important for the evolution of the Kurdish question, especially in Iraq and Turkey. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003, which resulted in the fall of Saddam's regime, contributed greatly to the empowerment of the Kurds in Iraq. The 2005 Iraqi Constitution officially recognized the Kurdistan Regional Government as an autonomous region within the new federal state. Despite many disputes with Baghdad, the KRG managed to achieve political and social success, which enabled the Kurdish leaders to establish strategic alliances with both regional and external powers.¹⁶⁷ In Turkey, the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) to power helped ease tensions between the Turkish government and its Kurdish population, culminated in peace talks which were introduced in 2009, with the aim of finding appropriate solutions for the Turkish-Kurdish conflict.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Gunter, Michael M. "The Kurdish Question in Perspective." *World Affairs*, vol. 166, no. 4, 2004, pp. 197-205.

¹⁶⁷ Efeğil, Ertan. "Analysis of the AKP Government's Policy toward the Kurdish Issue." *Turkish Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2011, pp. 27-40. Doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2011.563938.

¹⁶⁸ Natali, Denise. "The Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Stabilized or Spoiler?" *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2013, pp. 71-79.

2.4. Kurdish Nationalism: Ethnic vs. Civic Nationalism

Kurdish nationalism is a complex combination of two aspects, namely ethnic and civic factors, which implies the merging of the form of historical memory of the shared descendants of the Kurds, as well as the modern political aspirations that equipped them with democratic principles and structures. According to ethnic nationalists, the collective identity they have formed is created based on the common ancestor, the cultural heritage that they share and also their common language. The Kurds consider themselves to be the descendant of the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia and the creators of their very unique language, Kurdish, which constitutes the core of their ethnic identity. Ethnic nationalism of this type represents the beauties of culture and the history of their continuance throughout Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and the world. The focus on such ethnic nationalism often stimulates mythological narratives and historical figures like Salah ad-Din (Saladin), the Kurdish national hero who, in a way, symbolizes the resistance of the Kurds against outside pressures. As the cultural symbols of the tribes unite them into one and make them more harmonious, they can demonstrate their uniqueness in comparison to the other Middle Eastern minority actors.¹⁶⁹

On the other hand, civic nationalism is the other side of the Kurdish nationalism that rests on shared political values and democratic principles as the basic elements for the collective identity and the political action. The foundation of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq in the early 1990s illustrates the efforts of the Kurds to promote democratization and civic engagement among the different groups. Civic nationalism is an approach that emphasizes citizenship rights, the rule of law, and governance systems that are accountable to the authority in Kurdish areas and that are based on the unity of the Kurdish people. This strategy, therefore, seeks to enhance a Kurdish identity that is built on democratic participation and a set of political ideals, aiming to consolidate both internal cohesion and international recognition of Kurdish aspirations.¹⁷⁰

The relationship between ethnic and civic nationalism reveals a complex interplay where these dimensions both complement and occasionally clash with one another. Ethnic

¹⁶⁹ Jabar, Faleh A., and Dawood Hosham. *The Kurds: Nationalism and Politics*. Saqi Books, 2007. p. 132.

¹⁷⁰ Jabar, Faleh A., and Hosham Dawood. p. 215.

nationalism emphasizes the cultural distinctiveness and historical continuity of the Kurds, while civic nationalism offers a framework for political organization, institutional development, and international engagement. Kurdish political movements frequently navigate these two aspects to garner support for autonomy or independence, leveraging both cultural identity and political principles to advance their goals on both regional and global stages.

In fact, Kurdish ethnic nationalism faced many challenges in terms of internal cohesion, especially when integrating different ethnic and religious communities within the Kurdish regions. Efforts to defend and preserve linguistic and cultural rights led sometimes to the marginalization of other minority groups such as Assyrians, Turkmen, Arabs, and Yazidis, further complicating attempts to promote social and political cohesion. In contrast, civic nationalism advocates pluralism and minority rights, aiming of aligning ethnic diversity with democratic principles in Kurdish political aspirations.¹⁷¹

The development of the Kurdish national movement saw a balance between the ethnic and the civic aspects which, on their part, were affected by both regional and international changes. The Kurds, when confronted by internal oppression and external ignorance, used mostly their ethnic nationalism in the struggle against discriminatory assimilation policies. In the meantime, civic nationalism was a good tool for the democratization and international diplomacy periods, when Kurdish leaders sought international recognition and support.¹⁷²

Therefore, the effects of the Kurdish nationalism on regional stability and conflict resolution reveal the need to balance ethnic and civic goals within a framework of peace and political stability. Combining cultural recognition with democratic governance can help ease tensions among the Kurdish communities, promote inclusive citizenship, and support long-lasting peace in Kurdish regions affected by historical grievances and regional conflicts. Moreover, international support for Kurdish self-determination and minority rights is crucial for addressing and advancing Kurdish aspirations for autonomy and human rights.

2.5. The Geopolitical Significance of the Kurdish Regions

¹⁷¹ Jabar, Faleh A., and Hosham Dawood. p. 218.

¹⁷² Jabar, Faleh A., and Hosham Dawood. p. 221.

The position of the Kurdish regions, which are situated in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, is of utmost importance in the geopolitics of the Middle East regarding their strategic location, abundant natural resources, and the web of regional and international interests. These regions have been historically important due to their location at the crossroads of the major empires and trade routes. Tribes ruled over and left traces of their dominance in the past, and the inhabitants of these areas saw great empires' rise and fall, such as the Assyrians, Persians, and Ottomans. Precisely, the control over such areas allowed the transportation of goods and acted as a barrier against external aggression. In particular, their locations relative to the major states of the Middle East made them of paramount importance to the safety and integrity of the regional powers' borders.¹⁷³

Economically, oil and gas are crucial resources for both regional and global energy markets. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) controls one of Iraq's most productive oil fields, which gives it a significant role in the global energy supply chain. The KRG's ability to influence the oil market is substantial, as its control over these resources can impact global oil prices and energy security by integrating Kurdistan's oil exports into the worldwide market.¹⁷⁴

Furthermore, the Kurdish issue is crucial politically to the security and territorial unity of many Middle Eastern states. Autonomy and independence of the Kurds in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria present serious challenges for the unity of these countries. However, the various policies adopted by these states towards their Kurdish citizens illustrate the difficulties of managing ethnic diversity within states' borders. These policies also facilitate the involvement of external powers, like the United States and the Western countries, to pursue their interests in the region.¹⁷⁵

In Turkey, the Kurdish issue has posed a major challenge both domestically and internationally. The conflict between Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has had a negative impact on the internal stability of Turkey and its relations with the neighboring and global allies. Southeastern Turkey, which is mostly inhabited by the Kurds, is very important due to its proximity to the unstable borders with Iraq and Syria.

¹⁷³ Jwaideh, Wadie. *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development*. Syracuse University Press, 2006. p. 268.

¹⁷⁴ Ahmad, Paiman R. "The Politics of Oil in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq." *AARMS*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2018, pp. 5-18.

¹⁷⁵ Jwaideh, Wadie. p. 274.

Instability in this area could spread into regional conflicts, making the Kurdish issue a significant national security objective for Turkey.¹⁷⁶

The Kurdish areas in Iraq gained a limited degree of autonomy as the Gulf War ended and no-fly zones were established. The formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government made Iraqi Kurdistan a semi-independent region with its own government, military and socio-economic policies. This autonomy had significant consequences for Iraq's unity and the internal balance of power. The KRG's ability to make oil deals on its own reveals the economic power that it holds and its significant influence on Iraq's politics and economy.¹⁷⁷

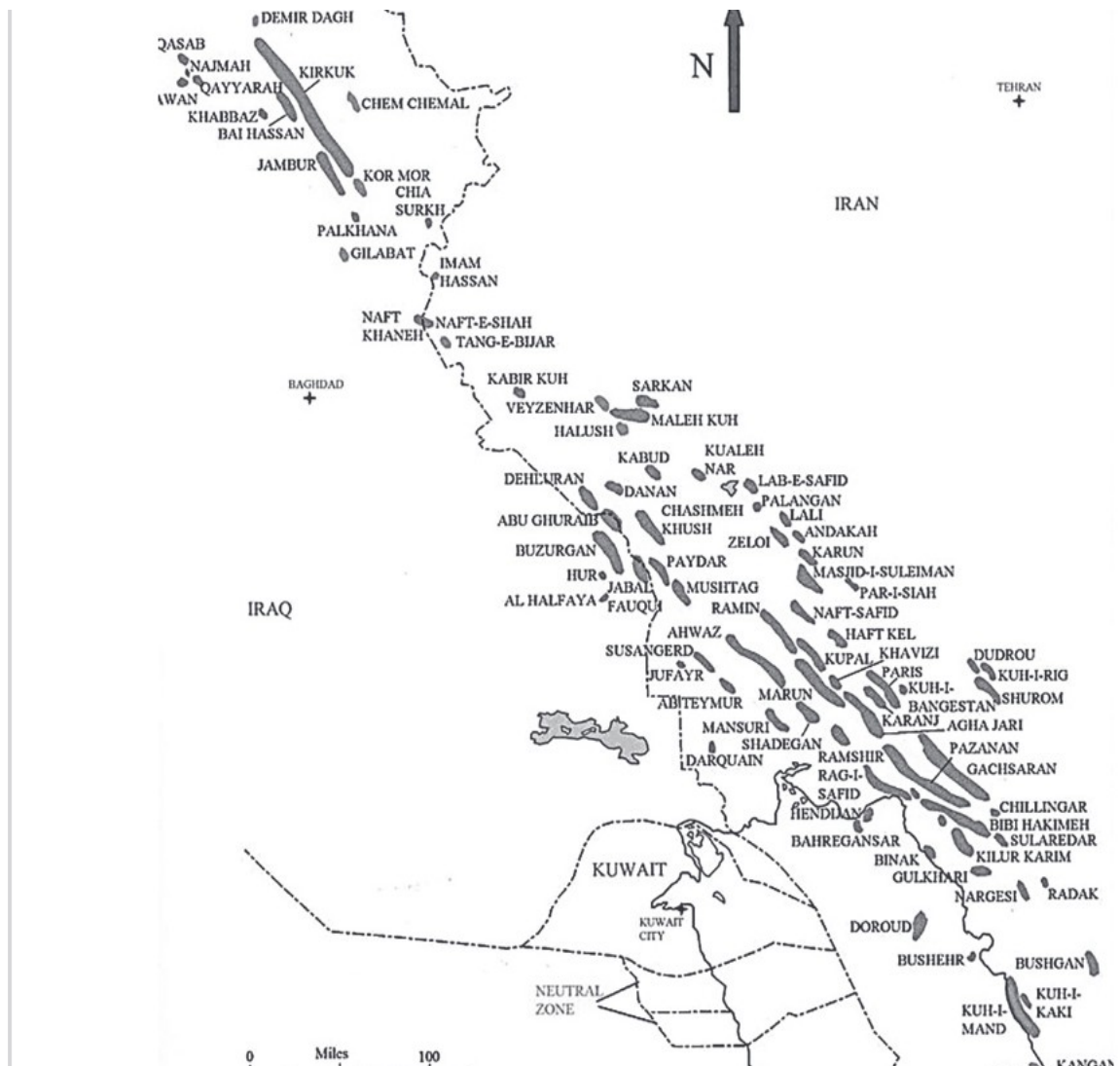
In Iran, the Kurdish regions are important because they are situated in the borders with Iraq and Turkey, which makes the region very significant for the countries' security. The Iranian Kurds, who were influenced by the national movements in the neighboring Kurdish regions, sought cultural and political rights, but they faced discrimination and persecution over decades. The Kurdish regions in Iran are crucial for internal stability, as tensions with Kurdish separatist groups could cause disruptions.¹⁷⁸ Economically, these areas are rich in natural resources, including oil, gas, and fertile land, which are important for Iran's economy, especially in the oil-rich provinces of Kermanshah and Ilam, as shown in the following map:

Map 2.5. Iran Oil Fields

¹⁷⁶ Natali, Denise. *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran*. Syracuse University Press, 2005. p. 91.

¹⁷⁷ Natali, Denise. p. 116.

¹⁷⁸ Natali, Denise. p. 129.



Source: Ahmad, Paiman R. p. 13.

Moreover, Syria's Kurdish regions significantly impacted the country's internal affairs and the broader regional geopolitics. Geographically, these areas are located in the northeast, along the borders with Turkey and Iraq. This position enabled the Kurdish regions to be a vital player for the stability and the safety of the Syrian borders. Additionally, these areas are known for their agricultural output and energy potentials. For example, the fertile lands of Al-Hasakah are important for Syria's breadbasket and make a significant contribution to the nation's agriculture. Furthermore, the oil fields which are located in the Kurdish areas increased the economic importance of these areas, despite being strictly controlled by the Syrian government.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ Natali, Denise. p. 141.

The Kurdish demand for autonomy and the resulting changes in regional and international politics have had broader implications for the principles of international law and practice. The Kurdish question was a focal point for various issues of self-determination, rights of ethnic minorities, and the basic principles of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states. Indeed, how the world handles the Kurdish case might set examples for other groups seeking their own state. The international community's response to the Kurdish aspirations is critical for unifying standards for dealing with ethnic minority issues in resolving regional and territorial disputes.¹⁸⁰

Global powers, such as the United States, often engage with the Kurds depending on their own strategic interests. The Americans perceived the Kurdish people, particularly in Iraq, as a valuable ally, especially after being key participants in the US war on Iraq in 2003. Consequently, supporting the Iraqi Kurds served several American objectives, including addressing regional security challenges and limiting Iran's influence. Indeed, the US engagement with the Kurdish groups reflects its pragmatic approach aimed at advancing its broader interests in the Middle East.¹⁸¹

In fact, the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East have also contributed to amplify the geopolitical importance of the Kurdish regions. Events and developments that took place in the Kurdish areas have affected not only the local region but also the neighboring countries and beyond. This requires a coordinated approach from both regional and international powers to deal with the complexities of the Kurdish question, as its impact on regional stability has made it a focal point for strategic considerations of both regional and global actors.¹⁸²

2.6. Kurdish Nationalism: Challenges and Obstacles

Scholars and researchers have not determined a specific period of Kurdish nationalism. However, most of the studies in the field agreed that the geopolitical changes

¹⁸⁰ Jwaideh, Wadie. p. 182.

¹⁸¹ Gurses, Mehmet, et al. *The Kurds in the Middle East: Enduring Problems and New Dynamics*. Lexington Books, 2020. p. 203.

¹⁸² Gurses, Mehmet, et al. p. 261.

in the aftermath of the First World War and the creation of nation-states resulted in sparking a sense of national awareness among the Kurdish people, who found themselves divided across the newly established states, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. According to Vali, the origins of Kurdish nationalism “are dependent on the relationship of the self and other with the emergent Turkish, Persian, and Arab identities in the early decades of present centuries.”¹⁸³

Under the Ottoman rule, Kurdish revolts occurred in the form of resistance against the central authority. They were not ethnic national in nature, as the Kurds did not see themselves different from other ethnic groups within the empire. Several rebellions erupted, including those of the Baban (1806-8), Badr Khan (1843-47), Mir Muhammad (1883-6) against the Turks. However, these were revolts of traditional leaders who were dissatisfied with the growing encroachments on their autonomous regions. Thus, Kurdish nationalism did not really emerge until after World War I.¹⁸⁴

In the post-war period, following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Kurds were offered a significant opportunity to establish their own state, encouraged especially by Wilson’s Fourteen Points. However, this chance was diminished following the partition of Kurdistan among the new nation-states. As a reaction, many Kurdish revolts erupted against the central governments which attempted to impose their conditions on the Kurds. David Romano wrote that “if people come to feel that they suffer repression due to ethnic or religious discrimination, they often come to identify more strongly with their ascribed ethnicities, using such identities as tools of resistance and community mobilization.”¹⁸⁵ This was the case for Kurdish people. As they started to feel that their nationalist identity was threatened by the new states, they reacted with resistance.

In Turkey, Sheikh Said launched the first revolt in 1925, which was immediately crushed by the Turkish army. Other uprisings, such as the Khoyboun revolt in 1932 and the Dersim rebellion in 1937, were also put down by the Turkish authorities. Many researchers, including Kaya, believe that the policies of assimilation, forced displacement and repression practiced by the states where the Kurds reside contributed to the rise of

¹⁸³ Vali, Abbas. *Essays on the Origin of Kurdish Nationalism*. Mazda Publication Inc., 2003. p. 104.

¹⁸⁴ Kaya, Zeynep N. *Maps into Nations: Kurdistan, Kurdish Nationalism and International Society*. 2012, The London School of Economics and Political Science, PhD dissertation. p. 120.

¹⁸⁵ Romano, David. *The Kurds and EU Enlargement: in Search of Restraints on State Power*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013. p. 197.

Kurdish nationalism.¹⁸⁶ Centralization policies in Turkey aggressively attempted to assimilate the Kurds through many laws, including the Settlement Law of 1934, which evacuated Kurdish speaking areas to Western Anatolia. Consequently, several efforts for uprisings emerged, leading to further crackdowns by the Turkish government.

In the 1950s, migration from rural to urban areas allowed many Kurds to enter skilled professions, resulting in an increase in the numbers of Kurdish mechanics, printers, electricians, lawyers, doctors, and journalists.¹⁸⁷ This situation, indeed, enabled the Kurds to participate in different fields, particularly in Politics. Moreover, the situation of the Turkish Kurds started to improve by the 1960s, as the 1960 constitution granted them more cultural freedom. However, constitutional changes in 1967 and 1980 severed the situation again, as the government ordered to rename cities and streets from Kurdish to Turkish language and banned all publications which mentioned the Kurds. In this context, Gocek wrote, “This violent suppression was accompanied by the disappearance of the word ‘Kurd’ from the lexicon, the ban of the Kurdish language... and the denial of the right of parents to give Kurdish names to their children.”¹⁸⁸ This persecution; however, did not succeed in erasing the Kurdish identity; rather, it contributed to intensify the ethnic tensions within Turkey.

While Turkish Kurds faced oppression for linguistic and cultural rights, Kurds of Iraq and Iran were persecuted due to political reasons. In Iraq, several national rebellions emerged, such as Shaykh Mahmud revolt in 1922 and Shaykh Ahmad revolt in 1927. These uprisings were unsuccessful because of Kurdish disunity and tribal conflicts. Later, the rise of Arab nationalism and the centralization of the Iraqi structures and economy further fueled the Kurdish national movements, which were met with brutal repression.¹⁸⁹ In Iran, the first major rebellion, known as Simko’s revolt, occurred from 1920 to 1924. However, researchers, such as Edmund Ghareeb, believe that the Iranian Kurdish nationalism started with the establishment of the Republic of Mahabad in 1946. Following the British and Soviet occupation of Iran in 1940, the Iranian Kurds took the opportunity to create their own independent state, the Republic of Mahabad. However, that Soviets-

¹⁸⁶ Kaya, Zeynep N. p. 18.

¹⁸⁷ Romano, David. p. 135.

¹⁸⁸ Goçek, Fatma M. “Through a Glass Darkly: Consequences of a Politicized Past in Contemporary Turkey.” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 617, 2008, pp. 88-106.

¹⁸⁹ Ghareeb, Edmund. *The Kurdish Question in Iraq*. Syracuse University Press, 1981. p. 12.

backed republic did not last long; when Moscow withdrew its support in exchange for oil concessions from Iran, the republic was violently put down by the Iranian army, ending the Iranian Kurds' hope for independence.¹⁹⁰

Syria, which was under the French mandate, managed to weaken the Kurds' position by dividing Syrian Kurdistan into smaller regions surrounded by Arabs. Up till the independence of Syria in 1946, Arab-Kurdish relations were generally friendly; however, tensions increased when Syria adopted a pan-Arabist ideology, which did not recognize non-Arab minorities in the country. Due to this new ideology, Syrian Kurds started to face marginalization and discrimination, but there was little effort to resist the government's unfair policies.¹⁹¹

In fact, the Kurds faced several challenges during their fight for autonomy. Political and linguistic differences increased disunity among them, and their split across four separate states fueled Kurdish cultural and linguistic divisions. Moreover, the geographical position, tribalism and the poor transportation networks also contributed to the isolation of the Kurdish people, leading to the development of different dialects and traditions within each region. This fragmentation, in fact, weakened the structural unity of the Kurds, posing a major obstacle for the spread of Kurdish nationalism.¹⁹² Another factor that hindered the growth of Kurdish national awareness was illiteracy. Though the first Kurdish newspaper, *Kurdistan*, was published in Cairo in 1898, its impact on the Kurdish communities was limited. Although it played a crucial role in enhancing national awakening among the literati, this educated class was very small and did not constitute a large reading public.¹⁹³

Additionally, internal political conflicts among the Kurds greatly hampered their unity and the development of the Kurdish nationalist movements. In Iraq, for instance, the rivalry between Kurdish leaders Mustafa Barzani and Jalal Talabani during their uprisings against the Iraqi government weakened their cause. Moreover, in 1992, both leaders helped Turkey attack Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of Kurdistan Workers Party, who was attacking Turkey from Iraqi Kurdish territories. Ocalan accused Barzani and Talabani of

¹⁹⁰ Ghareeb, Edmund. p. 18.

¹⁹¹ Ghareeb, Edmund. p. 32.

¹⁹² Romano, David. p. 194.

¹⁹³ Romano, David. p. 132.

“trying to stab the PKK in the back by cooperating with Turkey” and declared that “these two leaders are now our enemies.”¹⁹⁴ Thus, instead of uniting the Kurds, given the fact that their cause and their goal were similar in all four countries, political infighting led to disunity, which harmed the Kurdish nationalist movements. Kurdish conflicts during the following years further deteriorated the situation, revealing that divide and rule tactics succeeded in obstructing the Kurdish unity and weakening the Kurdish cause both internally and on the international stage.

2.7. International Laws and the Kurds: Self-Determination and Minorities' Rights

The concept of self-determination goes back to the American Revolution and the Declaration of Independence. Thomas Jefferson was influenced by John Locke's political philosophy, which advocated that “just political societies are based on consent of the people, who then agree to comply with the majority.”¹⁹⁵ In fact, Jefferson's adoption of this philosophy led to the emergence of the principle of self-determination, as articulated in the Declaration of Independence:

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the Powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.¹⁹⁶

Then, the French Revolution (1789-1799) also enhanced this principle by limiting the absolute power of the monarchy and replacing the Divine Right of Kings with the divine right of people. The revolution also advocated that “a people had the right to form its own constitution and choose its own government ... it had the right to decide whether to attach itself to one state or another, or constitute an independent state by itself.”¹⁹⁷ Additionally, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 marked a turning point in the history of

¹⁹⁴ Gunter, Michael. “Kurdish Disunity in Historical Perspective.” *Seton Hall Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations*, vol. 19, 2018, pp. 26-45.

¹⁹⁵ Grover, William, and Joseph Peschek. *Voices of Dissent*. Harper Collins College Publishers, 1993. p. 285.

¹⁹⁶ “Declaration of Independence: A Transcription.” National Archives. www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript. Accessed 12 Mar. 2021.

¹⁹⁷ Cobban, Alfred. *National Self-Determination*. University of Chicago Press, 1994. p. 5

the Russian Empire regarding the right to self-determination. Vladimir Lenin called for the right of each subject nation of the empire to choose whether to separate from or remain unified with the Russian people.¹⁹⁸ As a result, a new era started in the Soviet political ideology, where the principle of self-determination became a recognized right. In this context, Lenin stated:

Consequently, if we want to learn the meaning of self-determination of nations not by juggling with legal definitions, or "inventing" abstract definitions, but by examining the historical and economic conditions of the national movements. We shall inevitably reach the conclusion that self-determination of nations means the political separation of these nations from alien bodies, the formation of an independent national state.¹⁹⁹

In the aftermath of World War I, the principle of self-determination was introduced by the US President Woodrow Wilson, who is considered as the father of modern self-determination. He proclaimed that “every people has the right to choose the sovereignty under which they shall live.”²⁰⁰ In fact, Wilson’s support for self-determination was rooted in the American ideal of democracy and was seen as a foreign extension of American norms of political justice. Since then, the principle has been recognized as a universal right and has evolved and interpreted according to different circumstances over time. However, the right to self-determination was not yet explicitly included in the constitution of the League of Nations. It was not until the post-World War II period that the principle gained real traction, as it was included in the Charter of 1945. Since then, the right to self-determination has been guaranteed by several international treaties, including the UN Charter, the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Article I of ICCPR and ICESCR states that “all people have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development.”²⁰¹ Moreover, Resolution 1514 (XV) of the UN General

¹⁹⁸ Page, Stanley W. “Lenin and Self-Determination.” *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 28, no. 71, 1950, pp. 342-358.

¹⁹⁹ Page, Stanley W.

²⁰⁰ Yildiz, Kerim, and Susan Breau. *Kurdish Conflict: International Humanitarian Law and Post-Conflict Mechanisms*. Routledge, 2010. p. 200.

²⁰¹ “International Covenant on Economics, Social and Cultural Rights.” www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights. Accessed 26 Mar. 2021.

Assembly stipulates that “Subjugation of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a violation of the principles [of equal rights and self-determination of peoples], as well as a denial of fundamental human rights, and is contrary to the Charter of the United Nations.”²⁰² However, none of these treaties has detailed the process for applying the right of self-determination or how decisions should be made. Thus, researchers have attempted to define the principle according to different interpretations.

The right to self-determination is one of the most important principles of international law. It ensures the right of people to freely determine their own destiny. However, it is not absolute that everyone is entitled to self-determination, as there are no precise definitions of the terms related to the principle. When President Wilson introduced the notion of self-determination to the League of Nations in 1919, he described it as “the right of every people to choose the sovereign under which they live, to be free of alien masters, and not to be handed about from sovereign to sovereign as if they were property.”²⁰³ Thus, as the term has been vaguely described, its implementation has become a complex question, especially regarding which groups can be entitled to enjoy this right. Brown argued that the term people has been intentionally left undetermined in international law, because applying it to all potential groups could destabilize countries and lead to the emergence of security issues.²⁰⁴

In order to understand the right to self-determination, it should be viewed from two aspects: internal and external. Internal self-determination includes the right of people within a state to choose their political status. It is determined by international law as “a people’s pursuit of its political, economic, social, and cultural development within the framework of an existing state.”²⁰⁵ This right can only be exercised within the state’s integrity. Thus, three basic ideas constitute the core of the right to self-determination from the internal aspect: there must be a group; this group must be concerned about its political status; and the group must be able to exercise its own choice regarding its political future.

²⁰² “Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.” www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-granting-independence-colonial-countries-and-peoples. Accessed 26 Mar. 2021.

²⁰³ Cass, Deborah Z. “Rethinking Self-Determination: A Critical Analysis of Current International Law Theories.” *Syracuse Journal of International Law and Commerce*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1992, pp. 21-40.

²⁰⁴ Brown, Bartram. “Human Rights, Sovereignty, and the Final Status of Kosovo.” *Chicago-Kent Law Review*, vol. 235, 2005, pp. 235-272.

²⁰⁵ Verbergaite, Leva. “Self-Determination of the Kurdish People: Undermining the Unity of the ‘Turkish Nation’ ?” *IFF Working Paper Online*, no. 9, June 2015. folia.unifr.ch/unifr/documents/324075.

Researchers like Hannum believe that the internal aspect of self-determination is similar to democracy.²⁰⁶ Internal self-determination can take various forms, including autonomy within state, federal arrangements, or other constitutional arrangements for the people concerned. On the other hand, external self-determination refers to “people’s decision to establish independent and sovereign state, to create free association within an independent state, or to integrate with an existing independent state.”²⁰⁷ It is “the right to decide on the political status for people and its place in the international community in relation to other states, including the right to secede from the existing state of which the group concerned is a part, and to set up a new independent state.”²⁰⁸ However, this type of self-determination was applied to the colonized people. There is no consensus whether this right could be granted to other groups, because doing so could lead to the separation from a state and the disintegration of its territory.

Following World War II, the right to self-determination was addressed only to the colonized people. However, the international covenants mentioned “all people” with no exception, which means that this right could also be granted to those who live within independent states. This ambiguity led to the rise of an important question: who has the right to self-determination? In order to answer this, researchers have attempted to define other related terms. They agree that the terms “people” and “minority” must be defined to determine who can enjoy self-determination. However, the term “people” does not have a precise definition, since the international law has not provided any clear criteria to define it. Thus, researchers have defined the term according to two different approaches: the territorial approach and the characteristics approach. The territorial approach links people to a specific territory, focusing on individuals within a determined area; therefore, “a people” means one territory or one state with one people. This approach was, indeed, more useful during the era of colonization. In Africa, for instance, the colonized countries were multinational; thus, applying the right to self-determination was based on territorial grounds.²⁰⁹ Moreover, secession is not recognized under this approach since only one

²⁰⁶ Hannun, Hurst. *Autonomy, Sovereignty, and Self-Determination: the Accommodation of Conflicting Rights*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996. p. 30.

²⁰⁷ Verbergaite, Leva.

²⁰⁸ Al-Mazory, Arsalan. *Towards a New Understanding of the Right of Self-Determination in the Post-Colonial Context: the Case of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region*. 2015, Bangor University, PhD dissertation. p. 56.

²⁰⁹ Gardi, Rez. “From Suppression to Secession: Kurds, Human Rights and the Right to Self-Determination in Turkey.” *ILSA Journal of International & Comparative Law*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2017, pp. 62-108.

people can exist in one territory. In this context, Murswiek set some criteria that individuals must share in order to be qualified as peoples. They must live in a specific territory where they constitute the majority; they must be able to speak their own language, have their own culture and traditions and practice their particular religion.²¹⁰ However, defining people according to these criteria might create serious threats, as Adams argued, “to grant the right of self-determination exclusively to those who have a distinct ethnic, religious, or cultural background actually increases the danger of ethnic or religious cleansing.”²¹¹ Thus, if groups who are linguistically and culturally distinct have the right to self-determination, governments might try to erase these differences to unify individuals under one society. In fact, the case of the Kurds illustrates Adam’s view, as the countries where the Kurds live have attempted to blur the Kurdish identity, fearing claims of self-determination.

In contrast, the characteristics approach does not consider the territorial factor. Instead, it focuses on the shared features of a group of individuals, which means that different peoples can exist within one territory. This approach identifies peoples in terms of ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic differences. At a UNESCO meeting in 1989 on further study of the concept of the rights of peoples, experts provided another definition for the term “people”, concluding that the common features of people include shared history and traditions, ethnic identity, linguistic and cultural unity, religious affiliation, and territorial and economic connections.²¹²

Additionally, the concept “people” can be defined in terms of subjective and objective aspects. The subjective approach relies on whether a group of individuals sees itself as a people. Aureliu Cristescu, a special reporter to the UN on rights of peoples to self-determination, stated that “the fact is that whenever in the course of history a people have become aware of being a people, all definitions have proved superfluous.”²¹³ On the other hand, the objective approach focuses on ethnicity, territory, history, language, culture, and traditions, which means that individuals can only be deemed as a people if

²¹⁰ Murswiek, Dietrich. *The Issue of a Right to Secession*. Brill, 1993. p. 27.

²¹¹ Clark, Paul A. “Taking Self-Determination Seriously: When can Cultural and Political Minorities Control their own Fate?” *Chicago Journal of International Law*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2005, pp. 737-751.

²¹² Gradi, Rez.

²¹³ Cristescu, Aureliu. *The Right to Self-Determination: Historical and Current Development on the Basis of United Nations Instruments*. United Nations Publication, 1981. p. 40.

they settle in a particular area, and share common historical, cultural, and linguistic features.²¹⁴ Applying these conditions on the Kurds demonstrates that they can qualify as a people. They consider themselves as a distinct people, they live in an area known as Kurdistan, they speak their own Kurdish language, and most of them are Sunni Muslims who share their own cultural traditions, such as Newroz. Therefore, it is clear that the Kurds have all the qualifications to be considered as a people, and this supports their right to self-determination.

Yet, another question arises: do minorities have the right to self-determination? The term “minority” is also not clearly defined in international law. It emerged in the aftermath of World War I, following the creation of new nation-states. White argued that “the nation-state form creates the objective conditions in which people begin to consider themselves as majorities and minorities.”²¹⁵ Therefore, when dealing with minority issues, the prevailing definition of the term is that of Francesco Capotorti, the former UN Special Reporter of the Sub-commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, who described a minority as:

A group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a state, in a non-dominant position, whose members -being nationals of the State- possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language.²¹⁶

Researchers believe that there have been two different periods that determine minorities’ right to self-determination. The first period started after World War I, when US President Woodrow Wilson proposed that ethnic minorities could be free from alien subjection, domination, and exploitation. In the meanwhile, the League of Nations emerged as a tool to protect minorities’ rights through several treaties such as the Treaty of Versailles. However, the Wilsonian notion of minorities’ right to self-determination failed because the principle could not obtain a legal status.²¹⁷ The second period emerged

²¹⁴ Cristescu, Aureliu. p. 41.

²¹⁵ White, Benjamin T. *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria*. Edinburgh University Press, 2011. p. 22.

²¹⁶ Rebegea, Corina. “Minority Rights in World Politics: Group or Individual Rights?” *The IAPSS Journal of Political Science*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2008, pp. 75-85.

²¹⁷ Rebegea, Corina.

following World War II, when the right to self-determination was limited to cases of decolonization, which means that only colonized people living in the same territory could demand self-determination, excluding minorities and ethnic groups from this right. Instead, they could enjoy certain minority rights which were determined by Article 27 of the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).²¹⁸

However, the international law does not clearly specify which group of minorities can claim self-determination. Paragraph 7 of the Principle of Self-Determination in General Assembly Resolution 2625 states that “the full right of self-determination takes precedence if the government does not represent the whole people belonging to the territory without distinction as to race, creed or color”²¹⁹ which means that international law provides the right to self-determination to people who suffer from discrimination and oppression by the government. Buchanan wrote that secession must be “a remedy of last resort for persistent and grave injustices, understood as violations of basic human rights.”²²⁰ Thus, self-determination becomes the only solution if peoples’ identities, including their culture, religion and language, are threatened, or if it is proved that a group of people faces segregation and suppression.

In order to understand the Kurdish case, it is necessary to examine the situation of the Kurds across the four states they inhabit in order to determine whether they meet the conditions for self-determination. In Turkey, the Kurds have faced suppression since 1923. They were not recognized as a distinct people but as mountain Turks and were deprived of their cultural and linguistic rights. Moreover, the policies of assimilation led to forced displacements and resettlements. The Kurdish language was banned in both public and private domains, and all publications and TV programs in Kurdish were prohibited until 2004, when broadcasting in Kurdish was allowed, though with restrictions. The Kurds also

²¹⁸ Article 27 of ICCPR states that “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 practice their own religion, or to use their own language.” International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights#:~:text=or%20other%20status.,Article%2027,to%20use%20their%20own%20language. Accessed 03 May 2021.

²¹⁹ “Resolutions Adopted on the Reports of the Sixth Committee.” *General Assembly- Twenty-fifth Session*. treaties.un.org/doc/source/docs/A_RES_2625-Eng.pdf. Accessed 03 May 2021.

²²⁰ Buchanan, Allen. *Justice, Legitimacy, and Self-Determination: Moral Foundations for International Law*. Oxford University Press, 2007. p. 217.

faced discrimination in the economic field. Per capita income of the Kurds was less than half that of the Turks. This mistreatment led to Kurdish resistance using both peaceful and violent ways which were drained without reaching any solution.²²¹ Thus, it can be seen that Turkish Kurds lived in grave conditions and faced violation of human rights throughout history.

In Iraq, there was no significant Kurdish armed resistance until 1958, despite ongoing state's discrimination against the Kurdish minority group. However, the rise of Arab nationalism led to tensions between the Kurds, who sought to keep their distinct identity, and the government which aimed to create a harmonious and united Arabic society. This conflict resulted in the destruction of many villages and the death of thousands of Kurds. Following the defeat of Mustafa Barzani's revolt, most of the Kurds were forcibly removed to camps in the desert, where they faced the brutality of the Iraqi regime. The Iraqi Kurds also endured other humanitarian crises; in 1987, more than 187,000 Kurds were exterminated by the Iraqi army in the Anfal genocide, and a year later, 5,000 Kurds were also killed by chemical weapons in the Kurdish city of Halabja.²²² Despite facing injustice, discrimination, and massacres, the Kurds continued their struggle with great determination. After years of suffering, they finally reached a significant stage. In 2003, following the US invasion of Iraq and the fall of Saddam's regime, Iraqi Kurdistan became an autonomous federal region known as the Kurdish Regional Government.

The Kurds in Syria also endured a long history of discrimination and oppression. Several decrees were issued against the Kurds, including a decree in 1950 which ordered their dispossession. Another decree was passed to denaturalize more than 300,000 Kurds, depriving them of their political and economic rights, including the right to vote, possess identity documents, own property or business, and even have marriages recognized by law. Moreover, a government report in 1963 described the Kurds as "a violent mountain people without history, civilization, language, or ethnic origin."²²³ In 1973, the Syrian government confiscated the agricultural lands of the Kurds and gave

²²¹ Gunter, Michael M. *The Kurds in Turkey. EU Accession and Human Rights*. p. 17.

²²² Craig, Douglas A. "No Place to Call Home: The Iraqi Kurds under the Ba'ath, Saddam Hussein, and ISIS." *Chicago-Kent Law Review*, vol. 92, no. 3, 2018, pp. 817-839.

²²³ McDowall, David. p. 473.

them to Arab settlers in an effort to expel the Kurdish population from the country; consequently, more than 140,000 Kurds were removed and replaced with Arab settlers.²²⁴ Discrimination continued under the governments of Hafiz al-Assad and Bashar al-Assad. Kurdish language and customs were banned; children with Kurdish names were not allowed to attend schools, and businesses that operated in Kurdish were considered illegal. In fact, it was not until the outbreak of the Civil War in Syria that the situation of the Kurds started to change. Due to the rise of tensions in late 2010, Bashar al-Assad promised to grant citizenship to those stateless Kurds.²²⁵

In Iran, the government persecuted any Kurdish religious or political activities, leading to several uprisings. The most important revolt took place in 1945, resulting in the establishment of the Republic of Mahabad, but it was brutally crushed by the Iranian army. After that, the Iranian Kurds continued to face social and cultural repression, which prompted them to support the 1979 Revolution. Following the collapse of the Shah, the Kurds took control over the Kurdish cities; however, they were defeated by the Islamic Republic of Iran, resulting in the death of more than 10,000 Kurds and the destruction of their cities. Under the new Khomeini regime, which supported Shi'ism, Sunni Kurds were persecuted on religious grounds. Later, the Kurds were granted some rights, such as the ability to speak their language, but they still did not enjoy complete freedom.²²⁶ Thus, by examining the Kurdish situation throughout history in the four separate states, it is obvious that they have endured discrimination, suppression, grievances, and severe violations of human rights, which are undoubtedly intolerable and provide a strong basis for the Kurds to claim their right to self-determination.

2.8. The Kurdish Issue in the Four Regional States' Rivalries

²²⁴ McDowall, David.

²²⁵ "Stateless Kurds in Syria granted Citizenship." *CNN World*, 8 Apr. 2011.
edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/04/07/syria.kurdish.citizenship/index.html.

²²⁶ Entessar, Nader. "The Kurds in Post-Revolutionary Iran and Iraq." *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 6, no. 4, 1984, pp. 911-933.

The partition of Kurdistan across different nation-states following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire meant that the Kurdish people found themselves facing not only one but four states, each considered the Kurdish issue as a threat. These countries feared that the independence of the Kurds in one area would fuel secessionist movements in the neighboring countries too. As a reaction, the governments cooperated to prevent the Kurdish people from achieving their aspirations.

What might seem contradictory; however, is that these nations often used the Kurdish issue as a tool in their conflicts. In several occasions, they formed alliances with the Kurds within their rival countries. Syria, as a case in point, attempted to pressure Turkey by supporting the Turkish Kurds due to many disputes, including their dispute over the province of Alexandretta, water disputes over the flow of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and their opposing ideological affiliations during the Cold War. This led the Syrian government to support the PKK, which has been classified by Turkey as a terrorist group, providing them with weapons and resources, and also facilitating their contact with the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which helped train the PKK fighters. Additionally, Damascus was the safe haven where Kurdish leaders from Turkey and Iraq could meet, in exchange for not helping the Syrian Kurds in any way. Mesut Akyol, a pseudonym for a Turkish leftist, wrote that “without Syria’s approval, no Palestinian organization would have helped Turkish or Kurdish organizations... Syria’s approval was a condition.”²²⁷ In the same context, Selahattin Celik, a former senior PKK commander, stated, “In reality, we were finished as an organization after 1980. We had no strength in Europe, in Turkey we were in prison. But in Syria we could gather ourselves together.”²²⁸

As tensions escalated and no peaceful solutions were reached, Turkey threatened to invade Syria unless it ended the PKK presence and expelled Ocalan out of its soils. The two countries were on the verge of an armed war, urging the Arab League, with American support, to intervene to help resolve the conflict. Syria reluctantly agreed to stop assisting

²²⁷ Marcus, Aliza. *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence*. New York University Press, 2007. p. 91.

²²⁸ Marcus, Aliza.

the PKK, and the Adana Agreement was signed in 1998 to help improve relations between the two states.²²⁹

Another example is the Kurds of Iraq, who were exploited many times throughout the history of the Kurdish question. During the British mandate, they were treated according to the British interests, alternately supported and fought against. Britain, for example, tried to use Shaykh Mahmud, the leader of Sulaymaniyah, to fight against Attaturk; however, when he refused to serve the British goals, the Iraqi Kurds were abandoned to their harsh fate. During the Iraq-Iran war, the Shah of Iran promised to support the Iraqi Kurds in exchange for their assistance against Saddam Hussein, but the Kurds were also left to face the brutality of the Iraqi regime once a deal was made between the two states. Those Kurds, who were promised support by the Shah, were left to be killed by the Iraqi government in the Anfal and Halabja campaigns. Additionally, the neighboring states, namely Turkey and Iran, had different stances on the international intervention to stop the crimes committed by the Iraqi army. Turkey, convinced that Operation Provide Comfort (1991) would not lead to insurrection among the Turkish Kurds, immediately welcomed the creation of a safe haven in northern Iraq. In contrast, Iran feared that the no-fly zone would become a shelter for other Kurdish groups, particularly the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI).²³⁰

The Kurdish Civil War that broke out in 1994 between the KDP and PUK also led to the formation of new alliances based on different interests. Despite their hostility, Barzani's KDP was backed by Saddam Hussein, while Talabani's PUK received support from Iran, Saddam's long-time enemy. All factions, indeed, attempted to benefit from the war. Turkey also tried to exploit the situation by allying with the PUK to combat the KDP. In exchange, the Turkish government was allowed to pursue the PKK in the areas controlled by the PUK. However, the Turkish army did not succeed in eliminating the PKK in the mountainous region of Qandil.²³¹ After the US invaded Iraq in 2003, Turkey and the Kurdistan Regional Government started working together because they had some mutual interests. Turkey, allowed to pursue the PKK in Kurdish areas of Iraq, began to build a friendly relationship with Iraqi Kurds, marking a significant change from their

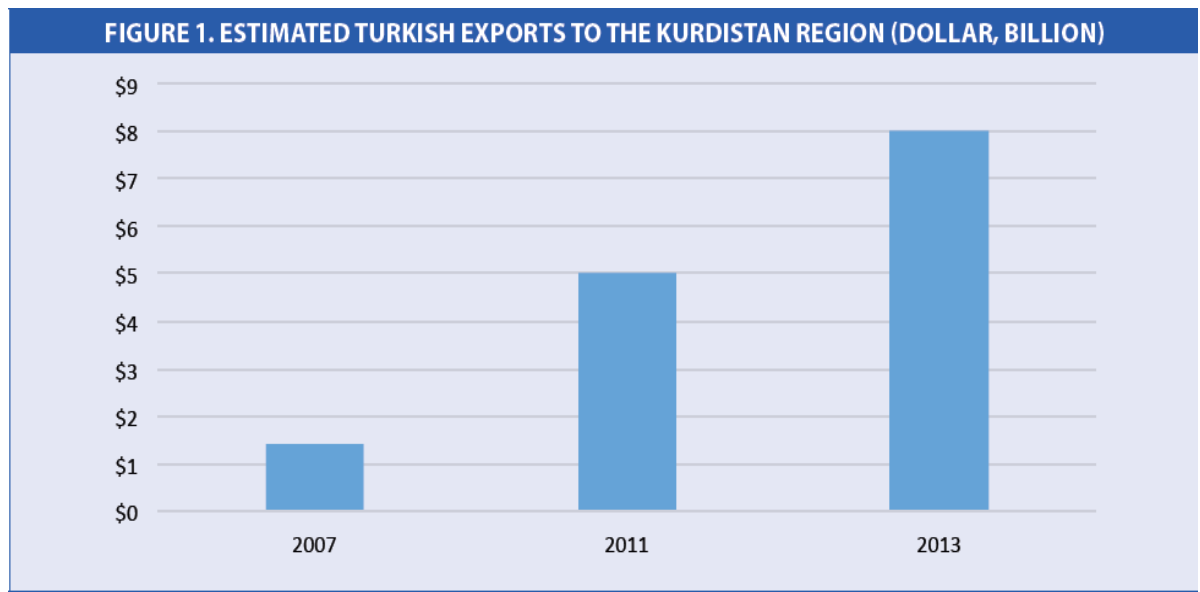
²²⁹ Marcus, Aliza. p. 112.

²³⁰ Romano, David. pp. 167-173.

²³¹ Aziz, Mahir A. *The Kurds of Iraq: Nationalism and Identity in Iraqi Kurdistan*. I. B. Tauris, 2014. p. 101.

earlier hostility. Trade between them grew, with Iraqi Kurdistan becoming an important trading partner for Turkey. Turkish companies also started working on infrastructure projects in the KRG, including building roads and airports.²³² The figure below shows Turkish exports to the Kurdistan region of Iraq during the period 2007-2013:

Figure 2.1. Turkish Exports to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq



Source: Ustun, Kadir and Dudden, Lesley. p. 13.

The Kurdish question also affected the Turkish-Iranian relations. Tensions between Ankara and Tehran increased during the period 1993-1995 due to Iran's supportive stance towards the PKK, which prompted Turkey to back the Iranian Kurdistan Democratic Party. However, the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 forced both countries to work together to prevent the establishment of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq, fearing that it might inspire the Kurds in the neighboring states. Additionally, relations between Turkey and Iran improved following Erdogan's visit to Tehran in 2004, as Iran labeled the PKK as a terrorist group. Both states also worked to consolidate their cooperation especially after the formation of the Party for Free Life in Kurdistan PEJAK, an Iranian offshoot of PKK, in 2004. A memorandum was signed in which both states agreed to share

²³² Ustun, Kadir, and Lesley Dudden. "Turkey-KRG Relationship: Mutual Interests, Geopolitical Challenges." *SETA*, no. 31, 2017, pp. 12-13.

intelligence on Kurdish groups and locations and conduct military operations against the PKK and PEJAK.²³³

Hence, it can be concluded that relationships between the states inhabited by the Kurds (Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria) experienced several ups and downs over time, shaped by a set of domestic, regional and international factors. These changes, indeed, affected each state's approach to dealing with the Kurds and the Kurdish problem, which were often exploited by these states to achieve their own objectives and interests. Moreover, the Kurdish aspirations for autonomy were used as pawns in regional rivalries, resulting in a cycle of cooperation and conflict among countries which shifted their strategies according to the changing geopolitical circumstances.

2.9. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Kurdish issue represents a complicated intersection of nationalism, politics and the fight for minority rights in a volatile region with several historical ongoing conflicts. Kurdish nationalism, whether based on ethnicity or citizenship, reflects the different aspirations within the Kurdish communities, who have been seeking recognition and autonomy despite many challenges.

The Kurdish regions are very important due to their strategic locations which are rich of natural resources. This makes them crucial for both regional and global powers. The conflicts between these countries often exacerbated the miserable situation of the Kurds, adding more obstacles to their struggle for self-determination.

Moreover, the fight for minority rights is the central part of the Kurdish question. Demands of recognition and autonomy have often been met with rejection and oppression of the dominant states, leading to the escalation of tensions between these governments and their Kurdish populations due to the ongoing contradictions regarding national sovereignty and the rights of ethnic minorities. Therefore, as this chapter has demonstrated, addressing minority and ethnic issues is essential not only for the groups concerned but also for the broader stability and social cohesion in the entire region.

²³³ Barkey, Henri J. "Iran and Turkey." *The Iran Primer*, 5 Oct. 2010. iranprimer.usip.org/resource/iran-and-turkey.

Chapter Three

The US Foreign Policy Toward the Kurdish Issue in Turkey and Syria

3.1. Introduction

The US foreign policy towards the Kurdish issue in Turkey and Syria reflects a complex intersection of regional dynamics and strategic international calculations. The Kurds in these countries have long been seeking recognition and autonomy; these aspirations have significantly affected regional politics, shaping thus the American foreign policy which has attempted to balance its strategic interests with its responses to Kurdish nationalism.

In Turkey, the Kurdish question has been a source of tension both domestically and regionally. The rise of the PKK and its insurgency against the Turkish state has been a major concern for the American officers, who have often prioritized their strategic relations with Turkey, a NATO member and a valuable partner in the Middle East, over addressing the Kurdish demands for self-determination. Therefore, the US approach has often been characterized by a careful consideration of Turkey's sovereignty and national security while dealing with the humanitarian and political aspects of the Kurdish issue.

In Syria, the Kurdish demands for recognition and self-determination emerged very late compared to the other Kurdish populations in the neighboring states. However, this struggle has been intertwined with Syria's internal political dynamics and its relations with regional and global powers like the US and Russia. For the United States, foreign policy towards the Kurds in Syria has been shaped by the need to counterbalance the Syrian government and other security threats. At the same time, the US sought to handle the complexities of the Kurdish problem to avoid further regional destabilization.

The period up to 2010 was marked by a changing geopolitical environment where the US was preoccupied with many new challenges, including the War on Terror, the Iraq War and other regional and global issues. Hence, the American approach to the Kurdish question was characterized by pragmatism, seeking to maintain strong relations with key

allies such as Turkey while dealing cautiously with the Kurdish minority groups, whose problem had significant implications on regional politics.

This chapter examines the complexities of the US foreign policy towards the Kurdish issue in Turkey and Syria up to 2010. It covers the mix of the strategic, political and humanitarian factors that influenced the American approach to the Kurds and the countries in which they live. It also looks at how the US attempted to maintain a balance between supporting its regional allies and dealing with the grievances of the Kurdish people, providing different perspectives on the repercussions of the US policy in the entire region.

3.2. The Turkish Kurds in the US Policy

As mentioned above, the US policy towards the Kurdish population in Turkey was primarily driven by the imperative to retain strong relations with Turkey while tackling the challenges presented by the Kurdish national movement. A cautious strategy was necessary to achieve an appropriate balance between supporting Turkey's counterterrorism activities and treating Kurdish concerns.

3.2.1. The Development of the Kurdish Question in Turkey

The Kurdish population in Turkey is one of the largest minority groups, numbering between 12 and 15 million and comprising about 23% of the total country's population.²³⁴ While there are Kurdish minorities in other parts of the country, the majority of the Turkish Kurds live in south-eastern Turkey, an area known as Northern Kurdistan or Bakure. This name, indeed, demonstrates the Kurds' rejection of the terms East and Southeast used by the Turkish government. Map 3.1. shows the regions in Turkey where the Kurds reside.

²³⁴ Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Turkey. EU Accession and Human Rights*. Pluto Press, 2005. p. 6.

Map 3.1. Kurdish Areas in Turkey



Source: Goran, Baxtiyar. Map of Kurdish Areas in Turkey, 2 Aug. 2016.
x.com/BaxtiyarGoran/status/760462999995973632/photo/1

During the period of the Ottoman Empire, the Kurds were considered part of the Sunni Muslim core, but were recognized by the Sultan as a distinct group. They were allowed to rule their own provinces in exchange for maintaining stability along the empire's borders and providing the Sultan with taxes and military support during wars.²³⁵ This system continued until the 19th century; however, efforts of centralization and modernization adopted by Sultan Mahmud II threatened the semi-autonomous status of the Kurds and the interests of the Kurdish Aghas. These reforms strained relations between the Kurds and the Ottoman central government, leading to the emergence of many Kurdish uprisings, including the rebellion of Sheikh Ubeydullah in 1880 and the revolts of Mir Mehmet Pasha of Rewabduz and Bedir Khan Bey of Cizre. These revolts marked the beginning of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict which has lasted until the present time, although

²³⁵ McDowall, David. p. 28.

they were not driven by nationalist motives but were merely tribal efforts aimed to restore their autonomous status.²³⁶

In the wake of World War I and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Kurds saw a glimmer of hope for independence, especially following the announcement of Wilson's Fourteen Points, as point twelve declared that the non-Turkish minorities of the Ottoman Empire should be granted the right of autonomous development.²³⁷ Indeed, the Kurdish hope was close to reality after signing the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920, which provided autonomy to the Kurds. However, the situation altered when Mustafa Kemal won the War for Independence, with significant Kurdish support. In fact, the Kurds were not eager to fight for Kemal's interests, but they were successfully convinced by the theme of Islamic unity. In the words of Kemal, "as long as there are fine people with honour and respect, Turks and Kurds will continue to live together as brothers around the institution of the Khilafa, and an unshakeable iron tower will be raised against internal and external enemies."²³⁸ Additionally, in a telegram sent to a notable in Diyarbakir, Kemal emphasized that "Our existence requires that Kurds, Turks and all Muslim elements should work together to defend our independence and prevent the partition of the fatherland."²³⁹

In fact, Kemal recognized, or pretended to recognize, the coexistence of different ethnicities within Turkey, as a Muslim remnant of the Ottoman Empire. In this context, he said:

There are Turks and Kurds ... there are various bonded Muslim elements. Every Muslim element which makes this entity are citizens. They respect each other; they have every kind of right, racial, social and geographical. We repeated this over and over again. We admit this honestly. However, our interests are together. The unity we are trying to create is not only Turkish or Circassian. It is a mixture of one Muslim element.²⁴⁰

In another effort to secure the Kurdish support during the War for Independence, Kemal also promised autonomy for the Kurds. To prove his sincerity, the Kurdish

²³⁶ Çapan, Firat. *Analysis of Intra-State Conflicts: The Case of Kurdish Issue in Turkey*. 2015, Hacettepe University, PhD dissertation. p. 62.

²³⁷ "President Woodrow Wilson's 14 Points (1918)." *National Archives*. www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/president-woodrow-wilsons-14-points. Accessed 12 Mar. 2021.

²³⁸ McDowall, David. p. 187.

²³⁹ Mango. Andrew. "Ataturk and the Kurds." *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 35, no. 4, 1999, pp. 1-25.

²⁴⁰ McDowall, David. p. 188.

National Assembly was established in 1922, which provided local self-rule to the Kurdish people and allowed them to manage their internal affairs. However, this assembly was not fully independent because its general governor was appointed by the Turkish Grand National Assembly, which insisted on using Turkish as the official language of the Kurdish Assembly, limiting its autonomy.²⁴¹

Three years after the Treaty of Sèvres, Atatürk defeated the Allies and won the war for Turkey's liberation. This victory led to the signing the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, in which Turkey managed to acquire double the territory set at Sèvres. However, the new treaty made no mention of the Kurds, who were not even considered as a minority group in Turkey, as only non-Muslims were categorized as such. Zürcher noted that:

Within the new borders of the republic, about 20 percent of the population was Kurdish but they were not mentioned in the peace Treaty of Lausanne and promises of autonomy made by the nationalist leaders, including Mustafa Kemal himself, during the independence struggle were forgotten. This was a great disappointment to the Kurdish nationalists.²⁴²

Furthermore, Cagaptay stated that Kemal recognized the Kurds as a distinct ethnic group only during the war, and his policy towards them altered once the Republic of Turkey was established.²⁴³ And although Article 39 of the Treaty of Lausanne guaranteed all linguistic minorities, both Muslims and non-Muslims, the right to use their own language in commerce, religion, publications and at public gatherings,²⁴⁴ the Kurds were denied this right; and they started to face discrimination from the Turkish government due to ethnic and cultural reasons. Jafar described the situation of the Kurds as a de facto military occupation;²⁴⁵ while Besikçi asserted that “the Turkish state interpreted the Lausanne Treaty as a signal to start eradicating the Kurds from the face of the earth”, adding that “it perceived the signing of the Treaty as an international guarantee and

²⁴¹ McDowall, David.

²⁴² Zürcher, Erik J. *Turkey: A Modern History*. I. B. Tauris, 1993. p. 170.

²⁴³ Cagaptay, Soner. *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who is a Turk?* Routledge, 2006. p. 105.

²⁴⁴ Article 39 of the Treaty of Lausanne stipulated that “there will be no official restriction of any Turkish citizen's right to use any language he wishes, whether in private, in commercial dealings, in matters of religion, in print or at public gathering. Regardless of the existence of an official language, appropriate facilities will be provided for any non-Turkish speaking citizen in Turkey to use his own language before courts. “*Treaty of Lausanne, Section III, Article 39.*” *WWI Document Archive*. wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Treaty_of_Lausanne. Accessed 17 May 2022.

²⁴⁵ Jafar, Majeed R. *Under-Underdevelopment: A Case Study of the South-eastern Area of the Republic of Turkey*. Painoprint, 1974. p. 249.

approval of a continuation of its policies. With the signing of the Lausanne Treaty, Kurdistan became an inter-state colony.”²⁴⁶

After defeating its external enemies, Turkey was proclaimed a Republic under the presidency of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. It was, indeed, the beginning of a new era for a modern secular Turkish state, when Kemal started to implement his new agenda to establish a purely Turkish nation. According to the Republican People’s Party, founded in 1923 by Ataturk and the Young Turks, a nation is defined as “a political and social community formed by citizens bound by a unity of language, culture and ideal.”²⁴⁷ This means that all people living within the Turkish soil, including Kurds, had to abandon their distinct languages and cultures and adopt Turkish ones. This Turkification process aimed to build a homogenous society and a unified nation. Martin Van Bruinessen noted that “the Turkish elite of the time had been very much obsessed with territorial integrity and national unity which is another traumatic heritage from the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. These laid the foundations for policies of assimilation.”²⁴⁸ Ataturk also sought to create a centralized and westernized state. His first reform was the abolition of the Sultanate in 1922, followed by the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924. In addition, the institutions of Ulama called Sheikh al-Islam and the ministry of Shari’a were eliminated.²⁴⁹ Kemal’s reforms extended to closing religious schools and colleges. In 1926, the Islamic Law was replaced by the Swiss Civil Code, which prohibited polygamy and granted wives the right to divorce.

However, abandoning the traditional Islamic values and practices and abolishing the Caliphate negatively affected the Turkish-Kurdish relations. This shift severed the religious bounds between the Turks and the Kurds, and ended the religious loyalty of the Kurds to the Turkish state. The new reforms sparked resentment and unrest in the Kurdish regions, leading to several uprisings as the Kurds perceived these policies as a threat to their identity and way of life.

Sheikh Said Revolt was one of the major Kurdish rebellions during the early years of Kemal’s rule. It started in February 1925 in the provinces of Diyarbakir and Elazig. The

²⁴⁶ Koivunen, Kristiina. *The Invisible War in North Kurdistan*. Helsinki University, 2002. p. 84.

²⁴⁷ Butenschon, Nils, and Roel Meijer. *The Middle East in Transition: The Centrality of Citizenship*. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2018. p. 51.

²⁴⁸ Bruinessen, Martin V. “The Kurds in Turkey.” *MERIP Reports*, no. 121, 1984, pp. 6-12.

²⁴⁹ Ulama is an Arabic term literally means religious scholars; and Shari’a means the Islamic Law.

revolt was considered as a serious threat to the Turkish state, as 35% of the state's annual budget allocated to crush it.²⁵⁰ By April 1925, Turkish forces in these provinces numbered around 52,000.²⁵¹ The rebels managed to take control over the towns of Elazig and Palu, but they failed to consolidate power in the big city centers. The rebellion was quickly suppressed and Sheikh Said, along with some of his followers, were executed after a trial in the Tribunals of Independence.²⁵²

In fact, scholars stated that Sheikh Said revolt emerged due to several reasons. According to Besikçi, one of the main motives was the British interests in the region, particularly Mosul for its oil wealth; therefore, the British used the Kurds as proxies against the Turkish state. This was evidenced by Sheikh Said receiving weapons catalogues from British munitions makers. He supported the British, believing that they would be less oppressive than the Turkish government.²⁵³ Another key factor was the nationalist motive behind the revolt. The new policy of assimilation led to the rise of the Kurdish nationalist movement. Kemal's failure to fulfil the promises of autonomy made during the Independence War, along with his attempts to erase the Kurdish identity and assimilate the Kurds into the Turkish culture, strained relations between the Turkish government and its Kurdish population, leading to the outbreak of political conflicts. Olson explained that "Sheikh Said rebellion was the first large-scale nationalist rebellion by the Kurds. The role of the Azadi was fundamental in its unfolding. Kurdish intellectuals and military officers lay at the heart of the nationalist movement, in terms of organization and recruitment."²⁵⁴

Religion, which had served as social glue during the Ottoman rule, was another important reason behind Sheikh Said rebellion. Islam was the strongest bond between Kurds and Turks, but as Kemal started his reforms and implemented the secularization process on the Republic, anti-Turkish sentiments grew among the Kurdish people, sparking the uprising. Yasemin Celik noted that "Sheikh Said's goal was to establish a

²⁵⁰ Yuksel, Metin. "The Encounter of Kurdish Women with Nationalism in Turkey." *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 42, no. 5, 2006, pp. 777-802.

²⁵¹ McDowall, Donald. p. 195.

²⁵² McDowall, Donald.

²⁵³ Olson, Robert, and William Tucker. "The Sheikh Said Rebellion in Turkey (1925): A Study in the Consolidation of a Developed uninstitutionalized Nationalism and the Rise of Incipient (Kurdish) Nationalism." *Die Welt des Islams*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1978, pp. 195-211.

²⁵⁴ Olson, Robert. *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880-1925*. University of Texas Press, 1989. p. 153.

traditional Islamic order in Turkey, and he was supported not only by the Kurds but also by groups dissatisfied with the secular direction the country was taking.”²⁵⁵ In the same context, Douglas Howard pointed out that “the rebellion was expressed in a wonderful religious idiom, calling for restoration of the caliphate and rule by the Shari’a.”²⁵⁶ Eleanor Bisbee also asserted that “they (Kurds) are Muslims, and when the new Turkish government went so far as to depose the head of their religion, the Caliph, and to promulgate secular Turkish laws, the Kurds rebelled.”²⁵⁷

On the other hand, other scholars argued that the revolt was driven by both religious and nationalist motives. Erik Jan Zürcher noted that “while the leadership was undoubtedly motivated by the desire for an autonomous or even independent Kurdistan, the rank and file acted from religious motives, demanding the restoration of the holy law and the Caliphate.”²⁵⁸ Ersin Kalaycioglu also observed that “Islamic propaganda was a smokescreen to hide the true feelings of the Kurdish leaders who would establish a Kurdish state under the guise of a Shari’a state for the Kurds”, adding that “Kurds had been a tribal people whose identity was deeply influenced by Islam. The Kurdish intellectual nationalists assumed that the only way to mobilize the tribes was to rally them under the flag of Islam, for ethnic identity did not seem to transcend beyond their tribal allegiances.”²⁵⁹

During his trial, Sheikh Said declared that his rebellion was motivated by religious reasons. This prompted Mustafa Kemal to impose further restrictions on the Islamic practices to prevent other religious uprisings. In September 1925, new decrees were issued which mandated the closing of religious sects, prohibited clergy from wearing religious clothing, and forced government employees to wear Western clothing and adopt Western behaviors.²⁶⁰ Sheikh Said revolt, in fact, resulted in a more aggressive Turkish policy. When Ismet Inonu came to power, he introduced the Law on the Maintenance of Order (Takrir-i Sukun), which aimed to crush any organization or institution that could threaten

²⁵⁵ Celik, Yasemin. *Contemporary Turkish Foreign Policy*. Praeger, 1999. p. 33.

²⁵⁶ Howard, Douglas. *The History of Turkey*. Greenwood Press, 2001. p. 95.

²⁵⁷ Bisbee, Eleanor. *The New Turks: Pioneers of the Republic 1920-1950*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1951. p. 54.

²⁵⁸ Zürcher, Erik J. *Turkey: A Modern History*. I.B Tauris, 2004. p. 171.

²⁵⁹ Kalaycioglu, Ersin. *Turkish Dynamics: Bridge Across Troubled Lands*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. p. 49.

²⁶⁰ Kolçak, Hakan. “Unfinished Building: Kurdish Language Rights During the First AKP Ruling Period from November 2002 to June 2015.” *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2016, pp. 26-56.

the state. Consequently, all forms of opposition, including newspapers and publications, were closed.²⁶¹

Yet, the Sheikh Said revolt failed to change the Turkish government's discriminatory policies towards the Kurds, who were considered as mountain Turks and as backward people needing to be civilized. In a 1925 speech, Ismet Inonu ignored the existence of the Kurdish minority, and stating that "we are openly nationalist. Nationalism is the only cause that keeps us together. Except for the Turkish majority, none of the other elements shall have any impact. We shall, at any price, Turkicize those who live in our country, and destroy those who rise up against the Turks and Turkdom."²⁶² By June 1925, the Turkish army completely crushed the uprising. However, the revolt marked the beginning of the Kurdish suffering by the Turkish authoritarian one-party state. Despite suppression, the Kurds continued their struggle, and unrest persisted in the Kurdish regions in the following decades.

The Kurds continued to challenge the national integrity of the Kemalist Turkish state. In 1927, the Kurdish National League, Khoybun, was established by a group of Kurdish intellectuals led by Ihsan Nuri Pasha, a former Ottoman General. The party managed to spark the revolts in the Agri and Ararat Mountains in 1930-1931. However, these uprisings were crushed by the Turkish forces, and Ihsan Pasha escaped to Iran. In response, the Turkish authorities implemented more aggressive measures, including the 1934 Law which ordered the deportation of hundreds of Kurds to Western Turkey.²⁶³ Factually, these harsh policies led to another revolt in the Dersim region in 1937-1938, which ended in a complete Kurdish defeat and the death of hundreds of Kurds. The revolt also resulted in the renaming of Dersim to modern-day Tunceli.²⁶⁴

The Turkification project and assimilation policies were pursued during Atatürk years, despite Kurdish protests. The Turkish government targeted anyone who did not identify himself as Turkish. Also, the Kurds were forcibly deported and replaced with Turkish-speaking populations. Kurdish regions were renamed with Turkish names, aiming

²⁶¹ Jwaideh, Wadie. *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development*. Syracuse University Press, 2006. p. 215.

²⁶² Bose, Sumantra. *Secular States, Religious Politics: India, Turkey and the Future of Secularism*. Cambridge University Press, 2018. p. 216.

²⁶³ Jwaideh, Wadie. p. 215.

²⁶⁴ Barkey, Henry, and Graham Fuller. *Turkey's Kurdish Question*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1997 p. 33.

at civilizing the cultural and social aspects of the republic. After the death of Atatürk, the Turkish regime continued the same policies, particularly towards the Kurds. Kemal's successors sought to legitimize themselves by adhering to his reforms, and any revision or questioning of his principles was seen as political treason.²⁶⁵ Under this policy of repression, 33 Kurdish civilian villagers were executed near the Iranian borders by General Mustafa Muglali in July 1943.²⁶⁶

The regime's complicity in the massacres committed against the Kurds continued until the coming of the Democrat Party to the political scene in 1950. During their electoral campaign, the Democrats promised to ease some of the cultural restrictions in the East, aiming at de-escalating the secularist policies. In fact, the Democrat decade 1950-1960 brought relative relief to the Kurdish people and alleviated the suffering they had experienced under Atatürk and his successor's rules. This era marked Turkey's shift from the one-party rule to multiparty politics, and was also characterized by greater freedom of expression, in which all people, including Kurds, were allowed to voice their grievances. Additionally, the Democrats preferred to pursue integrative approaches rather than conflict with Kurdish opponents.²⁶⁷

Indeed, this new political system benefited the Kurds; however, from 1960s onward, periods of liberalization were interrupted several times by military coups, as the army intervened and seized power three times whenever Kemalist principles were perceived to be at risk. After the Democrats were overthrown following the May 1960 coup, the situation of the Kurds deteriorated again; more restrictions were imposed, and the new leader Cernel Gürsel threatened to bomb towns and villages in case of Kurdish unrest. Things, however, began to change when the army withdrew from power and a new constitution was introduced, bringing renewed hope to the Kurdish people.²⁶⁸

The 1940s and 1950s were seen as a silent and peaceful period, as the Kurdish areas did not witness any ethnic uprisings. Barkey and Fuller argued that this silence was mainly due to the state's effective control and oppression of any Kurdish mobilization.²⁶⁹ However, things began to alter in early 1960s. The political climate, particularly the 1961

²⁶⁵ Barkey, Henry, and Graham Fuller. p. 13.

²⁶⁶ Barkey, Henry, and Graham Fuller.

²⁶⁷ Barkey, Henry, and Graham Fuller. p. 14.

²⁶⁸ Barkey, Henry, and Graham Fuller. p. 14-15.

²⁶⁹ Barkey, Henry, and Graham Fuller. p. 14.

Constitution, helped reshape the Kurdish issue, allowing Kurdish nationalism to evolve from local and tribal leadership to left-wing movements. The constitution also prompted the foundation of trade unions and students organizations, which the Kurds immediately sought to leverage. Between 1965 and 1968, bilingual Turkish-Kurdish magazines like *Dicle-Firat* and *Deng* were launched. Another major achievement was the establishment of Revolutionary Cultural Society of the East in 1969, which organized several teach-ins to raise Kurdish national awareness throughout the Republic.²⁷⁰

Although the 1961 Constitution granted some rights and liberties to the Kurds, the Turkish state continued its discriminatory policies against them. To enforce Law N° 1587, the National Unity Committee started to rename Kurdish places with Turkish names, arguing that they hurt public opinion and contradicted the national culture and traditions and moral values.²⁷¹ According to a survey conducted by Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation in 2011, 15,047 Kurdish regions or villages out of 41,036 were renamed in Turkish during the 20th century.²⁷² Furthermore, the policy of marginalizing the Kurdish region continued in order to keep it underdeveloped. Between 1968 and 1975, only 10.7 billion liras were invested in East and Southeast Anatolia, representing just 2.4% of national investment, compared to 31.1% in Marmara, 20.8% in the Aegean region, and 16.4% in the Mediterranean area.²⁷³

Recognizing the rise of the Kurdish movement, the Turkish army intervened and took power again in 1973 to restore order in the region. The political and social turmoil of the 1970s, coupled with harsh repression against the Kurds, led to the emergence of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has become the most significant event in the recent history of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. The party was founded by Abdullah Ocalan and his friends when they were students in Ankara in 1978. The organization initially adopted the Marxist-Leninist ideology, believing that capitalism was responsible for the disparity between the underdeveloped southeast and the prosperous western Turkish regions, and that communism was the solution to achieve stability within the Republic.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ McDowall, David. p. 407.

²⁷¹ McDowall, David. p. 406.

²⁷² Caglayan, Muttalip. *Turkey's Kurdish Conflict Through the Lenses of Conflict Resolution*. 2013, Middle East Technical University, Master Thesis. p. 48.

²⁷³ Callimanopulos, Dominique. "Kurdish Repression in Turkey." *Cultural Survival*, 9 Feb. 2010. www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/kurdish-repression-turkey.

²⁷⁴ Adolfson, Jack. *An Evolution of the Kurdish Issue in Turkey: Beyond a State-Centric Perspective*. 2017, Claremont McKenna College, CMC Senior Thesis. p. 36.

During this decade, poverty increased dramatically in the Kurdish areas. The French newspaper *Le Monde* described the situation in a Kurdish village in the Mardin province, stating that “each family had a few chickens and possibly five or six goats ... rates of pay were US \$1 for a child, \$1.50 for a woman, and \$2 for a man.”²⁷⁵ Under these miserable circumstances, the PKK managed to create a positive image for itself, particularly among the Kurds who were suffering from poor living standards. The organization was seen as a champion for the disenfranchised and a hero of socialism, gaining great support in south-eastern Turkey. The PKK, indeed, was perceived as a new hope for resisting the state’s injustice. A party’s supporter from Mardin described its emergence as “the rising of the sun.”²⁷⁶

In addition to his goal of building a socialist state, Ocalan aimed to create an independent and unified Kurdistan. Due to the oppression and cultural genocide which the Kurds faced, the PKK leaders believed that armed resistance was their only way to achieve their desired goals, after exhausting all peaceful and legal means. In the early 1980s, preparations for military engagement started, but were disrupted by the 1980 military coup, which led to massive arrests of PKK militants. As a result, Ocalan decided to relocate training to Syria and Lebanon, which served as safe havens for the fighters, since the Turkish forces could not pursue them in these neighboring countries. Moreover, Ocalan’s stay in Syria facilitated the establishment of close ties with the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which helped train the PKK fighters. After completing their trainings, the PKK militants returned to southeast Turkey to launch attacks against the Turkish army.²⁷⁷

However, it was not until 1984 that the PKK launched its first armed attack on the Turkish forces in the cities of Eruh and Semdinli in the southeast. Their initial actions also targeted the assimilated Kurds, who were considered as their biggest enemy, as well as anyone cooperating with the government, including local leaders, village guards and civilian state employees like teachers. As a result, the Kurds in Turkey found themselves in a difficult position; they had to choose between supporting the PKK, which could make

²⁷⁵ Marcus, Aliza. *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence*. NYU Press, 2007. p. 15.

²⁷⁶ O’Connor, Francis. p. 6.

²⁷⁷ Marcus, Aliza. p. 53-56.

them targets of state suppression, or siding with the government, which could lead to attacks from the PKK.²⁷⁸

In fact, Turkey was not well prepared to suppress the PKK, because it was not just a group of tribal rebels like those in the previous revolts; rather, it had a well-defined and organized political agenda. In its initial reaction, the Turkish military responded violently with cross-border air strikes, resulting in more Iraqi Kurdish casualties than PKK fighters.²⁷⁹

From 1984 onward, a significant new phase began for the Kurdish national movement in Turkey. The Kurdish issue began to attract attention both domestically and internationally due to the increasing PKK attacks and the harsh reaction of the government. State records showed that since 1984, thousands of people were killed in the conflict, including 4,302 government officials, 5,018 soldiers, 4,400 civilians and 23,279 PKK fighters, in addition to thousands of wounded.²⁸⁰ In order to regain control of the region, a State of Emergency OHAL was declared in July 1987 across eight Kurdish provinces namely Bingol, Diyarbakir, Elazig, Hakkari, Mardin, Surt, Tunceli and Van. The OHAL region was under the control of a governor-general who was allowed to use all forces, including the army, gendarmerie, police and village guards, to eliminate the PKK guerrillas.²⁸¹

However, the PKK reached its peak in the early 1990s when it numbered between 15,000 and 20,000 fighters.²⁸² As the Kurdish threat increased, President Turgut Ozal attempted to reduce the intensity of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, and he suggested establishing peaceful relations with the Kurds instead of fighting them. The president also drafted a bill which sought to end the prohibition of speaking Kurdish in public places, though it was still restricted in broadcasts and education, but he was strongly criticized by Kemalists, accusing him of undermining Kemal's legacy. The bill was withdrawn, but was

²⁷⁸ Unal, Mustafa, and Fatih Harmanci. "Turkey's Struggle with the Kurdish Question: Roots, Evolution and Changing National, Regional, and International Contexts." *Middle East Review of Public Administration*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2016, pp. 1-30.

²⁷⁹ Hale, William. *Turkish Foreign Policy since 1774*. Routledge, 2012. p. 222.

²⁸⁰ Yavuz, Hakan. "Five Stages of the Construction of Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey." *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2001, pp. 1-24.

²⁸¹ McDowall, David. p. 427.

²⁸² Jongerden, Joost. *The Settlement Issue in Turkey and the Kurds: An Analysis of Spatial Policies, Modernity and War*. Brill, 2007. p. 66.

reintroduced in April 1991 and was eventually passed following several debates. A year later, Ozal stated that “it must be made clear that those in the Iraqi Kurdish area are relatives of Turkish citizens. So the borders are to some extent artificial, dividing people into two sections.”²⁸³

When the Grand National Assembly was still discussing the president's new policies, nearly 500,000 Iraqi Kurdish refugees escaped into Turkey, fearing Saddam Hussein's retaliation against the Kurdish uprising in March 1991.²⁸⁴ Consequently, Turkey found itself in a difficult position. On one side, the 1991 anti-terror law equipped the state with more tools to suppress its Kurdish population. On the other side, the Turkish government began to engage formally with Iraq's major Kurdish factions, Barzani's KDP and Talabani's PUK. However, Ozal believed that these diplomatic ties would demonstrate to Turkish Kurds that the government's issue was not with Kurds in general, but specifically with the PKK's terrorism. By early 1992, this collaboration progressed to the point where the Iraqi Kurdish Front warned the PKK that they would be expelled from the region if they continued their activities against Turkey.

In effect, Ocalan's primary goal appeared to be inciting civil unrest within Turkey. Such a situation could potentially create conditions for a military takeover by opposition groups, who sought an opportunity to challenge the existing government, thereby further destabilizing the country. This could pave the way for international intervention and the establishment of a Kurdish safe haven in Turkey. However, the close alliance between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurdish leadership forced the PKK to rethink their ultimate objectives. In November 1991, when journalist Ismet Imset asked whether the Kurds would accept a federal solution, Ocalan responded, “Unquestionably this is what we see.”²⁸⁵

In mid-1992, the ongoing Kurdish insurgency forced Ozal to permit the military fight against the PKK. The conflict between the PKK and Turkish forces became more intense. The Turkish military operations were supported by Iraqi Kurds, who restricted PKK activities in northern Iraq. In response, Ocalan imposed a blockade in Iraqi Kurdistan

²⁸³ Gunter, Michael M. “A de facto Kurdish State in Northern Iraq.” *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1993, pp. 295–319.

²⁸⁴ Gunter, Michael M. “A de facto Kurdish State in Northern Iraq.”

²⁸⁵ McDowall, David. p. 432

and forced truck drivers to implement it, leading to shortages of important supplies like food and fuel. As a response, Talabani and Barzani agreed to back the Turkish military's operations against PKK camps in northern Iraq by late 1992.

In February 1993, Talabani met with Ocalan, who said that he was ready to stop fighting the Turkish government. A month later, the PKK announced a month ceasefire to reduce tensions. Ocalan also mentioned that if Turkey stopped attacking his forces, the ceasefire could be extended, and he hoped to return unarmed to the southeast to work on political activities.²⁸⁶ However, after Ozal's death in April, the chance for extending the truce was lost, and violence between the Turkish army and the PKK resumed. By mid-1993, the PKK appeared to be approaching a position of relative military; nevertheless, the Turkish army increased its presence in the region and pursued PKK guerrillas in the mountains, inflicting heavy losses on them. The government also deported local Kurds to undermine the PKK's support base. Ironically, this deportation spread the PKK's influence into western Turkey, turning it into a broader national issue.²⁸⁷

However, the popularity of the Kurdistan Workers' Party declined following Ocalan's decision to attack the Kurdistan Democratic Party in northern Iraq for its support of the Turkish state. The party's position weakened further when Turkey threatened to invade Syria in 1998 unless Ocalan was expelled. As a result, Ocalan fled to Italy but he could not stay long due to pressure from Turkey and the United States to extradite him. He moved to Kenya, where he was finally captured in 1999 and returned to Turkey, where he was tried and sentenced to death for treason. While in prison, Ocalan suggested helping Turkey resolve the Kurdish problem. He urged the PKK to abandon violence, lay down their arms and withdraw from the country. The PKK guerrillas followed Ocalan's instructions, but as they were withdrawing, the Turkish army launched military operations, killing hundreds of them. By the end of the millennium, the PKK was defeated, but it still remained a threat to the Turkish state.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶ Candar, Cengiz. "Leaving the Mountain: How may the PKK lay down Arms? Freeing the Kurdish Question from Violence. *TESEV Publications*, 2012. p. 67.

²⁸⁷ Candar, Cengiz. p. 79.

²⁸⁸ Gunter, Michael M. "The Continuing Kurdish Problem in Turkey after Ocalan's Capture." *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 5, 2000, pp. 849-869.

Another significant development occurred in December 1999, which influenced the Kurdish question in Turkey. Turkey's application for a membership in the European Union (EU) forced the government to implement many constitutional reforms. Consequently, 32 articles of the constitution were amended, with article 26 as the most notable, since it addressed freedom of expression. The provision which had prohibited the use of any language not allowed by law was removed,²⁸⁹ which means that using other languages, including Kurdish, was no longer banned. In 2002, other amendments were made to allow teaching and broadcasting in Kurdish. Moreover, the death penalty was abolished, and Ocalan's sentence was changed to life imprisonment.

The rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) marked a significant shift in Turkey's policy towards the Kurdish issue. The party recognized that ignoring this problem was a mistake that caused decades of conflict. On August 12, 2005, Prime Minister Erdogan stated in a speech in Diyarbakir that "the Kurdish issue is the issue of the entire Turkish nation. We will solve it through more democracy and greater welfare."²⁹⁰ This speech, indeed, signaled the beginning of a new era for a more democratic Turkish state, where identity was based on citizenship rather than on Turkishness. In fact, the party's agenda and principles initially offered hope to the Kurds; however, the situation deteriorated in 2007 as the government reverted to military measures, leading to the escalation of violence between the Kurdish groups and the Turkish forces. By late 2007, the conflict expanded beyond the internal borders, as the Turkish army launched air strikes on PKK camps in northern Iraq.

In an effort to ease tensions, Turkey decided to grant the Kurds some cultural rights. On January 1, 2009, TRT6, a state-owned TV channel, began broadcasting in Kurdish. Additionally, the government initiated a peace process in 2009 aimed at resolving the conflict, initially known as The Kurdish Initiative, and evolved later into The Democratic Initiative and lastly The National Unity and Brotherhood Project. The goal of this project was to enhance more cultural rights for the Kurds, grant them some level of autonomy and facilitate the reintegration of PKK members who had not engaged in armed attacks against

²⁸⁹ "Constitution of the Republic of Turkey." *Refworld*, 7 Nov. 1982.
www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1982/en/17317.

²⁹⁰ "Turkey's Erdogan says the Country never had a Kurdish Problem." *EKurd Daily*, 16 Mar. 2015.
ekurd.net/erdogan-says-turkey-never-had-a-kurdish-problem-2015-03-16.

the Turkish military.²⁹¹ Despite these plans, no serious measures were implemented, and the Kurdish problem remains unresolved to the present day.

3.2.2. US-Turkish Relations and their Impact on the Kurdish Problem

Relations between the Americans and the Turks go back to the 18th century. Treaties were signed to set diplomatic and commercial relations, such as the Treaty of Navigation and Trade in 1830. During this time, American missionaries were active in areas inhabited by Christian minorities within the Ottoman Empire. They established schools aiming at educating the local populations. In 1880, there were 331 missionary institutions teaching over 13,000 students, and this increased to 450 institutions with 26,000 students by 1913.²⁹² However, some of these schools were closed by the Ottoman authorities, accusing them of trying to spread Christianity among Muslims, leading to tensions between the Ottomans and the United States.

Then, World War I broke out, which exacerbated tensions in the Ottoman-American relations. When the United States entered the war, Germany, an ally of the Ottomans, pressured them to sever ties with the US. The situation worsened following Wilson's declaration of his Fourteen Points, which promoted the idea of self-determination and threatened the unity of the Ottoman Empire, since it was a multi-ethnic state. Wilson's twelfth point specifically endangered the integrity of the empire by encouraging non-Turkish minorities to seek independence. It stated that "the Turkish portion of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development."²⁹³

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey emerged as a Republic in 1923, following a fierce war for independence. This period marked a shift from the Ottoman expansionist policies to a focus on the security and sovereignty of the new Turkish state, which learnt from past alliances with major powers that such ties often led to wars and incurred heavy costs. Meanwhile, the United States returned to its isolationist policy in the

²⁹¹ Kose, Talha. "Rise and Fall of the AK Party's Kurdish Peace Initiatives." *Insight Turkey*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2017, pp. 139-166.

²⁹² Aydin, Mustafa, and Cagri Erhan. *Turkish-American Relations: Past, Present and Future*. Routledge, 2004. p. 28.

²⁹³ "Fourteen Points." *Britannica*.

aftermath of World War I, focusing on domestic affairs, especially during the economic crisis of the Great Depression in 1929. As a result, Turkish-American relations were largely frozen during the interwar period, with both nations preoccupied with their internal affairs.

When World War II broke out, Turkey, under the presidency of Ismet Inonu, was pressured to join either the Allies or the Axis. However, it managed to remain neutral until the final stages of the war. Aydin explained the reasons that forced Turkey to join the Allied, stating that, “throughout the war, Inonu came to the conclusion that Turkey’s biggest problem after the war would be the prospect of facing all alone the most powerful Soviet Union. If Turkey entered the war, the Soviets would occupy Turkey as a member of the Axis or as a liberator.” He also added that “he (Inonu) also foresaw the Soviet post-war domination of Eastern Europe. Hence, he was determined not to give the Soviets an excuse to set foot on Turkish soil.”²⁹⁴ Therefore, this Soviet threat prompted Turkey to shift its stance from neutrality to alignment with Western powers, particularly the United States in hope of American support in case of a Soviet invasion. Consequently, the post-WWII period saw a strategic partnership between Turkey and the United States. Turkey’s geographical position made it a significant ally for the US, because it served as a buffer against the communist expansion in the region. Additionally, Turkey’s membership in NATO allowed it to act as a mediator between the Americans and the Soviets, improving US-Turkish relations during this period.

Factually, the US-Turkish relations were tested several times. For instance, when the Soviets sought control over the Turkish Straits, which were vital to the British oil interests in the Middle East, the US intervened, convincing Turkey to reject the Soviet request. In 1945, America secretly guaranteed its support for the Turkish government, which firmly opposed the Soviet proposal. To demonstrate this commitment, the US immediately sent its Battleship Missouri to Turkey in 1946. Many scholars and politicians, such as Edwin C. Wilson the US ambassador to Turkey at the time, argued that the US support was not only to protect Britain’s interests, but was also part of the broader American strategy to fight the communist expansion. Wilson believed that the Soviet Union aimed to control Turkey, and the US policymakers feared that Turkey’s fall under the Soviet influence

²⁹⁴ Aydin, Mustafa. “Determinants of Turkish Foreign Policy: Changing Patterns and Conjunctures during the Cold War.” *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2000, pp. 103-139.

would facilitate their control over other countries in the region.²⁹⁵ It was, indeed, the same reason that prompted the US in 1947 to announce the Truman Doctrine, providing military and economic assistance to Greece and Turkey. These actions demonstrate Turkey's importance to the United States in its fight against communism.

Turkey continued to support Western and American interests in the region. It was the first majority-Muslim country to recognize Israel as a state in 1949. Additionally, the US-Turkish relations strengthened during the Korean War, when Turkey sent 4,500 troops to Korea, boosting its reputation in the West and helping it gain NATO membership in 1952.²⁹⁶ These events, indeed, enhanced good relations between the US and Turkey during the 1950s. Treaties were signed to reinforce partnership and cooperation between the two states, including the Turkey-US Military Facilities Agreement in 1954, which allowed the United States to establish military bases in Turkey. However, relations deteriorated in the 1960s and 1970s due to the Cyprus issue.²⁹⁷ The US position on the problem demonstrated that Turkey could be abandoned at any time; consequently, it started to reconsider its reliance on America. In 1969, the Bilateral Defense Cooperation Agreement was signed, which forced the US to recognize the Turkish sovereignty over all of American military installations within the state. In fact, Turkey's concerns were validated following the escalation of the Cyprus problem, when it intervened militarily and seized control over 40% of the island. In response, the US imposed a military embargo on Turkey and stopped all arms sales in 1975. Relations between Ankara and Washington severely strained. It was not until the 1980s that the two countries reconciled due to the American support of the military coup in Turkey, and the signing of a Defense and Economic Cooperation Agreement on March 29, 1980. However, the resurgence of the Cyprus and Armenian issues worsened the situation once more. It was, indeed, Turgut Ozal and Ronald Reagan's shared perspectives on these issues that helped stabilize the US-Turkish relations.

Despite tensions between the United States and Turkey in the 1970s and 1980s, pressures of the Cold War forced Washington to support Ankara with military and

²⁹⁵ Kayaoglu, Barin. "Cold War in the Aegean: Strategic imperatives, Democratic Rhetoric: The United States and Turkey, 1945-1952." *Cold War History*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2009, pp. 321-345.

²⁹⁶ Kayaoglu, Barin.

²⁹⁷ For more details on the Cyprus problem, see Barston, Ronald P. "Cyprus: The Unresolved Problem 1963-70." *India Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 2, 1971, pp. 114-121.

economic aid. In 1984, US military aid to Turkey reached \$715 million.²⁹⁸ However, with the end of the Cold War, Turkey's status as a favoured ally diminished. The argument for its geographical importance became invalid after the Soviet threat disappeared; thus, Turkey was obliged to seek new strategies to secure the American support in the emerging post-Soviet world.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO started to face new challenges, including ethnic tensions, terrorism, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In this new political environment, Turkey needed to demonstrate its capability to handle the evolving NATO missions in order to maintain its importance among the Western countries. The first test for Turkey came with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. In fact, the Gulf War put the Turkish state in a difficult situation, as involvement contradicted its policy of non-engagement in Middle Eastern affairs. However, it was a crucial moment for Turkey to prove that it was still a reliable ally to the West, particularly the United States. Moreover, staying out of the conflict would negatively impact Turkey's position regionally, while other states were re-shaping the political status of the Middle East. Consequently, Ankara decided to side with the United States and the coalition forces, participating in the war against Saddam Hussein's army. The war ended with the defeat of Iraq and the liberation of Kuwait; however, the Turkish government found itself facing a new dilemma: a large influx of Iraqi Kurdish refugees who escaped into Turkish territories for fear of Saddam's retaliation. According to Mustafa Aydin, this situation "presented Turkey with both a refugee problem of unprecedented proportions and a political problem, since the sensibility of its own Kurdish question for Turkey made it of far-reaching importance; thus, left Turkey with an immediate dilemma." He also added that "it was feared that an influx of Iraqi Kurdish refugees in Turkey for an undetermined time period might have a radicalizing effect on Turkish Kurds. Moreover, security problems were presented by the possibility of infiltration by the PKK guerrillas into Turkey with refugees."²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ "Around the World; U.S. and Turkey agree on Military Cooperation." *The New York Times*. www.nytimes.com/1984/02/19/world/around-the-world-us-and-turkey-agree-on-military-cooperation.html. Accessed 1 May 2022.

²⁹⁹ Aydin, Mustafa. *Turkish Foreign Policy during the Gulf War of 1990-1991*. American University in Cairo Press, 1998. p. 50.

Despite its involvement in the Gulf War, Turkey later criticized the United States for not compensating its economic losses, estimated at about \$30 billion.³⁰⁰ The US was also blamed for the creation of a no-fly zone in northern Iraq, which became a safe haven for the PKK to increase its military operations against the Turkish army. Despite these criticisms, Ankara and Washington managed to maintain stable relations by the late 1990s. In 1999, the US described its relations with Turkey as a strategic partnership, recognizing the importance of Turkey to the United States.³⁰¹ Relations further strengthened following the September 11, 2001 attacks, as both countries joined US-led counterterrorism efforts. Turkey's long struggle against the PKK made it supportive of the US fight on terrorists, leading to strong Turkish support for the American war in Afghanistan in 2001. However, the situation deteriorated following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Anticipating the negative consequences, Turkey refused to support the invasion, leading to tensions between Ankara and Washington. In fact, the US viewed Turkey's refusal as a major setback in their relationship.

3.2.3. Turkey's Kurdish Question in the US Foreign Policy

As a matter of fact, it has been agreed that the Kurdish problem in Turkey emerged due to the repression and discrimination that the Kurds faced by the Turkish authorities. However, it is important to recognize that the external powers, particularly the United States, also played a crucial role, in a way or another, in escalating the Kurdish conflict in Turkey. To understand the point, we must revisit the early interactions between the Ottoman Empire and the United States. Although the US did not have a clear and direct foreign policy towards the empire due to its isolationist policy, American missionaries in the region during the early 1880s paved the way for the development of US-Ottoman relations. While these missionaries failed to convert some ethnic minorities to Christianity, they managed to provoke sectarian conflicts among the different elements in the empire, using divide and rule policy which ultimately weakened the unity of the Ottoman state.

When Turkey became an independent republic in 1923, a Turkish-American treaty was signed in Lausanne on August 6, 1923, leading to the establishment of formal

³⁰⁰ Dinc, Cengiz, and Mustafa Yetim. "Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy Toward the Middle East: From Non-Involvement to a Leading Role." *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2012, pp. 67-84.

³⁰¹ Pearson, Robert W. "The United States and Turkey: A Model of Sustained Engagement." *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2002, pp. 53-61.

relations between the two countries in 1927. Yet, the United States' isolationist policy during the interwar period restricted bilateral relations primarily to commercial activities. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the US State Department instructed its diplomats not to criticize or intervene in Turkey's domestic policies. For this, the major Kurdish revolts that took place during these decades and the harsh oppressive policies pursued by Kemal's government against the Kurdish population were largely ignored by the United States.³⁰²

However, the situation altered in the aftermath of World War II when the US policy shifted from isolationism to internationalism. The Cold War forced America to seek alliances with many countries in order to contain the spread of the Soviet influence. The Kurds, who constitute the largest ethnic group in the Middle East, were considered as a major threat that could destabilize the region and threaten the American interests. In this context, the US ambassador in Moscow stated in October 1945 that the Turkish Kurds should not be underestimated, as they could jeopardize Turkey's integrity if they were supported by external powers.³⁰³ Nevertheless, in September 1950, when American and British diplomats met in London to discuss the importance of the Kurds in the Middle East, the British reassured the Americans, arguing that the Kurds could not have such an effective role because they had never been united or well organized, and their rebellions had been poorly planned.³⁰⁴

In the late 1950s, there was a strong fear of Soviet influence over the Kurdish people in the Middle East. In 1959, the Shah of Iran expressed concern to the US President Eisenhower that the Soviets were inciting the Kurds through Cairo Radio to rebel against their governments. However, Turkey's ability to control its Kurdish population and suppress all forms of opposition prevented the emergence of Kurdish uprisings during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. The US-Turkish strategic alliances during these decades kept Washington from criticizing Turkey's violations of the Kurdish rights, as it viewed these issues as internal matters that did not concern the United States.

³⁰² Kuçukkeles, Mujge, and Jeffrey Mankoff. "The Kurdish Question and US-Turkish Relations in a Changing Middle East." *Atlantic Council*, March 2014.
www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/the-kurdish-question-and-us-turkish-relations-in-a-changing-middle-east/.

³⁰³ Meho, Lokman I. *The Kurdish Question in U.S. Foreign Policy: A Documentary Source book*, Praeger Publishers, 2004, pp. 414-421.

³⁰⁴ Meho, Lokman I.

In the 1980s, the American policy towards the Kurds continued to be shaped by the Cold War events. During this period, American-Turkish relations remained stable, which limited any US serious criticism of Turkey's harsh policies towards its Kurdish population. This was evident during a State Department's Conference on June 15, 1988, where the spokesman stated that "US policy is that Kurds should satisfy their aspirations peacefully within the framework of the existing states. The United States does not interfere in the internal affairs of those countries."³⁰⁵ Additionally, the State Department's Country Report on Human Rights Practices deliberately downplayed Turkey's human rights violations against the Kurds in the years 1986, 1987 and 1988; instead, it emphasized Turkey's efforts to improve human rights of all citizens. However, the situation changed in 1989 when a report highlighted numerous human rights violations in Turkey, stating that "continuing instances of torture was the principal human rights problem in 1989."³⁰⁶ The report also criticized the state's failure to address issues of punishment and torture, as well as its severe restrictions on the civic freedoms, including the cultural rights of the Kurds.

Congressional criticism of Turkey's Kurdish human rights abuses increased during early and mid-1990s. In a correspondence to the Secretary of State James Baker in November 1991, the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs Lee Hamilton stressed Turkey's bad treatment of the Kurds, based on the violations recorded by Helsinki Watch. However, Baker claimed that Turkey took such strict measures as a response to the increasing number of terrorist attacks on the country. He also emphasized that Turkey was a democratic and secular state that ensured justice and freedom for all citizens, regardless of their religious or ethnic backgrounds. In 1994, Hamilton raised again the case of the Kurds in Turkey. He sent a letter to the State Department in which he insisted that it was necessary to consider the political, social and economic requirements of the Kurds in order to find a feasible solution to the Kurdish problem. Peter Tarnoff, Acting Secretary, told Hamilton that the US would continue to encourage Turkey to solve the issue peacefully.³⁰⁷

Indeed, the US military played a crucial role in backing Turkey in its conflict with the PKK during the 1990s. According to an American corporal who stationed at a US Air

³⁰⁵ Meho, Lokman I. p. 481.

³⁰⁶ "Turkey: Human Rights Developments." *Human Rights Watch*.
www.hrw.org/reports/1990/WR90/HELSINKI.BOU-04.htm. Accessed 28 Apr. 2022.

³⁰⁷ Meho, Lokman I. pp. 248-249.

Force base in Turkey, American staff members were providing intelligence about Kurdish rebels to the Turkish military, which conducted raids on civilian homes to pursue the Kurdish fighters.³⁰⁸ Additionally, a US F-15 pilot declared that there were cameras on his aircraft used to capture the positions of PKK militants in the highlands and the mountainous regions.³⁰⁹ Following the 1991 US intervention in Iraqi Kurdistan to protect the Kurds from Saddam Hussein's atrocities, American and Turkish officers were left in the Iraqi city of Zakho to oversee the activities of Operation Provide Comfort. In return for this support, the Iraqi Kurds were pressured to assist the Turkish army in its fight against the PKK. In other words, Turkey imposed control over the Iraqi Kurds and threatened to cut off food and medical supplies on the Turkish borders if the Kurds in Iraq refused to cooperate with the Turkish government.

Moreover, the significant increase in the US arms sales to Turkey demonstrates the American support of Turkey in its conflict with the Kurdish population. William Hartung, an analyst at the World Policy Institute, reported that American companies sold Turkey \$9.4 billion in weapons to aid its fight against the Kurdish insurgency from the mid-1980s to late 1990s, describing this as "far and away the biggest use of weapons and most aggressive use anywhere in the world."³¹⁰ Additionally, Turkey received \$5 billion in US military aid, some of which was used to buy weapons from American corporations.³¹¹ The following tables illustrate the substantial volume of US arms transfers to Turkey.

Table 3.1. Total Dollar Value of US Arms Deliveries to Turkey through the Direct Commercial Sales (DCS) and Foreign Military Sales (FMS) Programs from FY 1950 TO 1998 (Dollars in thousands)

Fiscal Year	DCS	FMS	Total
FY 1950 to FY 1983	63,831	1,132,234	\$1,196,065
FY 1984	26,751	304,907	\$331,658
FY 1985	27,848	389,296	\$417,144

³⁰⁸ McKiernan, Kevin. *The Kurds: A People in Search of their Homeland*. St. Martin's Press, 2006. p. 62.

³⁰⁹ McKiernan, Kevin. p. 65.

³¹⁰ Hartung, William D. "The Role of U.S. Arms Transfers in Human Rights Violations. Rhetoric versus Reality." *World Policy Institute*, 7 Mar. 2001.

www.worldpolicy.org/projects/arms/reports/testimony030701.htm.

³¹¹ Hartung, William D.

FY 1986	23,813	282,300	\$306,113
FY 1987	67,947	277,138	\$345,085
FY 1988	47,464	699,944	\$747,408
FY 1989	342,653	620,929	\$963,582
FY 1990	220,302	760,801	\$981,103
FY 1991	79,922	626,575	\$706,497
FY 1992	37,673	703,369	\$741,042
FY 1993	122,481	755,811	\$878,292
FY 1994	14,824	937,019	\$951,843
FY 1995	162,510	374,425	\$536,935
FY 1996	64,124	482,850	\$546,974
FY 1997	103,866	1,167,109	\$1,270,975
FY 1998* (estimate)	201,000	541,204	742,204
Total 1984 to 1998	\$1,543,178	\$8,923,677	\$10,466,855
Total 1950 to 1998	\$1,607,009	\$10,055,911	\$11,662,920

Source: Foreign Military Sales, Foreign Military Construction Sales and Military Assistance Facts.
apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA219727

Table 3.2. Grant Excess Defense Articles (EDA) under Section 516 to Turkey, FY 1990 to FY 1998

Fiscal Year	Original Acquisition Value
FY 1990	\$56,800,000
FY 1991	\$342,400,000
FY 1992	\$238,300,000
FY 1993	\$626,300,000
FY 1994	\$107,900,000
FY 1995	\$156,900,000
FY 1996	\$18,125,000
FY 1997	\$273,350,000
FY 1998	\$111,547,000
Total	\$1,931,622,000

Source: Foreign Military Sales.

Table 3.3. International Military Education and Training Program (IMET) Assistance Received by Turkey, FY 1950 to FY 1999 (Dollars in thousands)

Fiscal Year	\$ Value	No. of Students
FY 1950 to FY 1983	119,937	20,413
FY 1984	3,160	215
FY 1985	3,297	255
FY 1986	3,075	207
FY 1987	3,375	196

FY 1988	3,461	210
FY 1989	3,408	201
FY 1990	3,371	212
FY 1991	3,552	223
FY 1992	3,288	189
FY 1993	3,032	211
FY 1994	1,006	64
FY 1995	1,102	109
FY 1996	1,095	121
FY 1997	1,454	84
FY 1998	1,505	194
FY 1999 (estimate)	1,500	193
Total 1984 to 1999	\$40,681	2,884
Total 1993 to 1999 (Clinton Administration)	\$10,694	976
Total 1950 to 1999	\$160,618	23,297

Source: Foreign Military Sales.

The United States not only maintained a passive stance towards Turkey's human rights violations against the Kurds, but also indirectly contributed to these abuses by providing support and weapons to the Turkish military, although the US was fully aware that these arms were used for illegal purposes. In June 1995, the State Department reported that "US-origin equipment, which accounts for most major items of the Turkish military inventory, has been used in operations against the PKK during which human rights abuses have occurred."³¹² In the same context, Human Rights Watch noted that "US weapons, as well as those supplied by other NATO members, are regularly used by Turkey to commit severe human rights abuses and violations of the laws of war in the southeast."³¹³ Additionally, a former Turkish soldier described the US indirect involvement in the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, saying that "on August 18-20, 1992, troops used US-supplied M-48 and M-60 tanks, 105 mm artillery, US-supplied M-113 armored personnel carriers, US-designed M-16 rifles, and LAW anti-tank rockets to assault the town of Sirnak following an alleged PKK provocation. Twenty-two civilians died in the assault, sixty were wounded, and many of the town's 25,000 residents fled in panic. Much of the town was destroyed."³¹⁴

³¹² "Weapons Transfers and Violations of the Law of War in Turkey." *Human Rights Watch*, November 1995. www.hrw.org/legacy/summaries/s.turkey95n.html.

³¹³ "Weapons Transfers and Violations of the Law of War in Turkey."

³¹⁴ "Weapons Transfers and Violations of the Law of War in Turkey."

Despite Amnesty International's efforts to urge the Clinton administration to limit military aid and arms sales to Turkey due to its human rights violations, the US declined to link these sales to human rights assessments. The State Department argued that there was nothing objectionable about a friendly or allied country using American weapons to secure internal order or repel an attack against its territorial unity.³¹⁵ In an effort to shift focus away from Turkey's aggressive policies towards the Kurds, in which American weapons were used, the State Department issued a report in 1995 which emphasized the long standing relationship and collaboration between the United States and Turkey within the framework of NATO. The report stressed Turkey's crucial role in promoting Western interests in the Middle East. It also described the PKK as a violent terrorist organization backed by Iran, Syria and other groups who sought to divide Turkey and destabilize the region. On the other hand, the State Department admitted that Turkey used some forms of violence and human rights abuses during its military campaigns against the PKK, including the evacuation and destruction of many Kurdish areas. Therefore, it noted the need for a more civil-based approach by the Turkish government to effectively resolve the problem in the Kurdish region.³¹⁶

In the early 2000s, the United States consolidated its role as a dominant global power, which made the American-Turkish relations increasingly unpredictable. However, the United States' new focus on combating terrorism necessitated a continued US partnership with the Turkish government. In its 2000 annual report, the US State Department praised Turkey for its successful accomplishments in fighting terrorism. Robert Pearson, the US Ambassador in Ankara, stressed the importance of the US-Turkish cooperation in the global war on terror, citing the Turkish army's success in crushing Kurdish rebels in the southeast as an example for the American officials to learn from.³¹⁷

Bilateral relations between the United States and Turkey strengthened following the September 2001 attacks, as both governments decided to cooperate in order to eliminate the terrorists globally. However, history has shown that there is no trust in politics. While Turkey's support for the US intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 was a strong evidence of

³¹⁵ Kirisci, Kemal, and Gareth Winrow. *The Kurdish Question in Turkey: An Example of a Trans-State Ethnic Conflict*. Routledge, 1997. p. 175.

³¹⁶ "Report on Human Rights in Turkey and Situation in Cyprus." *Department of State, Bureau of European Affairs*.

www.fas.org/asmp/profiles/turkey_cyprus_1995.txt. Accessed 17 May 2022.

³¹⁷ Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Turkey: EU Accession and Human Rights*. Pluto Press, 2005. p. 21.

their alliance, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 tested this partnership. Turkey's refusal to allow the US forces to use its territory for a northern front led to the deterioration of relations between Ankara and Washington. Nevertheless, both sides soon recognized that restoring their partnership would serve their mutual interests. As a result, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and then-Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul issued in 2006 a document titled "Shared Vision and Structured Dialogue to Advance the Turkish American Strategic Partnership" which aimed to expand their cooperation to include other areas such as education, science, media and business. The document also stressed the necessity of cooperation to combat terrorism, including the fight against the PKK and its affiliates.³¹⁸

The United States continued to support the Turkish war against the Kurdish militants, and as the PKK attacks intensified in 2007, the US decided to take a more active role in eliminating the PKK, which was classified as a terrorist group. In a meeting in January 2008, Presidents Abdullah Gul and George W. Bush labelled the PKK as a common enemy, and Bush promised to use actionable intelligence to support Turkey's pursuit of PKK groups in Northern Iraq.³¹⁹ On the other hand, the United States insisted that Turkey should seek alternative solutions to the Kurdish problem rather than focusing only on military action. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates emphasized that "security operations should always be accompanied by political and economic initiatives. A long-term solution is possible only if Turkey address the Kurds grievances."³²⁰ Additionally, the United States welcomed the initiatives of Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party, which aimed at easing restrictions on the Kurds within the country and initiating a peace process with the Kurdistan Workers Party. The US also expressed full support for the Kurdish Opening introduced by Recep Tayyip Erdogan in 2009.

3.3. Syria's Kurdish Question in the American Foreign Policy

³¹⁸ Akcapar, Burak. *Turkey's New European Era: Foreign Policy on the Road to EU Membership*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007. p. 147.

³¹⁹ Olson, Robert. "Turkish-Kurdish Relations: A Year of Significant Developments." *Insight Turkey*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2008, pp. 23-51.

³²⁰ "Gates Visits Ankara and Exercises Soft Pressure for the End of the Northern Iraqi Operation." *IN.GR News*, www.in.gr/news/article.asp?lngEntityID=877087&lngDtrID=245. Accessed 2 Jun. 2022

Until 2010, the US policy towards the Kurdish issue in Syria was limited and indirect, as it did not constitute a major priority on the American agenda. Relations between the two states were tense, especially due to Syria's alliance with the Soviet Union and Iran. This negatively affected the US stance on the Syrian Kurds, who faced marginalization, oppression and human rights violations by the Syrian governments.

3.3.1. The Emergence and Development of the Kurdish Issue in Syria

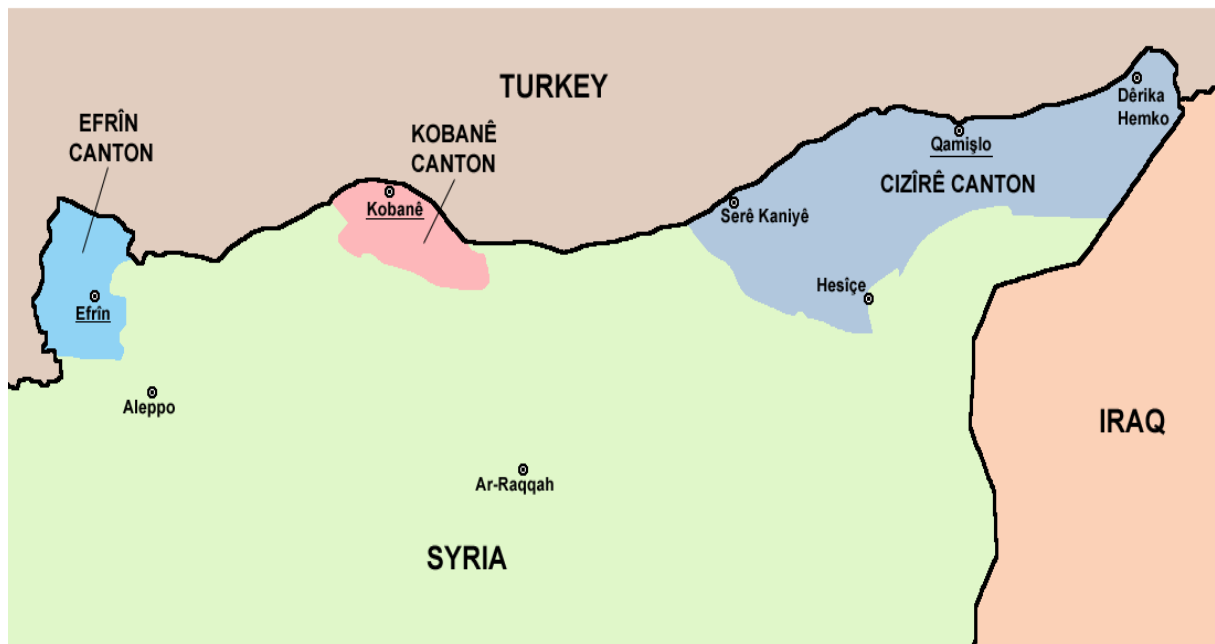
The Kurds are the largest ethnic minority group in Syria, with a population numbering over 1 million, which is about 8.5% to 12% of the country's total population.³²¹ Most Syrian Kurds are Sunni Muslims who speak their own dialect Kurmanji. They live in three main border regions: al-Hassakeh (Jazira), Ain Arab and Afrin (also known as Kurd Dagħ)³²² in addition to significant Kurdish communities in Aleppo and Damascus.³²³ Map 3.2. shows the distribution of the Kurdish population in Syria.

Map 3.2. Kurdish Areas in Syria

³²¹ Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Syria: The Forgotten People*. Pluto Press, 2005. p. 8.

³²² Kurd Dagħ is a Kurdish word which means mountain of the Kurds.

³²³ Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Syria: The Forgotten People*.



Source: The Kurdish Project. thekurdishproject.org/kurdistan-map/syrian-kurdistan/. Accessed 30 Jan. 2021.

National awareness among the Kurdish community in Syria developed later than in the neighboring states due to many reasons, including their geographical position. Situated in the outskirts of the Great Kurdistan region, the Syrian Kurds were not aware of the events happened in the other parts of Kurdistan during the Ottoman rule. Additionally, since the Syrian Kurds were mostly peasants and nomads, they were excluded from the social and political developments of the time.³²⁴ Hence, it was not until after World War I that national consciousness started to spread among them. The new circumstances that followed the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of the Middle East nation-states resulted in the division of Kurdistan into four different countries, leaving a relatively small number of Kurds under the French mandate in Syria.

During the French mandate, the Kurds were granted some cultural rights. They were allowed to speak their own language and practice their customs and traditions. The Kurdish elite were granted positions of power, and some were recruited to the police and military.³²⁵ In fact, the French policy of favoring minorities, including the Kurds, over the

³²⁴ Fuccoro, Nelida. "Minorities and Ethnic Mobilisation: The Kurds in Northern Iraq and Syria." in *British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspectives*. ed. Meouchy, Nadine, and Peter Sluglett. Brill, 2003. p. 581.

³²⁵ McQuade, Laila, and Nabil Al-Tikriti. "The Limits of Soft Power: Why Kurdish Nationalism Failed in the French Mandate of Syria." in *The First World War and its Aftermath: The Shaping of the Modern Middle East*, edited by TG Fraser, Gingko Library, 2015. pp. 255-272.

Arab majority led to divided Kurdish view on the French mandatory system. Some Kurds supported France, believing that it benefited their interests more than aligning with the Syrian Arabs. Others; however, supported the Arabs, hoping to unite as a single Muslim community, as they had been during the Ottoman rule.³²⁶

The French, indeed, exploited the Kurds to maintain control over Syria more easily. They managed to apply divide and rule strategy to fight Pan-Arab nationalism, by supporting ethnic, religious, and sectarian minorities to weaken the Syrian Arab resistance. Security forces, known as les Troupes Spéciales de Levant, were composed of minorities such as Kurds, Alawites and Druze, who were used to crush Arab uprisings against the French. This approach worsened relations between the Arab majority and minorities in Syria.

Due to their strategic position along the Syrian-Turkish borders, the Kurds were very significant to France, especially in the context of the French-Turkish dispute over the Alexandretta province. Syrian Kurds were allowed some form of local autonomy in the Kurdish regions of Syria in exchange for protecting the border with Turkey. However, they sought independence, arguing that they were best suited to serve as a buffer along the Syrian-Turkish border.³²⁷ In a letter sent to the High Commissioner in 1924, the chiefs of the Kurdish tribes in Jazira stated:

The Kurds are courageous guardians of Syria's northern borders. They are prepared, at your signal, to prove their loyalty through self-sacrifice. We know of no Syrian people to make you such a promise. Your honest and loyal Kurdish friends can be useful. An independent Kurdistan in the North of Syria would constitute a powerful barrier between the Turks and Arabs.³²⁸

According to Jordi Tejel, the letter indicates that the Kurds were trying to obtain their rights through cooperation with the French rather than fighting them. It also demonstrates that national awareness among the Syrian Kurds began to develop before the influx of the Kurdish refugees from Turkey in 1925.³²⁹

³²⁶ McQuade, Laila, and Nabil Al-Tikriti.

³²⁷ McQuade, Laila, and Nabil Al-Tikriti. p. 261.

³²⁸ McQuade, Laila, and Nabil Al-Tikriti.

³²⁹ Tejel, Jordi. *Syria's Kurds: History, Politics and Society*. Routledge, 2009. p. 198.

In fact, the Turkish refugees who fled to Syria following Sheikh Said revolt in 1925 contributed to boosting national sentiments among the Kurds in Syria. The Kurdish political party Khoybun was established under the leadership of Jaladet Badir Khan. The party paved the way for the spread of Kurdish nationalism, and the Syrian Kurds began to recognize the need to defend their existence as a distinct group within the country. Khoybun was mostly composed of elites, tribal chiefs and former military members. It managed to establish friendly relations with the Western powers, particularly the French; however, it failed to win support in the other Kurdish regions in the neighboring states due to disunity among the Kurds. Khoybun made several demands, including the recognition of Kurdish as an official language, the creation of Kurdish schools, and the recruitment of Kurdish administrators in the Kurdish regions. However, these demands were rejected, and Sabri Osman, one of the party's prominent founders, was exiled to Madagascar.³³⁰

The French largely tolerated the party's activities, not out of support, but because the party was used as a tool to threaten the Turkish internal stability during times of conflicts. However, whenever relations between France and Turkey improved, the French often sided with Ankara over the Syrian Kurds. In 1928, for instance, the French authorities ordered to close the party's headquarters in Aleppo in order to appease Turkey, and the Kurds were allowed to continue their activities elsewhere in Syria.³³¹ After the failure of the Ararat Revolt launched by the Turkish Kurds in 1930, the Khoybun party changed its strategy from armed to peaceful resistance, focusing on strengthening Kurdish identity. In 1932, Jaladet Badir Khan launched the Kurdish newspaper Hawar, which aimed to enhance the Kurdish identity through writings, poetry, art and folklore.

The French policy of favoring minorities worsened relations between Arabs and Kurds in Syria. Tensions increased in 1937 following the establishment of the first centralized Arab national government in Damascus, ignoring the rest of minority groups. The French disregarded Kurdish nationalist appeals for autonomous government, granting national government status to the Arabs, because the Kurds were not considered as threatening as Arab nationalists in a sensitive period for France when the Second World War was on the verge of outbreak. In response, the Kurds launched several uprisings, such as the Amouda revolt in the Jazira region, to protest Arab dominance of the central

³³⁰ McQuade, Laila, and Nabil Al-Tikriti. p. 262.

³³¹ McQuade, Laila, and Nabil Al-Tikriti. p. 264.

government. To calm the Kurds, the French created a special administrative system in the Kurdish region of Jazira, allowing the Kurds some autonomy to establish their own social and cultural organizations. However, this solution increased hostility between Arabs and Kurds, who were seen as separatists and a source of ethnic problems in the country.³³²

As a matter of fact, the 1936 Franco-Syrian Treaty was the tipping point for the Kurds. They soon realized that they had been used by the French to serve their interests, and that the French policy of favoring minorities was just a divide and rule tactic to weaken the country in order to facilitate its control. Consequently, the Kurds began to reconsider their relations with the Arabs. They decided to join the Syrian Arab forces in the war to liberate the country from the French colonizers, and they fought fiercely for Syria's independence.³³³ However, following the end of the French mandate, the Syrian government's policy towards the Kurdish population changed dramatically. Instead of being rewarded for fighting alongside the Arabs, the Kurds faced discrimination and oppression under successive Arab nationalist regimes.

When Syria became independent in 1946, many Kurds, particularly those who lived in the urban cities like Damascus and Aleppo, supported the new Arab nationalist government. However, most rural Kurds, such as the Badr Khan family, continued to advocate for Kurdish independence. They were willing to use any means to reach their goal. During the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, Kamuran Ali Badr Khan was in Paris, serving as the spokesman of the Kurdish nationalism while also working for Israeli intelligence. In July of the same year, Kamuran was sent to Syria, Lebanon and Transjordan to find a way to obstruct the Arab participation in the conflict. He suggested that Israel should back the uprisings of the opposition minorities, including the Kurds, to create instability in these Arab countries and weaken them. Although this proposal was not implemented by the Israelis, it contributed largely to increase Syria's concerns and distrust towards the Kurds.³³⁴

Since 1950s, the Syrian Kurds started to face several serious challenges, especially following Syria's adoption of Arab Nationalism and the establishment of the United Arab Republic (UAR) in 1958. Accordingly, the Arab authorities took measures to curb the

³³² Hendriques, John. *Syria : Issues and Historical Background*. Nova Science Publishers, 2003. p. 121.

³³³ McDowall, David. p. 471.

³³⁴ McDowall, David.

Kurdish identity in order to create a pure Arab state. A decree was passed in 1958 which banned all publications in Kurdish and prohibited the use of Kurmanji in public schools and sectors. Names of towns and villages were changed from Kurdish to Arabic, such as Kobane which was renamed as Ayn al-Arab. Kurdish traditions and celebrations, including Newroz, were also banned, and parents were not allowed to give their children Kurdish names. These actions, indeed, were taken against the Kurds in Syria as part of the broader Arabization project.³³⁵ Two other factors explain these anti-Kurdish policies. First, Barzani's revolt against the Iraqi government, which increased fears of similar uprisings in the Kurdish regions of Syria. Second, the large grain and oil production in the Kurdish areas, which made them economically significant, increasing the government concerns about potential Kurdish secession.³³⁶

In response to injustice and discrimination, the Kurds started to defend their rights through political entities. The Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria (KDPS) was founded in 1957 by Kurdish intellectuals, calling for the recognition of the Kurdish people as a distinct group in the country and demanding their inclusion in the administration. The party won a large support among the Kurdish population; however, it was attacked by the state authorities in 1960, leading to the imprisonment of its Secretary General Nurredin Zaza, along with other leaders. Their arrest, indeed, resulted in a split within the party's members: some supported Zaza, believing that the Syrian Kurds were a minority but not a nation, while others backed Sabri, arguing that the Kurdish nation was the core ideal of the movement.³³⁷ Mediation efforts by Mustafa Barzani in 1970 failed to reconcile factions, resulting in the original party dividing into three parties namely the KDPS el-Parti, the Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party in Syria (KDPPS), and the Left Party. However, none of these parties dared to demand autonomy or independence, nor did they call for the use of violence as a means of protest. Their sole objective was constitutional recognition of the Kurds as a minority group with rights equal to those of other Syrian citizens. In fact, this peaceful approach distinguished the Kurds of Syria from those in the neighboring countries, particularly in Turkey and Iraq.

³³⁵ Yildiz, Kerim. p. 32.

³³⁶ Allsopp, Harriett. *The Kurds of Syria: Political Parties and Identity in the Middle East*. I. B. Tauris, 2014. p. 19.

³³⁷ Allsopp, Harriett. p. 78.

In fact, the dissolution of the UAR on September 28, 1961 and the declaration of Syria as an Arab republic was a setback for the Kurdish aspirations. Naming the country an Arab republic was a clear and direct indication that it belonged to the Arab majority, demonstrating the government's intent to deny recognition to the non-Arabs. Since then, policies of assimilation and Arabization intensified, leading to increased persecution of minority groups, especially the Kurds.

On October 5, 1962, a census was conducted in the Hasakah province under Decree N° 93, which was signed in August 1962 by the Republic's then-President Nazim al-Quds. The Syrian authorities argued that the census aimed to identify the Kurds who had infiltrated to Syria from Turkey following the 1925 Sheikh Said revolt and obtained Syrian citizenship and identity cards illegally. The census was done arbitrarily in only one day, resulting in the disenfranchisement of thousands of Kurds from their citizenship. Overnight, these Kurds, who had been Syrian citizens, found themselves stateless in their country of birth. In fact, many Kurds did not participate in the census for two main reasons: some found it impossible to prove their residency within one single day, while others feared forced conscription into the Syrian army.³³⁸

Based on the census, the Kurdish people were divided into three categories: Kurds with Syrian citizenship, foreign Kurds (ajanib) who were given white cards stating that their names were not on the registration lists of Syrians for Hasakah, and unregistered Kurds (Maktumeen) who were not registered in any official records, as if they did not exist. The census resulted in the denaturalization of between 120,000 and 150,000 Kurds, leaving them and subsequently their descendents deprived of their basic rights.³³⁹ Additionally, the numbers of the stateless Kurds increased, since children born to ajanib parents were considered foreigners, while those born to maktumeen fathers and Syrian mothers, or to ajanib fathers and maktumeen mothers, or to both maktumeen parents became automatically unregistered (maktumeen).

In fact, the Kurds affected by the 1962 census were stripped of their basic civil rights, including education, employment, voting, property and travel. Hence, the census was deeply unfair, with some members of the same families recognized as Syrian citizens,

³³⁸ Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Syria: The Forgotten People*. p. 34.

³³⁹ Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Syria: The Forgotten People*.

while others were not. Despite many complaints from the affected Kurds, successive Syrian governments failed to find appropriate solutions for the issue, which remains unresolved to this present day. Despite International Law guarantees the right to a nationality for all people,³⁴⁰ the Syrian authorities violated this right for thousands of Kurds by denying them the right to nationality.³⁴¹

When the Ba'ath party seized power in a coup in 1963, the policies of assimilation and Arabization were intensified. This period coincided with a study titled "Study of the National, Social and Political Aspects of the Province of Jazira" by Lt Muhammad Talab Hilal, a security chief in the Hasakah Province. In his report, Hilal described the Kurds as enemies and a malignant tumour in the Arab nation.³⁴² To fight against what he considered as Kurdish danger, Hilal proposed a twelve-point plan that aimed to enhance Arabism in the region in order to eliminate the Kurdish threat. The plan included creating an Arab belt along the border with Turkey by evacuating the Kurds and replacing them with loyal Arabs. It also proposed some measures to impose more restrictions on the Kurds, including depriving them the right to education and employment. Moreover, Hilal suggested using a divide and rule strategy to create internal divisions within the Kurdish society in Syria.³⁴³ Although the central government eagerly desired to control the Kurds and their areas, the Hilal plan was not fully implemented until the early 1970, even though some points were already put into action following the 1962 census.

In November 1970, Hafez al-Assad became Syria's president and continued the policy of Arab nationalism to control the country. Assad, in fact, used two methods to enforce his rule on the Syrians: force and violence, including abductions, detention, and torture for anyone who opposed the state's regime; on the other hand, the president claimed to be playing the role of the devoted and protective father committed to safeguarding the country and its people. While the first repressive method was done in

³⁴⁰ Article 15 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "Everyone has the right to a nationality. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality." *United Nation*, www.ohchr.org/en/nationality-and-statelessness/international-standards-relating-nationality-and-statelessness#:~:text=Article%2015%20of%20the%201948,right%20to%20change%20his%20nationality. Accessed 12 Apr. 2021.

³⁴¹ It is worth noting that the denaturalization process took place at a time when western companies, especially the American ones, started oil extraction. This caused Syrian state's fears of 'conspiracy with the goal of establishing non-Arab ethnic groups within the Syrian crude-oil triangle.' Thus, the government decided to deprive the Kurds of their right to property in order to give land to loyal Arabs.

³⁴² Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Syria: The Forgotten People*. pp. 35-36.

³⁴³ Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Syria: The Forgotten People*.

secret, the second was publicly promoted to show a good and positive image of the Syrian regime.³⁴⁴ This approach; however, did not allow people to have a neutral position, as they had either to support the Assad's Ba'athist government or oppose it, knowing that dissent could lead to severe consequences. As a result, the Syrians had no choice but to express loyalty to the Assad regime. Wedeen stated that under Assad's rule, everyone is both a victim and a supporter of the system.³⁴⁵

Under the government of Hafez al-Assad, which adopted Arabism as its basic principle, ethnic minority groups, particularly the Kurds, were considered as a threat to the national unity. This led to increased discrimination and repression against them. In 1973, al-Assad ordered to implement the Arab Belt program, which required the Kurdish families who lived along the Syrian-Turkish-Iraqi border to leave their homes and move to other non-Kurdish interior cities. They were replaced by Arab settlers known as Maghmurin,³⁴⁶ with the aim of changing the demographic composition of the region. These incoming Arabs were provided with homes and agricultural loans, which attracted many other Arabs to move from their original areas and settle in the homes of the deported Kurds.³⁴⁷ A Kurdish engineer interviewed by Human Rights Watch described the situation, stating:

The government built them homes for free, gave them weapons, seeds and fertilizer, and created agricultural banks that provided loans. From 1973 to 1975, forty-one villages were created in this strip, beginning ten kilometers west of Ras al-'Ayn. The idea was to separate Turkish and Syrian Kurds, and to force Kurds in the area to move away to the cities. Any Arab could settle in Hasakeh, but no Kurd was permitted to move and settle there.³⁴⁸

In fact, these demographic changes negatively affected the Kurds in Syria. Many were left unemployed and poor as their source of income was based on agriculture and grazing. Additionally, separating the Kurds and isolating them from the other Kurdish

³⁴⁴ Schott, Anne Sofie. "The Kurds of Syria: From the Forgotten People to World-Stage Actors." *Royal Danish Defence College*, 2017, p. 10.

³⁴⁵ Schott, Anne Sofie.

³⁴⁶ Maghmurin is an Arabic term refers to the Syrian Arabs whose lands were flooded following the filling of the Tabqa Dam in 1973.

³⁴⁷ Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Syria: The Forgotten People*. pp. 36-37.

³⁴⁸ Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Syria: The Forgotten People*. p. 37.

communities in the neighboring countries significantly weakened the Kurdish national movement in Syria.

Despite the Ba'ath regime's harsh policies towards the Kurds, some were allowed to attain high positions, such as Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaru who was appointed as Syria's Grand Mufti, and Mahmud Ayoubi who served as Prime Minister from 1972 to 1976. Actually, these Kurds were generally used by the Syrian authorities as evidence of equality and justice towards the Kurds within the country. However, some Kurdish activists argued that these individuals were selected because of their loyalty to the Syrian regime, and that without this allegiance, they would never have such positions.³⁴⁹

The state's oppressive policies continued during the 1980s and 1990s. The Ba'athist regime sought to erase the Kurdish identity by imposing Arabic identity on the Kurdish population. This included banning the use of the Kurdish language in public places and schools, prohibiting Kurdish songs and music at weddings and festivities, and forbidding the celebrations of Kurdish ceremonies such as Nowruz. Names of villages and cities were changed to Arabic, and even newborns were denied the right to have Kurdish names.³⁵⁰ Despite these repressive measures, the Kurds did not dare to protest; the Syrian regime's brutal policies effectively silenced them and made them wary of engaging in any political activity for fear of extermination.

While oppressing its Kurdish population, the Assad administration publicly advocated for Kurdish rights in Iraq and Turkey, aiming at inciting Kurdish national sentiments in these neighbouring countries to destabilize and weaken them. At the same time, Syria used the Iraqi and Turkish Kurds as mediators to convince the Syrian Kurds to refrain from demanding any national rights. In return, Syria became a safe haven for the PUK and PKK, providing them with weapons and training bases.³⁵¹ However, in the late 1990's, Syria's stance on the Kurdish issue in the neighbouring states changed due to some internal and external factors. In 1998, Syria, pressured by Turkey, withdrew its support for the PKK and forced Abdullah Ocalan to leave Damascus. Additionally,

³⁴⁹ "Group Denial: Repression of Kurdish Political and Cultural Rights in Syria." *Human Rights Watch*, 26 Nov. 2009. www.hrw.org/report/2009/11/26/group-denial/repression-kurdish-political-and-cultural-rights-syria.

³⁵⁰ Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Syria: The Forgotten People*. pp. 117-120.

³⁵¹ "Group Denial: Repression of Kurdish Political and Cultural Rights in Syria."

Assad's relations with the Iraqi Kurdish leadership deteriorated as a result of his reconciliation with the Iraqi president Saddam Hussein.

The coming of Bashar al-Assad to power, following his father's death in June 2000, did not bring any notable changes regarding the Kurdish problem in Syria. However, events in Iraq intensified tensions between the Arab majority and the Kurdish minority in Syria, as the Arabs accused both Iraqi and Syrian Kurds of supporting the 2003 US invasion of Iraq. On March 12, 2004, a football match in the Kurdish city of Qamishli between a local team and a team from Deir al Zor sparked violent events from which many Kurds are still suffering the consequences to the present day. Tensions between supporters of both teams escalated, especially after raising and chanting political slogans. Severe clashes broke out, requiring the intervention of security forces which used fire on the crowd, resulting in the death of at least seven Kurds and numerous injuries.³⁵² The next day, thousands of people gathered at the funerals, expressing their anger through political slogans and Kurdish symbols. Instead of calming the situation, the police and demonstrators engaged in clashes, during which security forces fired live bullets once again, killing and wounding several people. In the aftermath of these events, many Kurds in Qamishli were detained, regardless of their involvement in the protests.³⁵³

Indeed, the assassination of the Kurdish religious leader Sheikh Ma'shuq al-Khaznawi in May 2005 fuelled unrest and conflict between the Kurds and the Syrian regime. The causes of death remained unclear, and many Kurds accused the authorities of killing him, especially because Sheikh Khaznawi had met with members of the Muslim Brotherhood and had spoken out about the situation of the repressed Kurdish people.³⁵⁴ Hundreds of Kurds demonstrated following his funeral; however, they were attacked by the police, who arrested nearly sixty protesters.³⁵⁵ In response, the Syrian authorities imposed further restrictions on Kurdish gatherings. In April 2008, the Office of National Security ordered "prohibiting any gathering or protest or celebration without the approval of the Ministry of Interior, and forbidding the raising of Kurdish flags and referring those who raise them to the State Security Court on the accusation of treason and attempt to cut

³⁵² "Group Denial: Repression of Kurdish Political and Cultural Rights in Syria."

³⁵³ Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Syria: The Forgotten People*. p. 42.

³⁵⁴ "Group Denial: Repression of Kurdish Political and Cultural Rights in Syria."

³⁵⁵ "Group Denial: Repression of Kurdish Political and Cultural Rights in Syria."

a part of Syria.”³⁵⁶ Actually, the government used several violent ways in an attempt to silence the Kurds and force them to abandon their demands; however, these efforts remained ineffective and contributed to intensify the conflict between the Syrian regime and its Kurdish minority group.

3.3.2. The US Stance on the Syrian Kurds

Following the establishment of the French mandate in Syria in 1920, the Syrian Kurds began to emerge as a distinct group. The hope sparked by Wilson’s Fourteen Points, which promised the Kurds autonomy and independence, immediately diminished after signing the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Despite the American ideals of liberties and people’s right to self-determination, the United States, indeed, remained silent, unable to confront Western imperial ambitions. Two main reasons justified this US passive stance: its isolationist policy during the interwar years, which obliged its non-intervention in foreign issues, and the lack of US geostrategic interests for supporting the Kurds, especially as France did not represent any threat for the American interests in the region.³⁵⁷

However, the economic losses caused by World War II left France unable to sustain its presence in Syria; therefore, the French decided to withdraw from the country in exchange for the 1948 Marshall Plan, which provided US financial assistance to France to repair the war damage.³⁵⁸ When Syria became independent in 1946, it joined the Soviet camp against the US which was considered as an alternative to the Western imperial powers (France and Britain). During the beginning of the Cold War, the United States attempted to convince Syria to join the Western side, but when these efforts failed, America decided to overthrow the Syrian government and install a pro-Western regime; however, both Operation Straggle in 1956 and Operation Wappen in 1957 failed.³⁵⁹ In these operations, America relied on officers in the Syrian army to execute the coup, while it ignored the Syrian Kurds who could prove effective in destabilizing the internal situation to help overthrow the regime. This demonstrates that the Kurds in Syria lost their power and influence compared to their role during the French mandate.

³⁵⁶ “Group Denial: Repression of Kurdish Political and Cultural Rights in Syria.”

³⁵⁷ Yilmaz, Suhanaz. “Challenging the Stereotypes: Turkish-American Relations in the Inter-War Era.” *Turkish Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2009, pp. 109-129.

³⁵⁸ Fieldhouse, David K. *Western Imperialism in the Middle East 1914-1958*. Oxford University Press, 2008. p. 327.

³⁵⁹ Gorst, Anthony, and Scott Lucas. “The Other Collusion: Operation Straggle and Anglo-American Intervention in Syria, 1955-56.” *Intelligence and National Security*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1989, pp. 576-595.

The rise of Israel as an important player in the region during the 1960s contributed greatly to shift the US policy towards Syria from a hostile to a more accommodating stance. Now, the US found itself obliged to maintain stability in the region as much as possible to protect its ally Israel, especially following the 1967 June War, which resulted in the Zionist occupation of the Syrian Golan Heights. In the wake of the war, Syria severed diplomatic relations with America; however, Henry Kissinger successfully managed to broker a ceasefire between Syria and Israel after the 1973 Yom Kippur War.³⁶⁰ US-Syrian relations were restored in 1974, but safeguarding Israel remained a top priority for the United States, making it wary of having new conflicts in the region. For this, the United States decided to overlook the abuses of Kurdish rights in Syria, including the loss of citizenship and other rights for many Kurds.³⁶¹

Moreover, events that took place in the Middle East during the late 1970s and the 1980s, such as the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran and the Iraq-Iran War (1980-1988) were of great importance and required American intervention. Thus any involvement with the Syrian Kurds at that time could have created further unnecessary problems in the region. Consequently, the US continued its policy of ignoring the violations of the Kurdish rights in Syria throughout the eighties.³⁶²

After the end of the Cold War and the emergence of the United States as a unilateral power in the early 1990s, Syria was forced to reconsider its relations with the West, particularly with America. Relations between the two countries improved significantly, and the US successfully convinced Syria to begin peace negotiations with Israel.³⁶³ Internally, the Assad's brutal policies managed to silence the oppressed Syrian Kurds during this decade. Despite this repression, the US continued to overlook the plight of the Kurds in exchange for Syria's cooperation in the peace process with Israel. This situation indicates that whenever it came to its interests, the United States was willing to put aside its principles of human rights and minority protection. Hence, the duplicity of the American policy became apparent: the US remained passive about the Kurds' repression in Syria for fear that any implicit or explicit interference might affect the US-Syrian

³⁶⁰ Kissinger, Henry. *Years of Renewal, Volume 3*. Simon & Schuster, 2012. p. 355.

³⁶¹ Gunter, Michael. *The Kurds: A Modern History*. p. 297.

³⁶² Charountaki, Marianna. p. 145.

³⁶³ Lawson, Fred. "Domestic Transformation and Foreign Steadfastness in Contemporary Syria." *Middle East Journal*, vol. 48, no. 1, 1994, pp. 47-64.

relations and jeopardize peace talks with Israel; on the other hand, America strongly condemned Syria's support for the PKK and pressured the Assad's regime to stop assisting the Turkish Kurds who were fighting Turkey, showing little consideration for how this might affect relations between Damascus and Washington.

The onset of the 21st century brought about some changes for the Kurds in Syria and the American attitude towards them. When Bashar al-Assad assumed power in 2000, he introduced the Damascus Spring, which eased many of his father's aggressive policies and improved opportunities for Kurdish political and educational fields. However, this strategy was short-lived; by 2003, Assad restored his father's oppressive tactics, which caused resentment among the Syrian people, especially the Kurds who started to break their silence and fearlessly revived their national cause for the first time in their recent history. This was evident in the Qamishli uprising in 2004.³⁶⁴ On the international stage, Bush's Middle East Partnership Initiative significantly affected the Kurdish issue in Syria, considering for instance the US State Department's approval of funding for reformists in Syria. In this regard, Elizabeth Cheney, the Principle Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Near Eastern Affairs, stated that "the United States stands firmly with courageous men and women struggling for their freedom across the Middle East, including Syria. The people of Syria deserve the opportunity to build a better future and to live in freedom."³⁶⁵ Furthermore, the Syrian Kurds living in exile started to bring their cause to the international spotlight. In 2006, members of the Syrian Kurdish Diaspora in North America met with the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the US State Department officials to discuss the status of the Kurds in Syria and the violations of the Kurdish rights by the successive authoritarian governments. They also demanded support for the Syrian opposition to "liberate Syria, not in the same way Iraq was liberated, but in a peaceful manner."³⁶⁶ Despite these efforts, the American policy towards the Syrian Kurds did not change. The United States did not take any serious measures to pressure the Syrian regime to improve its treatment of the Kurdish population, mainly due to the fact that destabilizing Syria or undermining its national security was not in the US interests at the time, especially for an issue that was not crucial to American strategic goals.

³⁶⁴ Gunter, Michael. *The Kurds: A Modern History*. pp. 107-108.

³⁶⁵ "U.S. Investing \$5 Million to Support Reform in Syria". *U.S. Department of State*. 17 Feb. 2006. 2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2006/61535.htm.

³⁶⁶ Charountaki, Marianna. p. 232.

3.4. Conclusion

The US foreign policy towards the Kurdish issue in Turkey and Syria reflects how alliances and changing interests are interconnected. The need to find a balance between confronting the challenges of the PKK's insurgency and keeping strong ties with Turkey has been a major factor in shaping the American policy. To maintain good relations and regional stability, the US was careful to support Turkey's security concerns, limiting assistance to the Kurdish minority in the country.

In contrast, the lack of strong US-Syrian relations led to the absence of a clear American policy towards the Syrian state and its Kurdish population as well. However, the need to contain the Assad regime, especially for the success of peace talks with Israel, forced the US to tolerate Syria's human rights violations against the Kurds. Additionally, the American stance on the Kurdish issue remained passive in order to avoid exacerbating regional tension, especially with Turkey, a critical ally.

Overall, the American approach to the Kurdish issue in both Turkey and Syria reveals the challenges that the United States faced in dealing with the needs of its regional allies and Kurdish concerns. Factually, the period leading up to 2010 set the stage for more US direct involvement in the coming years, reflecting the evolving nature of the Kurdish question in the Middle East and inconsistent US foreign policy in the region.

Chapter Four

The US Foreign Policy toward the Kurdish Issue

in Iraq and Iran

4.1. Introduction

Despite being the largest ethnic minority group, the Kurds in Iraq and Iran faced serious discrimination. Their linguistic and political rights were suppressed by successive state governments. Additionally, forced displacement, expropriation and village destruction led to decades of challenges related to adequate housing for the Kurds. Moreover, economic neglect resulted in increased poverty and underdevelopment in the Kurdish regions.

This injustice and oppression forced the Kurdish people to fight for their right to self-determination, using both peaceful and violent means of resistance. Since the United States has long championed the values of freedom and democracy, as well as the rights of minority groups, the Kurds saw the Americans as the only hope of escaping decades of misery and suffering. However, the US policy towards these states and their Kurdish residents was determined by several factors that varied depending on the geopolitical events and variables. This, indeed, made the US-Kurdish relationship complicated, characterized by cooperation when the Kurds aligned with the American goals and interests, as in the case of the Iraqi Kurds, and neglect when this minority group did not serve the US strategic objectives, as with the Kurds of Iran.

To this end, the fourth chapter examines the relationship between the United States and the Kurds of Iraq and Iran in order to understand what factors might determine and shape the American foreign policy towards the Kurdish question in these countries.

4.2. The US Policy toward the Iraqi Kurds

The US stance on the Iraqi Kurds changed over time. At first, the American policy was very careful, but developed later to provide different levels of help. However, the Kurds were sometimes sold out when the US focused on regional allies or conflicts over addressing the Kurdish cause. Therefore, the US involvement with the Iraqi Kurds varied depending on the changing circumstances.

4.2.1. The Evolution of the Kurdish National Movement in Iraq

The Kurds constitute about 25% of Iraq's population, numbering more than 4 million. They inhabit the mountainous areas and parts of the plains, which extend from Khaniqin in the south to Zakho in the north, in addition to a large number of Yezidi Kurds who reside in the north-western area around Mount Sinjar, as shown in Map 4.1. Most Iraqi Kurds are Sunni Muslims, while a significant minority are Shi'a. They speak two main dialects: Kurmanji, spoken by those living north of the Greater Zab River, while Sorani is spoken by those living south of the river.³⁶⁷

Map 4.1. Kurdish Areas in Iraq



Source: new.krg.us/services/visa-2/. Accessed 14 Feb. 2023.

Iraq was invaded by the Ottomans in the first half of the sixteenth century; and due to its strategic position, it was considered as a defensive stronghold against the Persian Empire. Under the Ottoman rule, everyone in society was classified as Ottoman, based on religious affiliation (Muslims and non-Muslims) rather than ethnicity; thus, the Kurds,

³⁶⁷ "Kurds in Iraq." *Minority Rights Group*. minorityrights.org/communities/kurds-3/. Accessed 30 Jul. 2022.

who had inhabited the region for centuries, were seen as Muslim Ottomans, not as a distinct minority group. However, Kurdish families in the northern regions enjoyed a degree of local autonomy in exchange for protecting the frontiers with Iran. However, the situation changed following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918. After the Treaty of Sèvres (1920), which promised autonomy to the Kurds and raised hope for their own state, the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 redrew the geographical map, dividing the Ottoman Kurdish communities and territories into the new nation-states of Turkey, Iraq (or Mesopotamia as called by the British), and Syria.³⁶⁸

In the new state of Iraq, which came under the British mandate in 1920, the British policy towards the Kurds was completely different from the notion of self-determination. Despite the British support of the Kurdish rights, demonstrated by a statement on December 24, 1922, in which they stressed the importance of respecting the Kurdish rights within Iraq, it was obvious that Britain was using the Kurds as a tool to force Turkey and the Iraqi government to comply with its conditions. This strategy was more evident in the Lausanne Treaty, when Britain abandoned the Kurds and focused only on the oilfields in Iraqi Kurdistan. Disagreements on whether these areas belonged to Turkey or Iraq necessitated the intervention of the League of Nations, which officially incorporated the region into Iraq on December 16, 1925.³⁶⁹

However, British colonial officials in Iraq implemented a divide-and-rule policy, which heightened ethnic and sectarian tensions among the Iraqi people by favoring Sunni Arabs over the other groups. This policy, indeed, had a negative impact on the Kurds because those Arabs, who had been equal to them during the Ottoman rule, became their overlords. Consequently, the Iraqi Kurds launched armed rebellions in 1924 under the leadership of Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji, who declared himself King of the Kurdistan Kingdom. However, these revolts were put down by the British Forces and Barzanji was exiled.³⁷⁰

To calm the situation in northern Iraq, the British granted some linguistic and cultural rights to the Kurds. In 1926, the Local Languages Law was issued, which permitted the Kurds in Erbil and Sulaymania to teach Kurdish in primary schools and

³⁶⁸ McDowall, Donald. pp. 141-142.

³⁶⁹ Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Iraq: The Past, Present and Future*. Pluto Press, 2004. p. 12.

³⁷⁰ McDowall, David, pp. 161-3.

publish in their native language. Despite these privileges, the Kurds continued their disobedience and insurgency during the 1930s. They believed that the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty neglected their demands, fearing that they would be oppressed by the Arab majority.³⁷¹ Therefore, they refused to participate in the elections on September 6, 1930 and protested in Sulamania, where the British and Iraqi forces responded with violence, resulting in 60 dead and many wounded Kurds.³⁷² In fact, this brutality only deepened hostility between the Kurds and the Iraqi government in the following years. Other major rebellions emerged, including those led by Sheikh Ahmad of Barzan and Khalil Khushawi, but they also failed to achieve the Kurdish aspirations.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the educated Kurds started to form political parties such as Hiwa (hope) Party in 1939, Shursh (revolution) Party in 1944 and Razkari (liberation) Party in 1945. However, these parties were not popular because of disunity within the Kurdish community in Iraq. Hence, the need for a strong leadership in Iraqi Kurdistan obliged the return of Mullah Mustafa Barzani, who escaped from his exile in Sulaimania to Barzan in 1943. He launched a new revolt against the central government in Baghdad, declaring that it was not an armed but a passive resistance aimed at defending the rights of the Kurds especially those who were exiled. Despite the peaceful character of the revolt, the Iraqi government responded violently to crush it, leaving Barzani no choice but to resort to military action. This led to the defeat of the Iraqi government that was forced to accept negotiations with the Kurdish leaders.³⁷³

Negotiations started effectively between Prime Minister Nuri Said and Mustafa Barzani, but they failed due to strong opposition from the Arab nationalist officials. Consequently, Said resigned and was succeeded by Hamdi al-Pachachi, whose policy was characterised by military persecution, especially against the Kurds. In August 1945, the Iraqi army, backed by the British, launched massive attacks on the Kurdish areas, forcing Barzani and his fellows to flee to Iranian Kurdistan where they stayed until the fall of the Republic of Mahabad in 1946; then they moved to the Soviet Union in 1947 and spent a

³⁷¹ The treaty was signed in June 1930. It stipulated that Britain and Iraq would form a solid alliance to face all the foreign issues that might affect their shared interests. With British support, Iraq would maintain internal order; and in case of conflicts and wars, both sides would adopt a common defensive stance. *Britannica*. www.britannica.com/place/Iraq/Independence-1932-39. Accessed 02 Jan. 2021.

³⁷² Rafaat, Aram. "The Fundamental Characteristics of the Kurdish Nationhood Project in Modern Iraq." *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 52, no. 3, 2016, pp. 488-504.

³⁷³ Guli, Karwan. "The Kurdish Issue in Iraq and the British Policy 1943-1945." *Journal of Islamic and Human Advanced Research*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2015, pp. 12-30.

decade in exile.³⁷⁴ However, the defeat of Barzani's revolt did not end the Kurdish resistance in Iraq. In 1946, the Kurdish Democratic Party was established under the leadership of Mustafa Barzani to continue the Kurdish struggle within Iraqi and Iranian Kurdistan. In fact, the KDP managed to unify the Kurdish leaders with different views on resistance; the traditional leaders, who encouraged the use of armed struggle to gain their demands, and the educated, intellectual members, who preferred cooperation and negotiation with the Iraqi government for peaceful solutions.

After toppling the Iraqi monarchy in a military coup in 1958, Abdel Karim Qasim took power. The Kurds strongly supported Qasim, hoping that the new government would avoid the mistakes of its Hashemite predecessors, especially after the announcement of the new Iraqi Constitution which stated that "Arabs and Kurds are considered partners in the homeland, and their national rights within Iraqi sovereignty are recognised".³⁷⁵ To demonstrate goodwill towards the Kurdish issue, Qasim released the imprisoned Kurds and allowed exiles, including Mustafa Barzani, to return to Iraq. The Kurds were also granted official posts in the government, such as Khalid Naqshabandi, who was appointed to the three-man Sovereignty Council, and Baba Ali, the son of Sheikh Mahmud Barzinji, who became a cabinet minister. In return, Ibrahim Ahmad, the Secretary-General of the KDP, promised to support the new Iraqi government.³⁷⁶ The 1958 Revolution gave the Kurds hope that their dream of autonomy was within reach. However, it is worth noting that Qasim was seeking to benefit from Barzani as an ally against opposition groups such as the Communist Party and Nasserites, and he aimed to weaken the Iraqi Ba'athists and Nasserites for fear that the Arab Union would invite Egyptian interference in Iraq.³⁷⁷

Nevertheless, when Qasim solidified power, he turned against the Kurds, accusing them of supporting secessionist movements which were backed by imperialist powers. As a result, the Kurdish movement faced severe oppression; the KDP was dissolved by the Iraqi government and the Iraqi military forces bombed Barzani villages in September 1961, sparking the Eilul Revolution (see map 4.2.) that was led by Mustafa Barzani.

³⁷⁴ Waisy, Karwan Salih. "The Iraqi Kurdistan from Rebellions to Civil War 1918-1998." *International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Sciences*, vol. 4, no. 5, 2015, pp. 247-273.

³⁷⁵ Entessar, Nader. "The Kurds in Post-Revolutionary Iran and Iraq." *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 6, no. 4, 1984, pp. 911-933.

³⁷⁶ Rubin, Avshalom H. "Abd al-Karim Qasim and the Kurds of Iraq: Centralisation, Resistance and Revolt, 1958-63." *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2007, pp. 353-382.

³⁷⁷ Rubin, Avshalom H.

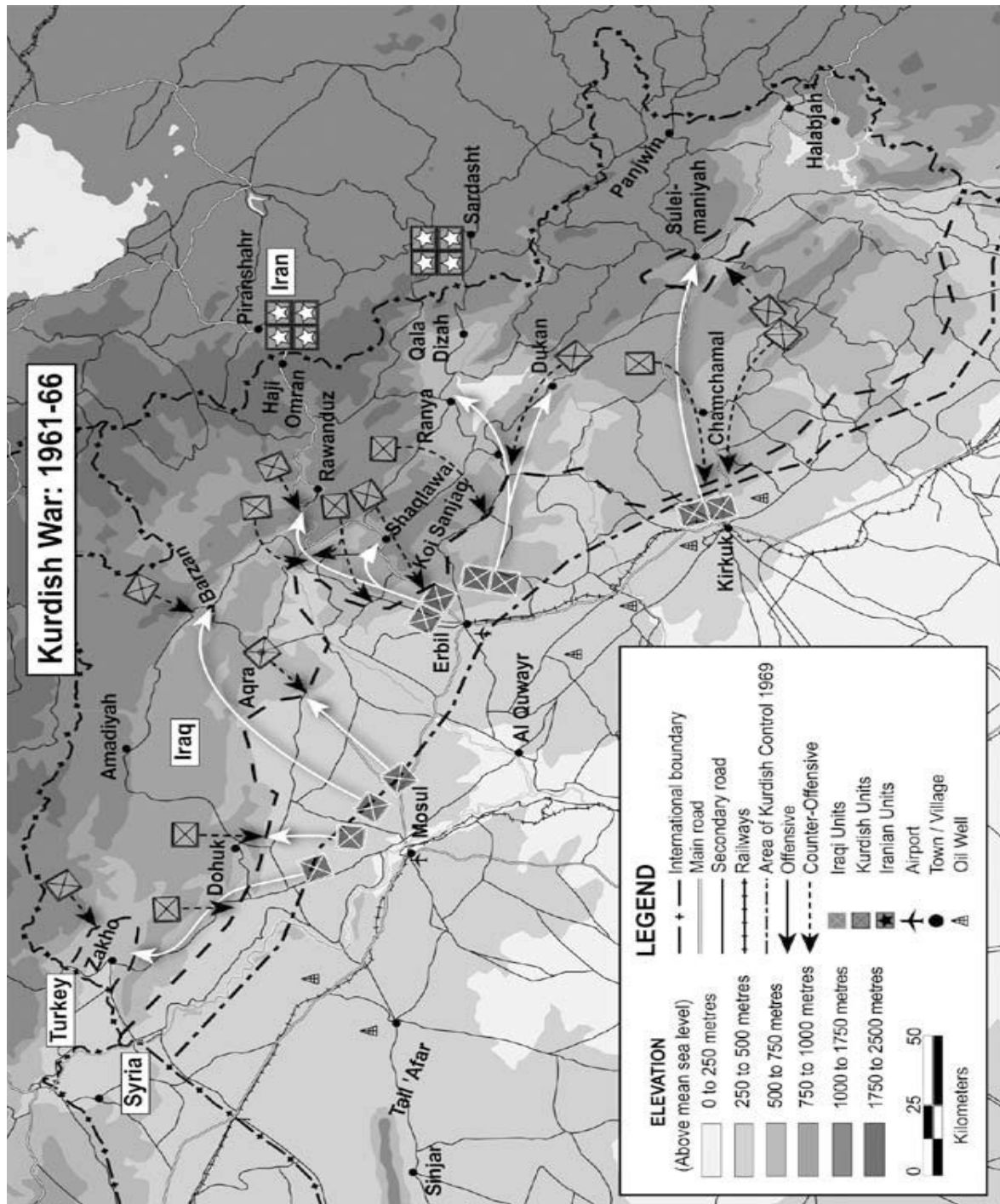
Although the revolt was defeated and resulted in the killing of a large number of Kurds and the destruction of many villages in the Barzani region, it was an important milestone in the Kurdish resistance.³⁷⁸ In March 1962, Qasim tried to calm the unrest by granting amnesty to all Kurdish rebels and providing financial aid to reconstruct the damaged villages. However, the KDP did not give up. Another pamphlet was made in which northern Iraq was described as South Kurdistan, and the Kurds demanded autonomy akin to that granted to “minority peoples in liberated countries as Switzerland, Yugoslavia, India and Czechoslovakia.”³⁷⁹ By the end of March, Barzani’s forces launched a new attack against the Iraqi army and managed to regain control over Sulaimania and the high ground around Mosul. In mid-April, Qasim’s forces launched a counter-attack, achieving some success against the Kurdish rebels. However, Barzani managed to shift the battle in his favor by June. Over the summer of 1962, the Revolutionary Council, a coalition that included Iraqi, Turkish and Iranian Kurds, achieved a series of victories against the Iraqi army, forcing Qasim to deploy 40 percent of his army’s combat forces to northern Iraq to confront the Kurdish fighters.³⁸⁰

Map 4.2. The Eilul Kurdish War 1961

³⁷⁸ Rubin, Avshalom H.

³⁷⁹ Rubin, Avshalom H.

³⁸⁰ Rubin, Avshalom H.



Source: Gibson, Bryan R. *Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds, and the Cold War*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. p. 39.

Barzani and the Kurdish rebels soon realised that they could not sustain their fight against Qasim due to the lack of sophisticated weapons, money and food supplies.

Therefore, they sought foreign support, inviting reporters to visit northern Iraq to record the Iraqi army's brutality against the Kurdish population. Meanwhile, Kamuran Ali Badir, Barzani's agent abroad, travelled around Europe and the US during the summer of 1962, in an effort to raise awareness about the Kurdish cause. He met with State Department officials, UN members, Senators, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, and Justice William O. Douglas. Badir managed to garner sympathy and promises of support; however, these remained unfulfilled, as many American diplomats argued that the US could not interfere in an Iraqi internal dispute.³⁸¹ This setback forced the Kurds to rely only on themselves. Consequently, hundreds of volunteer Iraqi Kurds joined the resistance; they were not paid but received only necessary food and weapons, while some Kurdish landowners provided large quantities of their yields to the rebels. By late 1962, Qasim lost support from almost all Kurdish tribes. It was only the Harki, a Barzani's rival tribe, that remained loyal to Qasim's government, while other tribes stayed neutral.³⁸²

While the Peshmerga were growing stronger, Qasim's supporters started to fragment, leading to the emergence of social grievances. Some Arab nationalists accused Qasim of using insufficient military force against the rebels and blamed him for "his total failure to put an end to the resultant losses in the lives of the officers of our army, its soldiers, and hundreds of other people."³⁸³ Losing hope of improving relations with Qasim, the KDP leaders started to align with the other Ba'athist and Nasserist opposition groups. In December 1962, the KDP pledged support for an Arab nationalist coup to overthrow Qasim, receiving promises of autonomy in return. Once the coup began, the Arab nationalist officers took control of Baghdad and killed Qasim. The KDP immediately announced its support for the coup, hoping that post-Qasim Iraq would be more favourable for the Kurds.

After toppling Qasim, the Ba'ath party came to power on February 8, 1963. Abdul Salam Arif, a former officer in Qasim's government, assumed the presidency. However, the party did not stay long; it fell after nine months of harsh persecutions of Iraqis. The Palace of the End in Baghdad was the detention centre that witnessed the execution and torture of many Iraqi people, including the Kurds. In the following few years, successive

³⁸¹ Rubin, Avshalom H.

³⁸² Rubin, Avshalom H.

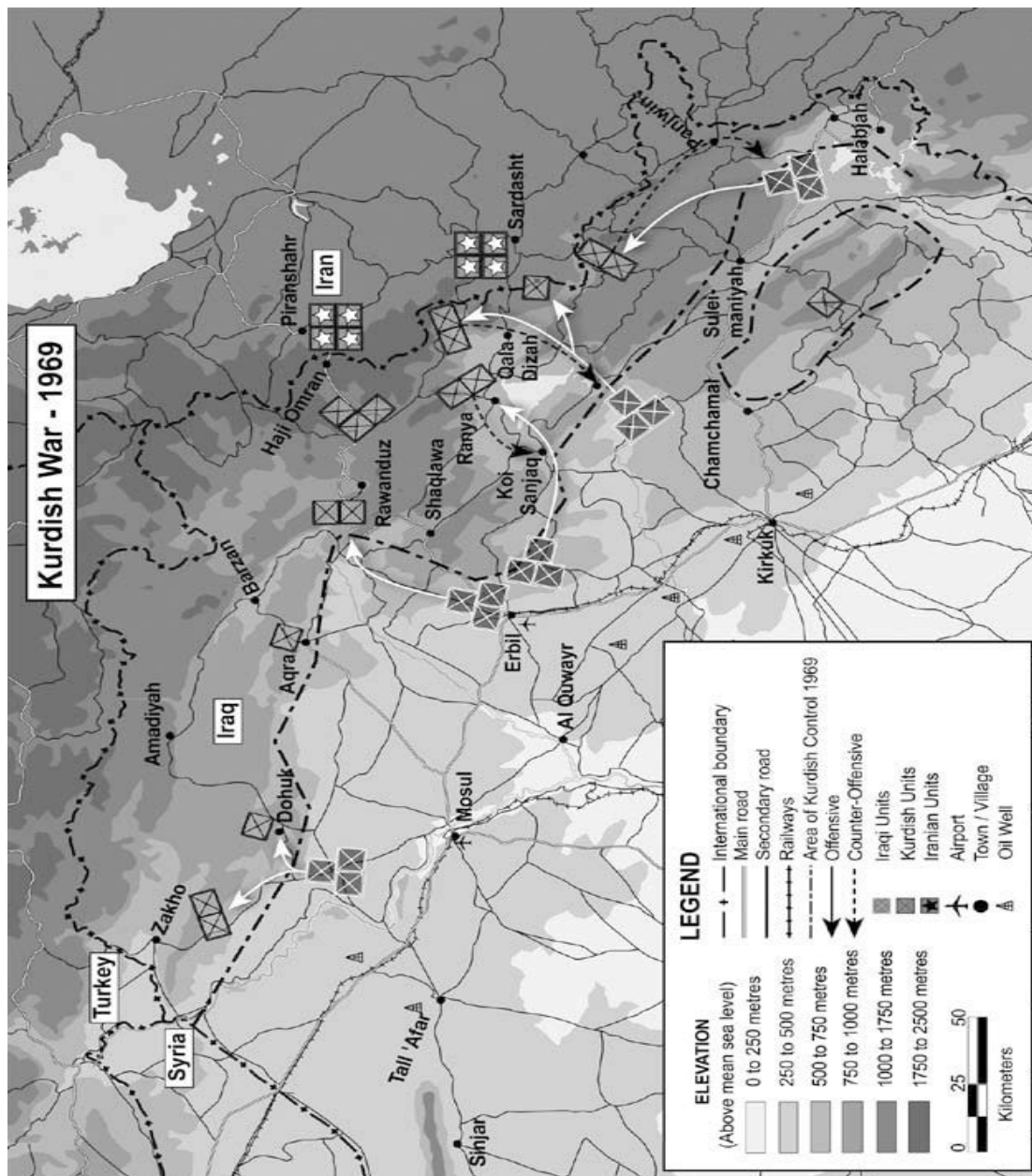
³⁸³ Rubin, Avshalom H.

Iraqi governments remained indecisive on the Kurdish issue, especially as no cabinet managed to stay in power for long.

Eventually, when the Ba'ath Party returned to power in July 1968, its popularity decreased, especially in the Kurdish and Shiite regions, due to the bad reputation from its brief rule in 1963. Moreover, the Iraqi people were weary of the constant coups since Iraq's independence, especially as the previous governments had failed to improve their political and socioeconomic conditions. In its early years, the Ba'athist regime was still weak and unstable; thus, it had no clear internal and external policies.

The Ba'athists soon clashed with the Kurdistan Democratic Party, despite initial attempts at reconciliation based on the Twelve-Point Program, also called the Bazaaz Declaration, issued on June 29, 1966, which promised more freedom for Kurdish people. However, the new rulers did not fulfill these pledges because the Ba'athist leadership believed that northern Iraq was mainly Arab land, which reduced the chances of Kurdish autonomy. The Bazaaz Declaration was the largest offer of autonomy ever given to the Kurds. However, disagreements and delays hampered its realization, leading to the Kurdish uprising in 1969 (see map 4.3.), which broke out mainly due to the government's failure to keep its promises to the Kurds.

Map 4.3. Kurdish War - 1969



Source: Gibson, Bryan R. p. 115.

The regime initially appeared friendly to the Kurds. It sought cooperation with Ba'athists, Communists, and Kurds as a united front. However, these promises were only to keep a unified Arab state under the Ba'athist control. As the regime gained more power, it tried to involve the Kurds in its political plans but still used the Bazaaz Declaration to maintain influence over them.

The Ba'athist government exploited conflicts among the Kurdish groups, particularly focusing on the rivalry between Barzani's and Talabani's factions. Seeing Talabani as more agreeable to its interests, the Iraqi regime offered the PUK military funding and allowed the publication of al-Nur newspaper in Baghdad. In return, Talabani supported the government's Kurdish policies. This partnership upset Barzani, who decided to take military action against Talabani's forces in late 1968, asserting control over Kurdish regions to expose the weakness of Talabani's position. The government, now siding with Talabani, used its military force against Barzani, ordering the Iraqi Air Force to bomb the villages that the KDP controlled. In response, Barzani reached out the United Nations for assistance. Consequently, the Iraqi government accused Israel and the United States of causing unrest, claiming that these foreign powers were trying to create chaos to weaken the Iraqi regime.³⁸⁴

By early 1969, Iraq stationed around 60,000 troops in Kurdish areas near Sulaimaniya with Talabani's support, though winter weather forced a temporary halt in operations by February. During this pause, the government falsely claimed it had fulfilled the promises of the Bazaaz Declaration, asserting that a peaceful solution with the Kurds was within reach under the progressive new government. Throughout this period, the regime repeatedly linked Kurdish resistance to foreign conspiracies involving the United States, Israel, and Iran. In January, during a series of show trials, the regime charged 19 individuals, eight of them Jewish, with espionage for Israel, alleging they sought to form a political network aligned with the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and supported by the US, aiming to incite rebellion among Kurdish tribes.³⁸⁵

On March 1, 1969, Barzani launched a major counteroffensive, marking the start of nearly a year-long conflict. His forces succeeded in pushing back government and Talabani troops, even shelling the Kirkuk oil fields in a strategic move to draw attention away from the Iranian border and reopen supply lines with Iran. In a statement to an American journalist later that month, Barzani foresaw being blamed by the Baghdad regime and Arab public opinion for diverting Iraqi military resources from the broader Arab-Israeli conflict, a notion later echoed by U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger,

³⁸⁴ McDowall, Donald. p. 325.

³⁸⁵ O'balance, Edgar. p. 151.

who referenced the Kurds' role in limiting Iraq's ability to confront Israel during the 1973 war.³⁸⁶

Indeed, Iraq was working hard to protect its borders with Iran. This demonstrated Iraq's concerns on its neighboring state's increased influence and support for the KDP. On April 19, 1969, the situation worsened as Iran decided to cancel the 1937 treaty and declared Shatt al-Arab water way an international channel. Both nations accused each other of backing Kurdish fighters across their shared borders.

In 1969, the conflict between the KDP and the PUK intensified. There were increasing reports of Barzani receiving support from other countries, notably Iran, the US, and Israel. Under the pretext of these reports, the regime began internal repression. Public trials were conducted, accusing many of being spies. By the end of May, 36 people were executed, accusing them of being agents of foreign powers. Additionally, the government urged citizens to be vigilant and wary of people who might have links to the CIA or Iran. In June, the Iraqi government again blamed the United States for instigating Kurdish unrest, portraying it as the main culprit behind Iraq's internal challenges. These accusations, while largely speculative, served as a convenient distraction from the military stalemate developing in the north.³⁸⁷

By September, Iraq claimed to have engaged and killed 30 Iranian soldiers, alleging they were assisting Barzani's forces. State media asserted that these troops were part of a special unit linked to American and Israeli intelligence. While the scale of foreign involvement remained murky at the time, the conflict's growing intensity began to yield clearer signs of international entanglement, though the full extent would only come to light years later.³⁸⁸

Indeed, the Kurdish question was a top priority for the regime, as it posed a significant internal threat to the stability of the state. Iran often exploited the Kurds during its conflicts with Iraq, inciting them to revolt against the government whenever relations

³⁸⁶ O'balance, Edgar. p. 152.

³⁸⁷ Schmidt, Dana A. "Sands of Mideast Power Shift Again." *New York Times*, 13 Jan. 1969. www.nytimes.com/1969/01/13/archive/sands-of-power-shift-again-in-arab-world-by-dana-adams-schmidt.html.

³⁸⁸ O'balance, Edgar. p. 153.

between the two countries soured.³⁸⁹ The Ba'athist government was not yet ready for a military confrontation in the north; thus, it attempted to find other peaceful solutions to solve the Kurdish problem. The March Agreement was proposed in 1970, providing Kurdish autonomy under Barzani's leadership, and recognizing Kurdish, along with Arabic, as the official languages in the Kurdish region, mandating its teaching as a second language. In addition, the Kurds were also allowed to take part in the government and the army, and they were granted the right to establish their own organizations. The central government promised funds and assistance for the development of the Kurdish areas; and the constitution would be amended to recognize both Arabs and Kurds as two nationalities in Iraq.³⁹⁰ A 15 point plan was signed by Saddam Hussein and Mustafa Barzani, which included a statement that "history will bear witness that you (Kurds) did not have and will never have as sincere a brother and as dependable an ally as the Arab people."³⁹¹ However, the Kurds did not trust the Ba'ath government because the implementation of autonomy was set to be completed in four years, making the Kurds reliant on the central government's goodwill. Moreover, there were some disputed areas, including Kirkuk, where a census was supposed to determine the Kurdish majority. However, this census never occurred; instead, the Ba'athists redrew Kirkuk's boundaries to diminish the Kurdish population.

Some scholars believed that the 1970 Accord was very significant because it officially recognized the existence of the Kurds as a distinct group within Iraq. However, others considered the agreement a trap for the Kurds, such as Kerim Yildiz, who described it as "a ploy used by the infant Ba'ath regime to consolidate its power before imposing its control on the Kurdish region."³⁹² It was also argued that the Iraqi government wanted to succeed the agreement due to the Kurdish peshmerga's attacks on the oil field in Kirkuk and northern Iraq, causing substantial losses for the foreign companies there.³⁹³ Additionally, Iraq aimed to weaken Kurdish relation with Iran, especially following Iran's abolition of the 1937 Saadabad Agreement.³⁹⁴ Another factor that contributed to the

³⁸⁹ Bengio, Ofra. *The Kurds of Iraq: Building a State within a State*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2012. p. 122.

³⁹⁰ McDowall, Donald, pp. 327-328

³⁹¹ McDowall, Donald, p. 328

³⁹² Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Iraq: The past, Present and Future*. p. 18.

³⁹³ Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Iraq: The past, Present and Future*.

³⁹⁴ The 1937 Saadabad Agreement between Iraq and Iran reaffirmed the 1847 agreement between the Ottomans and the Persians, which had drawn the borders between the two countries in the area of Shatt al-Arab. Akhtar, Shameem. "The Iraqi-Iranian Dispute over the Shatt El-Arab." *Pakistan Horizon*, vol. 22, no.

Ba'athists' eagerness to make the agreement work was the Cold War, which divided the great powers into two camps. On the one hand, Russia was trying to end the conflict between Iraq and its Kurdish population in order to prevent the US influence in northern Iraq, while the US sought to set friendly relations with the Kurds to gain them as allies against the communist spread in Iraq and the Middle East.

Factually, the 1970 Agreement did not please Iran, which feared that it would lose a significant ally in Iraq, and that this step would strengthen the Iraqi government. Consequently, the Shah of Iran managed to persuade the US President Richard Nixon to thwart any friendly relations between Saddam Hussein and Mustafa Barzani. Barzani, believing that the Kurds would receive support from Iran and the United States, refused Saddam's offers, leading to the collapse of the accord. By 1973; however, the Ba'ath regime made another attempt to maintain relations with the Kurds by proposing the Autonomy Law of 1974³⁹⁵, but this attempt also failed because the Kurdish leaders could not agree on the law's terms. The Iraqi government gave the Kurds 15 days to accept the law; and when the deadline passed, Saddam Hussein ordered the dispossession of the Kurdish people, who were deported and replaced by Arab citizens. This, indeed, led to the Iraqi-Kurdish war of 1974- 1975 (see map 4.4.). During the war, the Kurds hoped for Iranian and American assistance; however, the US ignored the issue and considered it an internal problem, and Iran also abandoned the Iraqi Kurds when the Algiers Accord was signed in 1975³⁹⁶. As a result, the Kurds were left to face the Ba'athists' retaliation alone. The Iraqi forces destroyed about 1,500 villages and deported an estimated 600,000 Kurds, including the elderly, women and children, to collective camps with substandard living conditions. In addition, the Iraqi government ordered to kill any Kurd found in the region after the deportation process.³⁹⁷ The Arab citizens were brought into those razed Kurdish areas, willingly or forcibly, to transform them into Arab dominated provinces. When asked about relocation, an Arab witness said in a Human Right Watch interview, "We

3, 1969, pp. 213-220.

³⁹⁵ The autonomous region, with Erbil as its metropolitan core, was defined by Act No. 33 of 1974 as an essential administrative unit with autonomy and legal status within the Republic of Iraq. The official and educational languages were to be Arabic and Kurdish. Local taxes were to be used to fund the region's budget and financial resources. Both the Executive Council, an appointed administrative body, and the Legislative Council, which was intended to be an elected legislature, were founded. Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Iraq: The Past, Present and Future*. p. 20.

³⁹⁶ Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Iraq: The Past, Present and Future*. p. 20.

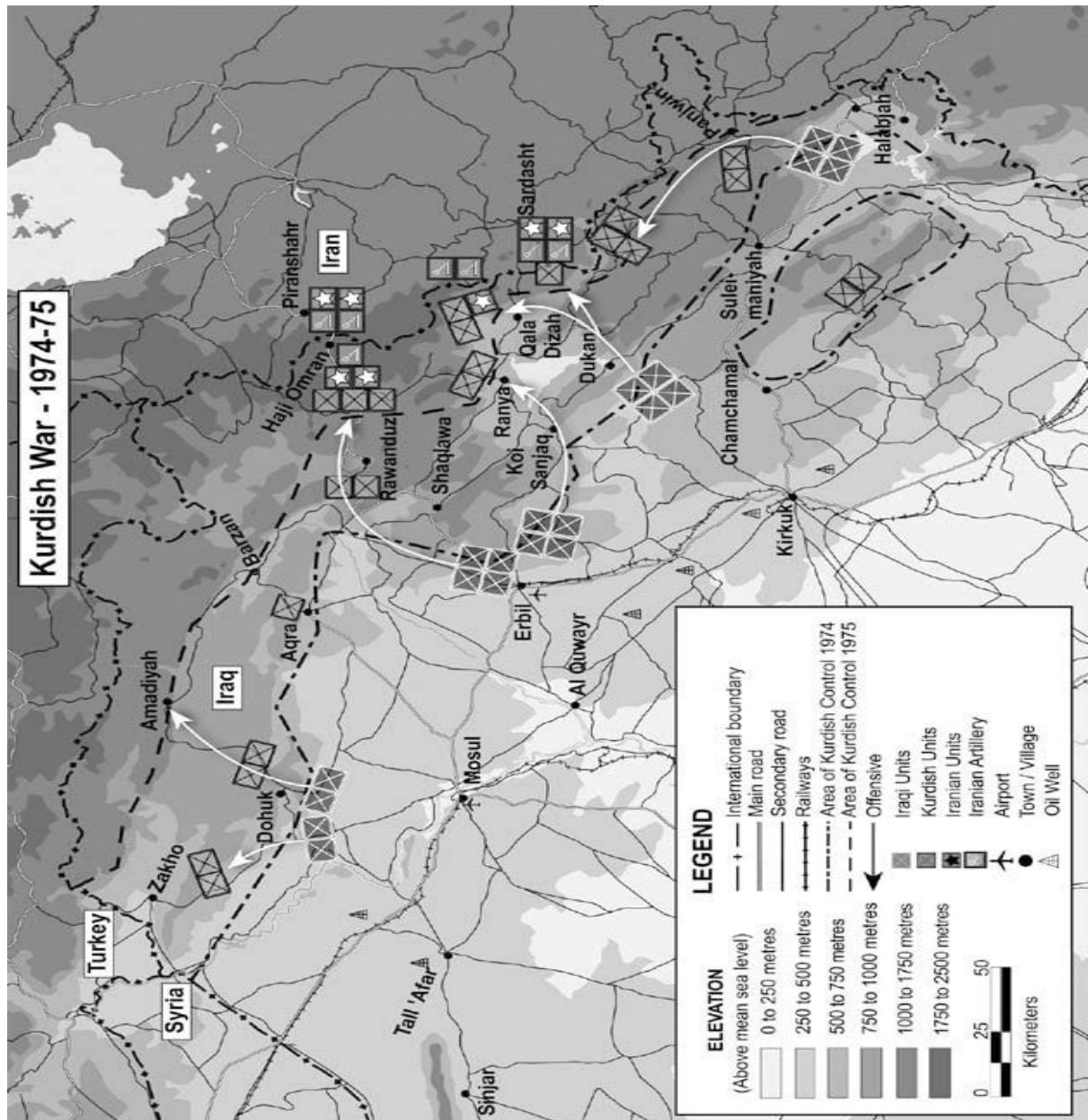
³⁹⁷ Albert, Craig Douglas. "No Place to Call Home: The Iraqi Kurds under the Ba'ath, Saddam Hussein, and ISIS." *Chicago-Kent Law Review*, vol. 92, no. 3, 2018, pp. 816-839.

moved because there was an order from the government to move to this village. Whether I was happy or unhappy, I had to obey that order.”³⁹⁸ The Iraqi-Kurdish war ended with at least 200,000 Kurdish refugees in Iran only and an undetermined number of dead and wounded Kurds.³⁹⁹ Eventually, these policies of Arabization and ethnic cleansing deepened Kurdish hatred towards the Baghdad government and strained Kurdish-Arab relationships even further.

Map 4.4. Iraqi-Kurdish War 1974-1975

³⁹⁸ Albert, Craig Douglas.

³⁹⁹ Albert, Craig Douglas. p. 827.



Source: Gibson, Bryan R. p. 182.

Furthermore, the 1979 Iranian Revolution resulted in other significant events in the region. In his effort to benefit from Iran's internal instability, the Iraqi President Saddam Hussein decided to invade Iran in September 1980, sparking a bloody and devastating war that lasted much of the decade. This war, indeed, offered a new opportunity to the Kurdish movement in Iraq, as both the KDP and PUK decided to set aside their differences and reorganize their power to resume military operations against the Iraqi government.

Initially, the Iraq-Iran War mostly took place outside the Iraqi Kurdish regions. However, the situation altered by the mid-1980s, as Iran started to cooperate with the KDP and PUK to push the war into northern Iraq. In 1987, the parties' leaders Masoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani established the Kurdistan Front Party and they divided the Kurdish region into two zones: the KDP was active in Dohuk and Erbil, whereas the PUK operated in Sulaimania and Kirkuk. Indeed, this cooperation between Iran and the Iraqi Kurds triggered the fears of Saddam Hussein, who saw this unity as a major threat to Iraq. In response, he appointed his cousin Ali Hasan al-Majid, known as Chemical Ali, to oversee the north, and he gave him absolute power to cope with the situation in northern Iraq in order to purify the region from the Kurds, who were considered as saboteurs and traitors for collaboration with the enemy, Iran. Ali's brutal campaigns against the Kurdish people occurred between March 1987 and April 1989, with the deadliest massacres al-Anfal and Halabja taking place in 1988. During the Anfal campaign, Chemical weapons, which were outlawed internationally, were indiscriminately used against the Kurdish civilians' and fighters' locations. Villages were destroyed and homes were set on fire. Orders were issued, stating that "all persons captured in those villages shall be detained and interrogated by the security services, and those between the ages of 15 and 70 shall be executed after any useful information has been obtained from them."⁴⁰⁰ Although precise numbers are debated, nearly 100,000 Kurds were killed during the Anfal operations, which were described by Jallal Talabani as genocide in Iraqi Kurdistan.⁴⁰¹

The Iraqi forces continued their brutal campaign against the Kurds. On March 16, 1988, another chemical attack was executed on Halabja, a Kurdish town in the Iraqi-Iranian borders, accusing the PUK and Iranian fighters of taking refuge in the city. The Halabja massacres, or 'the Hiroshima of the Kurds' as referred to by the Kurdish people, resulted in nearly 3,200 civilian deaths and injuries in one day.⁴⁰² By June 1989, the Iraqi government ordered the deportation of nearly 300,000 Kurds from areas like Qala Diza, Tasawasrab and Rania, claiming that they were being relocated to more modern villages with better amenities.⁴⁰³ Saddam also established a security zone along the Iraqi-Iranian borders and declared it a prohibited area as an attempt to prevent the Iranian assistance for

⁴⁰⁰ Bengio, Ofra, p. 179.

⁴⁰¹ Bengio, Ofra, p. 178.

⁴⁰² Bengio, Ofra, p. 181.

⁴⁰³ O'ballance, Edgar, p. 176.

the KDP and PUK. Moreover, an Arabization policy was enforced to assimilate the entire Kurdish region into Arab culture.

Despite these inhumane actions, including attacks on innocent civilians, children and women, the international community remained silent, with only few condemnations. The UN and US State Department denounced Iraq for using chemical weapons and violating the 1925 Geneva Protocol, which prohibited the use of such weapons.⁴⁰⁴ However, no effective international measures were taken against the Iraqi regime for its crimes against its Kurdish citizens.

In effect, some analysts argue that the Anfal and Halabja campaigns inadvertently advanced the Kurdish cause. These atrocities helped bring their question to the international stage, earning them widespread sympathy, especially from human rights activists and organizations. Edgar O'Ballance stated that Saddam Hussein's Anfal and Halabja massacres were among his biggest mistakes because "this form of warfare drew universal attention to the plight of the Kurds and put them really in the spotlight for the first time."⁴⁰⁵

Indeed, the 1990s marked a turning point for the Iraqi Kurds. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait⁴⁰⁶ on August 2, 1990 prompted US-led coalition forces to intervene using UN Resolution 678,⁴⁰⁷ leading to the expulsion of the Iraqi forces from Kuwait. This intervention; however, resulted in the deterioration of the US-Iraqi relations. Conversely, the 1991 Gulf War offered new opportunities for the Kurds in Iraq. When the war broke out in January 1991, Jallal Talabani stated that "the Kurds are really happy because they believe that this war will put an end to Saddam Hussein's dictatorship"⁴⁰⁸; nevertheless, the Kurdish leaders decided to remain neutral during the war for fear of Saddam's retaliation as happened following the Iraq-Iran war.

However, once the Iraqi forces were defeated in late February, the Kurds quickly seized the opportunity to rebel against the Baghdad government. This move was spurred

⁴⁰⁴O'ballance, Edgar, p. 170.

⁴⁰⁵ O'ballance, Edgar, p. 174.

⁴⁰⁶ For more details on Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, see Kostiner, Joseph. *Conflict and Cooperation in the Gulf Region*. VSVERLAG, 2009. pp. 78-139.

⁴⁰⁷ "Security Council Resolution 678 (1990)." *United Nations Digital Library*.
digitallibrary.un.org/record/102245?ln=en&v=pdf Accessed 30 Mar. 2020.

⁴⁰⁸ Gunter, Michael M. "Foreign Influences on the Kurdish Insurgency in Iraq." *Conflict Quarterly*, vol. 12, no. 4, 1992, pp. 7-24.

by President Bush's speech on 15 February, where he urged the Iraqi people to rise up against Saddam Hussein and his Ba'athist government, saying, "There is another way for the bloodshed to stop, and that is for the Iraqi military and the Iraqi people to take matters into their own hands and force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside."⁴⁰⁹ Interpreting Bush's words as a promise of support, the Kurds launched a rebellion against the Baghdad government on March 5, 1991. They achieved significant victories, taking control of much of Iraqi Kurdistan. However, their success was short-lived. After crushing the Shiite rebellion in the south, Saddam's forces moved to the north where the Kurdish fighters were harshly defeated.

Kurdish leaders Masoud Barzani and Jallal Talabani appealed to President Bush for help, reminding him that "you personally called upon the Iraqi people to rise up against Saddam Hussein's brutal dictatorship."⁴¹⁰ However, the Kurds were abandoned again by the United States, which argued that its mission was to liberate Kuwait and that it had no UN mandate to intervene in Iraq to help the Kurds. Also, the White House considered the Kurdish-Iraqi conflict an internal issue and stated that "in no way should we associate ourselves with the 60-year old rebellion in Iraq or oppose Iraq's legitimate attempts to suppress them."⁴¹¹

The US chose not to intervene in Iraqi Kurdistan for many reasons. An intervention could have led to internal instability within Iraq, threatening thus the stability of the entire Middle East region. Additionally, the US feared that a Kurdish victory in Iraq could incite the Kurds in the neighbouring states, particularly Turkey and Iran, leading to further instability and chaos in these states. Another factor that prevented the US intervention was the fear that a new American war in Iraq would be unpopular with the American public and make the US appear hypocritical in its foreign policy. In this context, Dick Cheney, then Secretary of Defense, said:

If we (the US) had gone to Baghdad, we would have been all alone. There wouldn't have been anybody else with us. There would have been a (US) occupation of Iraq. None of the Arab forces that were willing to fight with us in Kuwait were willing to invade Iraq. Once you

⁴⁰⁹ McDowall, Donald, p. 372.

⁴¹⁰ McDowall, Donald.

⁴¹¹ Kaplan, Lawrence, and William Kristol. *The War over Iraq: Saddam's Tyranny and America's Mission*. Encounter Books, 2003. p. 41.

got to Iraq and took it over ... you could very easily end up seeing pieces of Iraq fly off: part of it the Syrians would like to have the west, part of the eastern Iraq – the Iranians would like to claim, they fought over it for eight years. In the north you've got the Kurds, and if the Kurds spin loose and join with the Kurds in Turkey, then you threaten the territorial integrity of Turkey ... It's a quagmire if you go that far and try to take over Iraq.⁴¹²

The defeat of the Kurdish uprising resulted in a humanitarian crisis, with hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Kurds fleeing to the mountains in the Turkish and Iranian borders. Hayri Kozak Ciloglu, the Regional Governor in the southeast of Turkey, mentioned that by late April, there were around 468,000 northern Iraqis in Turkey's border region with Iraq. Meanwhile, Ahmad Hoseyni, the Director General of Foreign Nationals and Immigrants in Iran, reported in early May that over 1,117 Iraqi refugees entered Iran.⁴¹³ This massive influx of refugees created political problems for both Turkey and Iran, prompting them to call on the international community to intervene for help. They feared that the presence of so many Iraqi Kurds could influence the Kurdish movements within their own countries, especially in Turkey, where the PKK insurgency was active at the time. Under that pressure, the UN Security Council issued Resolution 688, which allowed for humanitarian intervention in Iraqi Kurdistan.⁴¹⁴ Immediately in April 1991, the United States, along with Britain and France, intervened and initiated Operation Provide Comfort to deliver humanitarian aid to the Iraqi Kurdish refugees.⁴¹⁵ Moreover, a no-fly zone was established, which involved the northern line at the 36th parallel (see map 4.5.) as a safe haven to protect the Kurds from attacks by the Iraqi army. As a matter of fact, the establishment of the safe haven was a turning point, enabling the Kurds to return home without fearing Saddam Hussein. It is worthy to mention that from 1991 onwards, the US-Kurdish relations improved dramatically. For the first time in the history of the Kurdish issue, the United States did not abandon the Iraqi Kurds but continued to support and protect them in the years that followed.

⁴¹² Cheney, Dick. "Interview with the American Enterprise Institute", 15 April 1994. www.youtube.com/watch?v=6BEsZMvrq-I. Accessed 07 Apr. 2021.

⁴¹³ Gunter, Michael M. "Foreign Influences on the Kurdish Insurgency in Iraq." p. 18.

⁴¹⁴ UN Security Council Resolution 688, adopted on April 5, 1991, condemned the repression of Iraqi civilians, particularly the Kurds, and stressed that Iraq should allow humanitarian aid to reach the affected areas. *United Nations Digital Library*. digitallibrary.un.org/record/110659?ln=en&v=pdf. Accessed 15 Apr. 2021.

⁴¹⁵ For more details, see Haulman Daniel L. "Crisis in Iraq: Operation Provide Comfort." www.afhistory.af.mil/FAQs/Fact-Sheets/Article/458953/1991-operation-provide-comfort-and-northern-watch/. Accessed 19 Apr. 2021.

Map 4.5. No-fly Zones in Iraq

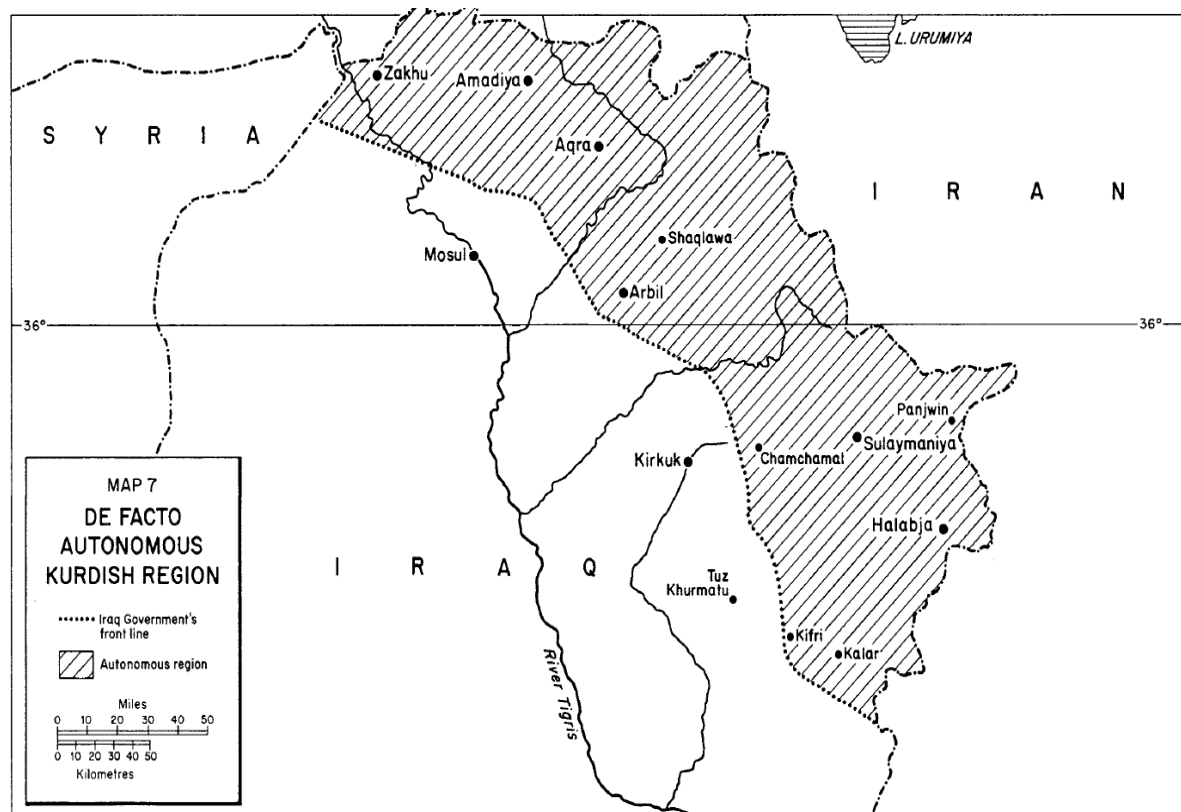


Source: Kiger, Patrick J. How No-fly Zones Work. science.howstuffworks.com/no-fly-zone.htm.

Since the Baghdad government could no longer directly attack the Kurds, it cut off all services, funding and salaries, expecting that this would pressure the Kurdish leaders to surrender to Saddam's demands. However, instead of yielding, the KDP and PUK established an autonomous government (see map 4.6) and held elections in May 1992. A month later, the Kurdistan Regional Government was formed, though it did not receive much support from the regional and international states. Factually, the United States was concerned about Iraq's integrity and stability; a State Department representative said that the US "Welcomed public and private assurances by the Iraqi Kurdish leadership that elections would deal only with local administrative issues and did not represent a move towards separatism."⁴¹⁶

Map 4.6. De Facto Autonomous Kurdish Region

⁴¹⁶ Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Iraq: The Past, Present and Future*. p. 44.



Source: McDowall, David. p. 374

4.2.2. The US and the Kurds: Frozen Relations

After World War II, the American foreign policy in the Middle East focused, as explained in the first chapter, on certain essential points, including containing the Soviet Union, protecting Israel, ensuring the flow of oil, and promoting democratic values. To achieve these goals, the United States sought to replace the hostile regimes with friendly governments which would serve its national interests. During President Harry S. Truman's administration, the United States adopted a policy that aimed to help free people maintain their institutions and national integrity against totalitarian regimes.⁴¹⁷ However, the US paid little attention to minority issues, prioritizing friendly relations with the governments of the states over minority rights. Regarding the Kurdish cause in Iraq, the United States continued to ignore the Kurdish demands for self-determination, especially following the formation of the Baghdad Pact in 1955 as a pro-American defence pact to contain the

⁴¹⁷ Charountaki, Marianna. p. 128.

Soviet Union.⁴¹⁸ Actually, the pact contributed to strengthen the American relations with Iraq and Iran, encouraging cooperation between Turkey, Iraq and Iran to address their Kurdish issues. The Kurds, though not being mentioned in the pact, considered it as an indirect threat to their national requests, and the US gave them little attention, valuing Iraq's stability and confronting the Soviet influence more than the Kurdish minority concerns. Consequently, the Iraqi Kurds were willing to accept any overtures offered by the Soviets.

That American policy, indeed, continued after the rise of President Eisenhower to power (1953-1961), whose policy also focused on combating the communist spread in the Middle East and establishing pro-Western regimes. These objectives left no chance for any US political developments towards the Kurdish issue in Iraq. The situation; however, altered after the 1958 Revolution, which ended the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq. When Abdel-Karim Qasim took power, he withdrew from the Baghdad Pact and established diplomatic relations with the Soviets. Consequently, the US saw the need to maintain its influence in the country by reconsidering its relations with the Kurds as part of its containment strategy during the Cold War. However, the US was cautious due to uncertainty about the nature of the Kurdish movements and suspicions that Mustafa Barzani, who had been exiled in the Soviet Union for 11 years (1947-58), was a communist agent.⁴¹⁹

Relations between Qasim and the Kurds deteriorated when he broke his promise of autonomy, leading to a Kurdish uprising in 1961. The Kurdish leaders sought support from the West, especially the US. However, when the Ba'athist Party seized power after toppling Qasim's regime in 1963, the Kurds' hope for foreign help dashed. As successive Iraqi governments failed to resolve the Kurdish problem peacefully during the 1960s, the Kurdish leaders tried to establish relations with the US, hoping to secure its assistance, but their attempts were in vain. This lack of American support prompted the Kurds to explicitly demand support. In 1962, Mustafa Barzani said in an interview with the

⁴¹⁸ The Baghdad Pact, also known as the Central Treaty Organization, was an agreement signed by Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and the UK in February 1955. Its aim was to establish a mutual defense against the spread of the Soviet Union and its communist ideology in the Middle East and South Asia. Ashton, Nigel John. "The Hijacking of a Pact: The Formation of the Baghdad Pact and Anglo-American Tensions in the Middle East, 1955-1958." *Review of International Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1993, pp. 123-137.

⁴¹⁹ Abdulkhaliq Muhammed, Peshawa. *US Perspectives on Kurdish Independence from Iraq, 1972-2011*. 2012, Keele University, PhD dissertation. p. 67.

journalist Dana Adams Schmidt of *The New York Times*, “Let the Americans give us military help, openly or secretly, so that we can become truly autonomous and we will become your (US) loyal partners in the Middle East.”⁴²⁰ The US responded by clarifying that it had a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. However, the escalation of the Cold War in the late 1960s and early 1970s contributed significantly to open up new prospects for the US-Kurdish relations, especially after the Soviets’ attempt to convince the Ba’athist regime to impose more control on Kurdistan, thereby threatening US regional interests.⁴²¹ Following Barzani’s letter to William Rogers, US Secretary of State, on 22 April 1969,⁴²² the first US aid payment of \$14 million was given to the Iraqi Kurds in August 1969.⁴²³ Factually, this new hope of US support significantly impacted the Iraqi-Kurdish relations, as it contributed to encourage the Kurds to reject the central government’s offers to resolve the Kurdish problem peacefully.

Up to 1972, there was no official American engagement with the Iraqi Kurds. However, this began to change after this period. Jonathan C. Randal argued that this shift was mainly due to the 1970 March Accord, because any improvement in the Iraqi-Kurdish relations would not benefit the US and its allies, especially Iran, since they had long used the internal Kurdish issue to weaken the Iraqi regime. Another significant factor that forced the US to reconsider its stance towards the Iraqi Kurds was the Ba’athists growing alignment with the Soviet Union. Additionally, the nationalisation of oil by the Iraqi state in 1972 also prompted the United States to seek an alliance with the Iraqi Kurds, anticipating potential disputes with the Iraqi regime.

4.2.3. Iraqi Kurds: a Useful Card to Play

The pre-1972 period was characterized by unsuccessful Kurdish attempts to establish contacts with the United States. However, from 1972 onwards, the US-Kurdish relations saw significant changes. According to Peshawa Muhammed, the American

⁴²⁰ Schmidt, Dana Adams. “The Kurdish Insurgency.” *Strategic Review*, vol. 2, 1974, pp. 51-58.

⁴²¹ Charountaki, Marianna. p. 135.

⁴²² A copie of the translated letter is attached in appendix I.

⁴²³ Charountaki, Marianna. p. 135.

engagement with the Iraqi Kurds can be divided into three phases: 1972-75, 1990-96, and the period following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003.⁴²⁴

Factually, the period 1972-1975 witnessed a significant shift in the US foreign policy towards both Iraq and the Kurds. The close relationship between Iraq and the Soviets alarmed the United States, especially following a meeting between the Baghdad government and the Soviets in February 1972 to discuss a military, economic and political agreement, which resulted in signing the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation on April 9. Moreover, Saddam's nationalisation of Iraq Petroleum Company on June 1 raised US suspicions and urged it to find an alternative ally in the country as the US-Iraqi relations deteriorated during the Nixon's administration.

The Soviets' push to include the Kurds and local communists in a national front government with the Ba'ath party made a US-Kurdish alliance more urgent.⁴²⁵ Consequently, Kurdish representatives Idris Barzani and Mahmud Othman met with Richard Helms, Director of the CIA, and Colonel Richard Kennedy, Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Council Planning in June 1972. During the meeting, the US officials expressed "sympathy of the US government for the Kurdish movement under Barzani ... noting that the presence of Kurdish representatives in his office was proof of our position to consider their requests for assistance."⁴²⁶ In turn, the Kurdish representatives demanded the continuation of secret American-Kurdish communications and emphasized that "Kurdistan, albeit small, could be exploited as an effective tool to reverse Soviet expansion in the area."⁴²⁷ Moreover, in order to weaken the Iraqi state and contain the spread of Communism, the US was obliged to support Iran's leading role in the region and began providing aid to the Iraqi Kurds through Iran to help them in their revolt against the Ba'athist government. This support was, indeed, part of the American foreign policy agenda. Marianna Charountaki describes the US policy towards the Kurds during the first half of the 1970s as "a project... a tactical means of facilitating the foreign policy objectives of the United States, given its desire to control both Iran and Iraq."⁴²⁸ These Iranian-American plans to weaken Iraq through the Kurdish issue succeeded in

⁴²⁴ Abdulkhaliq Muhammed, Peshawa. p. 64.

⁴²⁵ Charountaki, Marianna. p. 137.

⁴²⁶ Charountaki, Marianna.

⁴²⁷ Charountaki, Marianna.

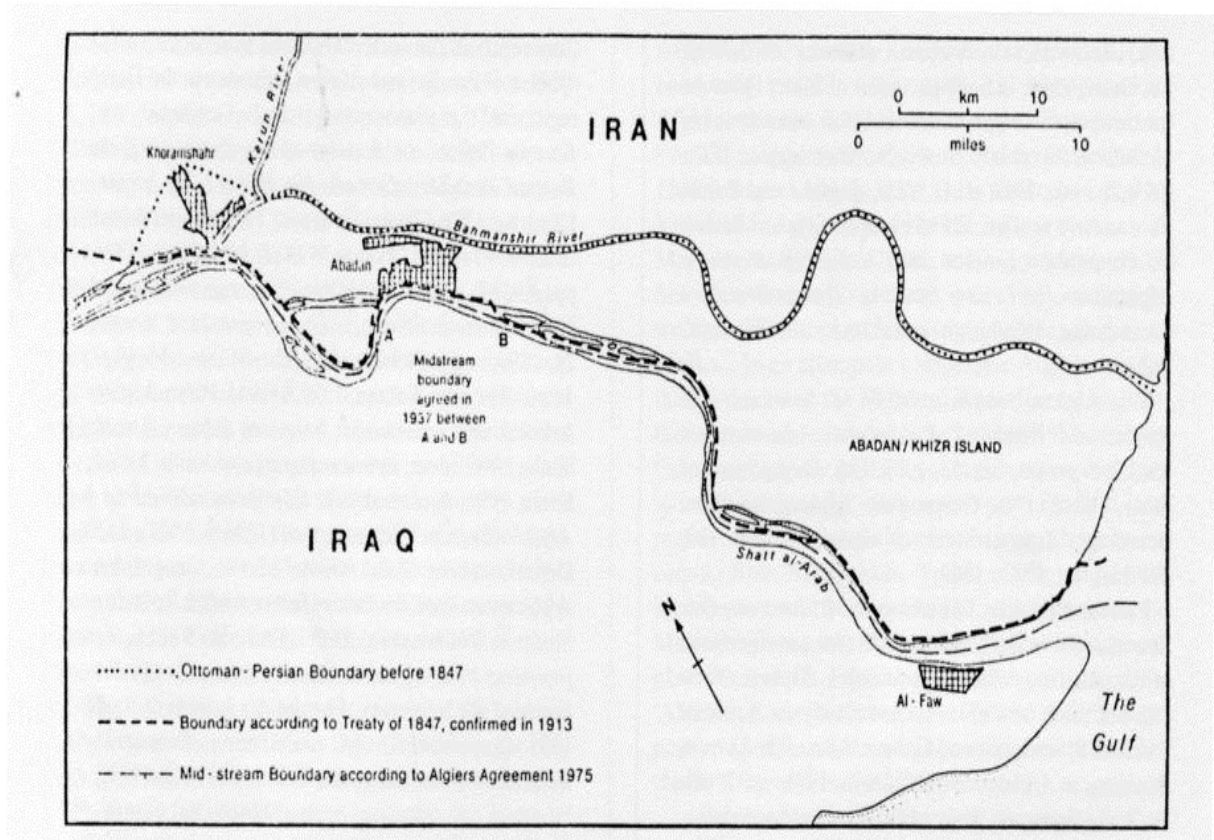
⁴²⁸ Charountaki, Marianna. p. 138.

achieving the desired objectives. The Iraqi president accepted the Shah's demands in exchange for Iran's promise to stop supporting the Kurds in Iraq. The Algiers Treaty was signed in 1975, and Iraq ceded half of Shatt al-Arab to Iran, as map 4.4. shows, resulting in the end of the Iranian-Iraqi disputes. Therefore, the Kurds were immediately abandoned by both Iran and the United States, leaving thousands of them to face the oppression of the Ba'ath forces. These events justified the change in the US stance towards the Kurds of Iraq during the second half of the 1970s. The Algiers Accord reshaped the American-Kurdish partnership, which was significantly influenced by regional and American interests. As a matter of fact, neither Iran nor the US wished to see an independent Kurdish state, as stated in a CIA memo on March 22, 1974:

We (the US) would think that the (Shah of Iran) would not look with favour on the establishment of a formalised autonomous government. The (Shah of Iran), like ourselves, has seen benefit in a stalemate situation... in which (Iraq) is intrinsically weakened by the (Kurds) refusal to relinquish its semi-autonomy. Neither the (Shah of Iran) nor ourselves wish to see the matter resolved one way or the other.⁴²⁹

Map 4.7. Shatt al-Arab and the 1975 Algiers Agreement between Iran and Iraq

⁴²⁹ Abdulkhaliq Muhammed, Peshawa. p. 77.



Source: Drysdale, Alasdair and Gerald Blake. *The Middle East and North Africa: A Political Geography*. Oxford University Press, 1985. p. 87.

Therefore, it is clear that the Kurds' lack of experience in international politics was a key factor that led to the failure of the Kurdish revolt in 1975. The Kurdish leaders needed to understand that they had been exploited by the Shah and the United States, and that they would be abandoned once they were no longer useful to the Iranian and American interests. Mahmoud Othman, a Kurdish politician, argued that "the Kurdish leadership was not sophisticated enough then to understand the complexity of international politics."⁴³⁰ Similarly, Omar Sheikhmous noted that "the Kurdish leaderships have been weak, inexperienced and lacked sufficient knowledge in the intricacies of international diplomacy and politics."⁴³¹

However, the Iranian Revolution in 1979 led to the deterioration of the US-Iranian relations, prompting the revival of US-Iraqi partnership, despite Saddam Hussein's close relations with the Soviet Union. This shift in the American policy towards the Ba'ath

⁴³⁰ Abdulkhaliq Muhammed, Peshawa. p. 80.

⁴³¹ Abdulkhaliq Muhammed, Peshawa. p. 81.

regime was mainly demonstrated by the Reagan and Bush administrations' support for Iraq during its war with Iran in the 1980s. A National Security Directive issued in November 1983 made it clear that "the US would do whatever was necessary and legal" to prevent the defeat of Iraq in the war.⁴³² Hence, the US provided advanced technological tools and substantial economic aid to Iraq, amounting \$400 million in 1983, \$513 million in 1984, and \$652 million in 1987.⁴³³

Unlike President Carter, the Reagan administration was characterised by pragmatism. Therefore, the US policy towards the Kurds in the 1980s was driven by American concerns and interests. This was demonstrated by a memorandum in November 1983 to the Secretary of State George Shultz stating that the US was aware of Saddam Hussein's aggressive policy towards the Kurds and his genocidal operations against them (Anfal and Halabja campaigns), but the Reagan government chose not to intervene to avoid straining its relations with Hussein and jeopardizing Iraqi oil supplies.⁴³⁴ The Kurds, who found themselves facing the brutality of the Iraqi regime following the Iraq-Iran war, had no choice but to seek again American aid and protection, despite being sold out in 1975. However, the Bush administration continued to ignore the Kurdish plight during the 1980s.

When President Clinton took office in 1993, his administration adopted a dual containment policy towards both Iraq and Iran, aiming to weaken these states politically and economically through sanctions. Thus, regime change was not among the American priorities. However, the situation altered in 1998 when President Hussein decided to end the Iraqi cooperation with the United Nations Special Commission, expelling the UN inspection teams from Iraq. Subsequently, ousting Saddam became a necessity for the United States. The Iraq Liberation Act of 1998 was issued, declaring that "it should be the policy of the United States to seek to remove the Saddam Hussein regime from power in Iraq and to replace it with a democratic government."⁴³⁵ The act also allowed the US to back the Iraqi opposition groups, including the Kurds, financially and militarily, despite

⁴³² Dumbrell, John. *American Foreign Policy: Carter to Clinton*. Macmillan Press, 1997. p. 81.

⁴³³ Pollack, Kenneth. *The Persian Puzzle: the Conflict Between Iran and America*. Random House, 2004. p. 207.

⁴³⁴ Totten, Samuel, and Paul Bartrop. *Dictionary of Genocide: Volume I*. Greenwood, 2007, p. 252.

⁴³⁵ "Iraq Liberation Act of 1998." *Congress Gov*.

www.congress.gov/bill/105th-congress/house-bill/4655#:~:text=Iraq%20Liberation%20Act%20of%201998%20-%20Declares%20that%20it%20should%20be,it%20with%20a%20democratic%20government.
Accessed 18 Apr. 2021.

doubts about the Kurdish leaderships due to the 1994 Kurdish Civil War, which culminated in 1996 when KDP leader Masoud Barzani sought Baghdad's assistance to defeat the PUK leader Jallal Talabani, who in turn demanded support from Iran.⁴³⁶ In fact, that internal split among the Kurds themselves made the US hesitant to fully support for Kurdish autonomy in Iraq. However, the fact that Iraqi Kurdistan was still under the protection of the US forced the American intervention, which occurred mainly for two reasons: the fear that Saddam Hussein might reoccupy the Kurdish region again; and the US desire to prevent any possibility of making a peace agreement between Saddam Hussein and the Kurds. The American involvement resulted in ending the Kurdish inter-factional war and the signing of the Washington Accord by the KDP and PUK in 1998. The agreement was, in fact, beneficial for the United States, as the Kurdish unity was necessary for the success of the Clinton's containment policy in Iraq.⁴³⁷ Thus, it is worthy to mention that from 1991 onwards, the US-Kurdish relations improved significantly. The United States continued to provide protection and aid to the Iraqi Kurds until the fall of Saddam's regime in 2003.

4.2.4. 2003: The Turning Point

The September 2001 attacks profoundly affected both US-Iraqi and US-Kurdish relations. In the aftermath of these events, the Bush administration shifted its policy towards the Middle East, focusing on combating militant groups, containing unfriendly states, and countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Hence, since Iraq was considered as a rogue state that posed a serious threat to the American objectives and interests, regime change became a top priority for the United States, which, for the first time, took serious steps to implement this decision.

To justify a war against Saddam Hussein and his Ba'athist government, the US sought compelling reasons to convince the international community and the American public as well. Besides accusing Hussein of possessing WMD, the Bush administration portrayed the Kurds as victims of Saddam's brutality. President Bush urged the need to intervene in Iraq for humanitarian reasons, using the plight of Iraqi Kurds as a powerful argument to convince the Americans to go to war. "Saddam Hussein gassed his own

⁴³⁶ Abdulkhaliq Muhammed, Peshawa. p. 95.

⁴³⁷ Gareth, Stansfield. *Iraq- History: The Middle East and North Africa, Volume 50*. Europa Publications, 2004, p. 461.

people - the Kurds”, said Bush.⁴³⁸ This statement, indeed, was enough to resonate with the American people, who had been hesitant about the war. Saddam’s killing of his people reminded the Americans of the Holocaust and provided both humanitarian and political justification.⁴³⁹ This demonstrates that the US positioned itself as a liberator rather than an invader, arguing that it sought to help the Iraqis get rid of the dictator, and also to promote freedom and democracy in the country.

In 2002, the United States officially decided to invade Iraq to oust Saddam’s regime; thus, it sought allies in the region to execute the operation. Kuwait from the south and Turkey from the north were seen as the most dependable regional allies, while the Kurds constituted an important ally in the northern part of the country. Factually, the Iraqi Kurds held significant value for two reasons: the Peshmerga, which made a large force in the north, numbering nearly 80.000 fighters; and the presence of Ansar al-Islam, al-Qaida cell, which operated in Iraqi Kurdistan.⁴⁴⁰ Given the challenging terrain, the US relied on the Kurds to combat this extremist group as part of its war on terror. However, the Kurdish leaders, wary from past experiences, refused to give any assistance until they received guarantees of protection and support in post-Saddam Iraq.

When the American officials were planning for the war in Iraq, they had no doubts about Turkey’s cooperation regarding territories and airbases. They had planned to deploy over 60,000 troops at the Turkish-Iraqi borders.⁴⁴¹ However, Turkey feared that toppling Saddam’s regime would lead to an independent Iraqi Kurdistan, potentially encouraging Turkish Kurds to revive secessionist movements. For this, Turkey refused to join the US coalition in the war. There were also rumours that the Turkish military would intervene in northern Iraq as soon as the war would begin in order to prevent the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in Iraq. In an interview on 1 August 2002, General Arman Kuloglo, a former Turkish Commander, told the Guardian that he believed that “Turkey would occupy Iraqi Kurdistan in the event of the war because it doesn’t want the towns of Kirkuk and Mosul to fall to the Kurds.”⁴⁴²

⁴³⁸ Shareef, M. Majeed. *President George W. Bush’s Policy Towards Iraq: Change or Continuity?* 2010, Durham University, PhD dissertation. p. 200.

⁴³⁹ Shareef, M. Majeed.

⁴⁴⁰ Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Iraq: The Past, Present and Future*. p. 103.

⁴⁴¹ Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Iraq: The Past, Present and Future*. p. 104.

⁴⁴² Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Iraq: The Past, Present and Future*. p. 105.

When Turkey refused to assist the United States, the Iraqi Kurds were eager to step in. The KDP and PUK decided to join their forces, recognizing their capability to destabilize the country internally. This marked the beginning of a new phase in the US-Kurdish relations. In April 2002, the Kurdish leaders were secretly invited to Washington to discuss Saddam's removal. Then another meeting was held in Germany to assess the Kurdish military and intelligence capabilities. However, the KDP leader Masoud Barzani did not attend the meeting because he mistrusted the US due to experiences of past betrayals. Conversely, the PUK's leader Jalal Talabani remained hopeful and positive about the US intentions. In July 2002, a Pentagon team arrived to northern Iraq to evaluate the Kurdish region and militia. This was followed by other meetings between American and Kurdish officials, where plans for liberating Iraq were set. Being aware that a US invasion of Iraq was imminent, Kurdish leaders Masoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani sought to strengthen ties with the US. On 15 August 2002, Talabani officially invited the US to enter Iraq from the PUK's territory, stating in an interview with CNN, "I explained to the United States' officials here that the Iraqi opposition, Kurds included... have tens of thousands of armed people. These forces can liberate Iraq with the support of the US, with cooperation and coordination with American forces."⁴⁴³

On March 1, 2003, the Turkish parliament voted against using Turkish soil for operations against Iraq. This decision, indeed, surprised Washington which had never expected Turkey's rejection of any US request, given the strong historical alliance between the two countries. As Turkey proved unreliable, the US turned to the Kurds as an alternative ally. Kerim Yildiz commented that "for the Kurds, the most important battle had been won before the combat had even begun."⁴⁴⁴ While the Turkish stance strained the US-Turkish relations, it strengthened the bond between the United States and the Iraqi Kurds. Michael Gunter stated that "only when the United States perceived the Iraqi Kurds to be a useful foil against Saddam Hussein did Washington begin to take a partially pro-Kurdish position at least towards the Iraqi Kurds."⁴⁴⁵

President Bush announced the US occupation of Iraq on March 20. The initial phase of the war was cautious, because the US-led coalition was trying to minimize

⁴⁴³ Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Iraq: The Past, Present and Future*.

⁴⁴⁴ Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Iraq: The Past, Present and Future*. p. 108.

⁴⁴⁵ Gunter, Michael. "The Five Stages of American Foreign Policy towards the Kurds." *Insight Turkey*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2011, pp. 93-106.

casualties, offering Saddam Hussein a chance to leave the country and encouraging the Iraqi forces to surrender. Instead of withdrawing, Saddam attacked Kuwait with scud missiles. This increased US concerns about Iraq's alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction, giving the US further justification for the invasion. The coalition forces entered Iraq from the south through Kuwait, while in the north, the Kurds were fully prepared to join the coalition forces, with an army that numbered about 80,000 Peshmerga compared to only 5,200 American soldiers deployed in the northern front. On March 26, over 1,000 members of the 173rd Airborne Brigade arrived at Harir airport in Iraqi Kurdistan.⁴⁴⁶

In the north, the initial mission was not directed against Saddam's army but against Ansar al-Islam. Kurdish and American forces moved into the mountainous border region with Iran, where the group operated. Within days, Operation Viking Hammer was launched; resulting in the defeat of Ansar al-Islam and the elimination of its threat, while the surviving members fled across the borders into Iran. Following the successful end of the operation, Peshmerga forces, backed by US Special Forces, turned their attention to the Iraqi Green Line units along the borders of the Kurdish region. They quickly defeated Saddam's forces in the cities of Kirkuk, Mosul and Erbil, which had seen some skirmishes before the withdrawal of the Iraqi troops. Moreover, the fall of Baghdad on April 9 further demoralized the remaining of the Iraqi soldiers in the north, who surrendered the next day without resistance.⁴⁴⁷

Following the defeat of the Iraqi army, the Kurds took to the streets of Kirkuk and Mosul to celebrate. In their victory, they destroyed Saddam's statue in a humiliating symbol of the end of his rule.⁴⁴⁸ However, the lack of US forces on the ground led to an unexpected situation in these cities. Celebrations quickly turned chaotic as the Kurds wanted to take revenge from the Arabs, believing that those lands and properties had originally been theirs. The Kurdish leaders of KDP and PUK tried to control the situation, acknowledging that they were attempting to stop the looting but "the local people are very angry. They have been so oppressed and tortured."⁴⁴⁹ Indeed, the Kurdish leaders

⁴⁴⁶ Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Iraq: The Past, Present and Future*. p. 110.

⁴⁴⁷ Yildiz, Kerim. *The Kurds in Iraq: The Past, Present and Future*. p. 111.

⁴⁴⁸ Braiker, Brian. "A tyrant's Life." *Newsweek*, 13 Dec. 2003. www.newsweek.com/tyrants-life-132093.

⁴⁴⁹ Harding, Luke. "Kurdish Fighters take Kirkuk." *The Guardian*, 11 Apr. 2003. www.theguardian.com/world/2003/apr/11/iraq.kurds1

condemned such actions; Masoud Barzani said that “no Kurd is allowed to attack the property, life or integrity of any Arab citizen in any village, district, or in the center of main cities”, adding that “the Arabs have full right to self-defence in such incidents.”⁴⁵⁰ And since the US officials did not expect such situation, they were not able to control the Kurds’ anger; thus, they asked the Kurdish leaders to restore order and stability. The situation stabilized quickly, with Kirkuk coming under the PUK control, while some parts of Mosul remained under the control of Saddam’s loyalists, leading to ongoing troubles there.

As a matter of fact, the American invasion of Iraq was beneficial to the Iraqi Kurds, as it helped them achieve two main goals. First, they finally saw the end of Saddam Hussein, whom they had long wished to remove. Second, they achieved a significant milestone with the recognition of Kurdistan in northern Iraq. The 2005 Iraqi Constitution acknowledged Kurdistan, declaring it a semi-autonomous region within federal Iraq, stating that, “this constitution, upon coming into force, shall recognize the region of Kurdistan, along with its existing authorities, as a federal region.”⁴⁵¹ The United States, which was grateful to the Kurds for their efforts in the war, granted guarantees of support and protection to the Iraqi Kurds in northern Iraq. In 2009, Defence Secretary Robert Gates promised not to abandon the Kurds in Iraq; and President Barrack Obama pledged to help mediate disputes between Erbil, the capital city of the KRG, and the central government in Baghdad.⁴⁵²

Factually, the close cooperation between the United States and the Kurds during the war greatly improved the American image among the Kurdish community. The Kurds, indeed, considered the Americans as liberators rather than invaders. Therefore, the US soldiers received a warm welcome from the Kurdish families, who opened their homes as safe shelters for the Americans to relax. For the Kurds, those foreigners were the only hope that would save them from decades of discrimination and suppression. When the war began in the north, the Kurds felt a newfound sense of security, because they recognized that the attacks were targeting their enemy, Saddam Hussein and his army. People in Iraqi

⁴⁵⁰ Harding, Luke.

⁴⁵¹ “Iraq Constitution of 2005, Article 117, Section I.” *Constitute Project*.
www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iraq_2005. Accessed 21 Apr. 2021.

⁴⁵² Gunter, Michael M. “The Five Stages of American Foreign Policy towards the Kurds.”

Kurdistan were very hopeful, waving American flags and holding photos of President Bush.⁴⁵³

After 2003, the issue of Kirkuk and other disputed territories became a significant challenge to US policy towards the KRG. These areas, at the epicenter of an extended conflict between Baghdad and Erbil, endangered Iraq's territorial integrity and raised the possibility of an ethnic conflict there. In this particular context, the United States was continuously embroiled in the battle and had a say in how it developed. In order to maintain its influence and strengthen its regional hegemony in the Middle East, the United States' policies towards these regions were part of its larger strategy for Iraq and the entire region.

After the fall of Saddam's Ba'athist regime, the United States redefined its mission from military intervention to stabilization and peacekeeping responsibilities. It was, indeed, a very difficult and complex responsibility in a country with ethnic and religious differences, in addition to historical rivalries threatened to boil over at any time. However, the situation in Iraqi Kurdistan was notably different. As soon as the serious risk of Saddam Hussein disappeared, the Kurds managed to establish a stable and prosperous region, enjoying both political and economic improvements. When the international community blamed the United States for its war on Iraq and accused the Americans of causing damage and instability, Iraqi Kurdistan stood out as a success story. While tension and sectarian violence increased elsewhere in the country, northern Iraq emerged as a relatively stable area, characterized by political autonomy, institutional development, and economic growth compared the rest of Iraq.

However, since 2003, the dispute between Baghdad and Erbil emerged as one of the major political issues that endangered Iraq's unity and stability. The United States also expressed worries about this problem, arguing that tensions could lead to catastrophic effects on the country and the region as a whole, and this would pose a serious threat on US national interests. Indeed, the American perspective on Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan was based on the idea that internal stability could be only achieved through political agreement

⁴⁵³ Krajewski, Jenna. "The Iraq War was a Good Idea, if you ask the Kurds." *The Atlantic*, 20 Mar. 2013. www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/03/the-iraq-war-was-a-good-idea-if-you-ask-the-kurds/274196/.

among different Iraqi groups, who could peacefully resolve their differences. For this, the US often attempted to mediate between the central government and the Kurdish leadership, encouraging them to contribute positively to build a successful political system in Iraq.⁴⁵⁴

Factually, the struggle between Baghdad and the Kurdish Regional Government can be traced back to two opposing viewpoints that have significantly influenced Politics in Iraq since 2003. On the one hand, Iraqi Arabs, supported by the US, advocated for the creation of a strong central government rather than a federal system. According to this perspective, as was outlined in the 2004 Transitional Administrative Law, the Baghdad government was granted all sectors of power, including military forces, natural resources and foreign policy. The United States argued that this solution was preferred at the aim of preserving Iraq's territorial integrity and averting its disintegration. This strategy was, indeed, adopted by the post-2003 Iraqi governments, who sought to marginalize the KRG. Michael Gunter commented that the stability of the country was in danger due to the "suspicion, animosity, and brinkmanship" which characterized the relations between the Kurdish leadership and the Iraqi government. Gunter mentioned that even though the 2005 Iraqi constitution recognized a federal system and granted the Kurdish region legitimate authority, the Iraqi regime still continued to try to assert control over the KRG. He argued that from the Arab perspective, consolidating power in the central government was crucial to prevent Iraq's breakup, which would be advantageous for both the country and the Kurdish region.⁴⁵⁵ Similarly, Gareth Stansfield and Liam Anderson stated that Baghdad's efforts to consolidate control and empower central authorities were a major contributing factor to the problems between Erbil and Baghdad. These efforts were demonstrated, for instance, by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki calls for changes to the constitution in 2008 that would favor centralization in Baghdad's hands.⁴⁵⁶

On the other hand, the other viewpoint, which the Kurds strongly supported, focused on creating a federal and democratic system that would divide authority between Baghdad

⁴⁵⁴ Nasri, Ghadir, and Arman Salimi. "The Politics of Kirkuk: Policy Implication for Iran." *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs*, vol. 3, no. 4, 2013, pp. 75-100.

⁴⁵⁵ Gunter, Michael. "Kurdish-Arab Tensions and Irbil-Baghdad Relations." *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2010, pp. 40-47.

⁴⁵⁶ Stansfield, Gareth, and Liam Anderson. "Kurds in Iraq: The Struggle between Baghdad and Erbil." *Middle East Policy*, vol. 16, 2009, pp. 134-145.

and Erbil, aiming to avert the emergence of a new dictator in the country.⁴⁵⁷ According to the Chief of Staff to the Presidency of the KRG Fouad Hussein, the main objective of the Kurdish leaders was to establish a federal system in Iraq; however, most policy makers in Baghdad were unwilling to establish such a system due to their poor democratic experience. These differences; therefore, led to increased tensions between the Kurds and the Iraqi Arabs.⁴⁵⁸ In the same context, Falah Mustafa, Head of the Department of Foreign Relations, pointed out that the Kurds asked the central government to “respect the Kurdish identity, equality and power sharing” stipulated by the constitution. However, the Iraqi government showed little willingness to recognize the Kurds as legitimate partners in Baghdad and to consider the KRG as a federal province.⁴⁵⁹

Additionally, the Kurdish fears of the authoritarian tendencies of the Iraqi governments further fueled tensions between Baghdad and Erbil. These tensions have been frequently considered by the United States as one of the main obstacles to its policy in Iraq. In its 2010 Annual Threat Assessment, the US Intelligence Community noted:

Arab-Kurd tensions have the potential to derail Iraq’s generally positive security trajectory, including triggering conflict among Iraq’s ethno-sectarian groups. Many of the drivers of Arab-Kurd tensions—disputed territories, revenue sharing and control of oil resources and integration of Peshmerga forces—still need to be worked out, and miscalculations or misperceptions on either side risk an inadvertent escalation of violence. US involvement both diplomatic and military—will remain critical in defusing crises in this sphere.⁴⁶⁰

Similarly, the US Deputy Assistant Secretary for Iraq and Iran Brett McGruck stated that the ongoing struggle between Baghdad and Erbil, which centered mostly on federalism, revenue sharing, power balance and disputed territories, not only threatened Iraq’s stability but also posed risks to the American interests in the Middle East.⁴⁶¹ Moreover, General Raymond Odierno, the Commander of Multinational Forces in Iraq,

⁴⁵⁷ Rafaat, Aram. “US-Kurdish Relations in post-Invasion Iraq.” *Middle East Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2007, pp. 79.89.

⁴⁵⁸ Rafaat, Aram.

⁴⁵⁹ Rafaat, Aram.

⁴⁶⁰ Blair, Dennis C. “Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.” 3 Feb. 2010.

www.odni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Testimonies/20100203_testimony.pdf.

⁴⁶¹ McGurk, Brett. “U.S. Foreign Policy toward Iraq.” 13 Nov. 2013.

www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-113hhrg85554/html/CHRG-113hhrg85554.htm.

warned that the Arab-Kurdish conflict could benefit al-Qaeda and other extremist groups who aimed to destabilize the country.⁴⁶² Essentially, despite efforts to mediate disputes between Baghdad and Erbil during the period 2003-2010, Washington often supported the central government on key issues, leaving many problems unresolved.

Contrary to repeated claims that the Kurds would be a destabilizing tool for Iraq and the whole region, the Kurdish Regional Government has proved itself as a stabilizing and secure force since 2003. In fact, it has been regarded as one of the safest and most stable areas in Iraq; for this, it has been often described as the “other Iraq”. Many researchers, such as Gareth Stansfield, argued that the stability and prosperity of the KRG were significant in solidifying the Kurdish position in Iraq, through promoting federalism and providing a secure environment.⁴⁶³ Michael Williams also confirmed that the Kurdish region emerged as a haven of security and stability since the end of Saddam Hussein’s rule.⁴⁶⁴ Similarly, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons praised the political system in the KRG, stating:

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq is a genuine democracy, albeit an imperfect and still developing one, and a beacon of tolerance and moderation in a wider region where extremism and instability are on the rise. Its values are broadly our values. The UK is fortunate to have in such a volatile part of the world a partner as relatively moderate, pragmatic, stable, democratic, secular and reflexively pro-Western as the KRG.⁴⁶⁵

The United States’ approach was largely influenced by conditions of stability and instability in Iraq and the broader Middle East. Following the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, the US sought to establish a strong central government that would serve its interests. This prompted Paul Bremer, the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, to stress the KRG’s support of a united Iraqi government, leading to significant differences between the US and the Kurdish leadership over the future political structure of Iraq. While the Kurds aimed to preserve their autonomous status, the US focused on establishing a central

⁴⁶² Odierno, Raymond I. “Interview with Joint Force Quarterly.” *Joint Force Quarterly*, vol. 55, no. 4, 2009, pp. 120-125. intelros.ru/pdf/jfq_55/20.pdf.

⁴⁶³ Stansfield, Gareth. “The Unravelling of the post-First World War State System? The Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the Transformation of the Middle East.” *International Affairs*, vol. 89, no. 2, 2013, pp. 259-282.

⁴⁶⁴ Williams, Michael. “Goodbye to Sykes-Picot?” *Chatham House*. 17 Jun. 2014. www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/14903.

⁴⁶⁵ “UK Government Policy on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.” *UK Parliament*. 21 Jan. 2015. publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm.201415/cmselect/cmfaaff/564/56409.htm.

government based on administrative federalism that divided the country into eighteen provinces. These opposing views increased significantly during the leadership of Bremer, who tried to unify Iraq through weakening the KRG's importance. To achieve this goal, Bremer attempted to dissolve the Peshmerga militias and include them in the Iraqi army.⁴⁶⁶ Many politicians and researchers, such as Galbraith, considered this strategy as "unrealistic and undesirable", because it was unreasonable to expect that the Kurdish fighters abandon their military to join an army dominated by Arabs, who were perceived as enemies.⁴⁶⁷ Bremer also called for an administrative federal structure; therefore, he made an agreement with the Iraqi Governing Council in November 2003 to discuss this structure. However, this approach did not take into account ethnic or geographic considerations. In fact, the US perspective on federalism did not align with Kurdish aspirations; Galbraith stated that the goal of a non-ethnic Iraq was unachievable;⁴⁶⁸ and Michael Gunter noted that a non-ethnic federalist system could endanger minority rights and encouraged the oppression of the majority over minority groups.⁴⁶⁹ Furthermore, the White House attempted to exclude the Kurdish Regional Government from the Transitional Administrative Law. The Kurds were dissatisfied with this American policy; thus, in December 2003, Masoud Barzani strongly opposed the idea of administrative federalism and the dissolution of the Peshmerga forces, stressing that the Kurds would not abandon the autonomous status that they had enjoyed for years.

Indeed, the United States adopted this approach for several reasons. First, its desire to establish a strong and strategic ally in Baghdad, believing that the presence of the Kurds within Iraq was very essential to preserving the country's stability. Second, the US aimed to make Iraq a strategic tool in the Middle East to counter Iran and protect the American interests in the region. Third, the US lacked a deep and clear understanding of the complex sectarian and ethnic situation in Iraq. Galbraith said that the Bush administration had no detailed knowledge of the internal disputes that existed between the various Iraqi factions; thus, it viewed Iraq as a "blank slate" on which the US could impose its idea of a

⁴⁶⁶ Galbraith, Peter W. *The End of Iraq: How American Incompetence created a War without End*. Simon & Schuster, 2007, p. 235.

⁴⁶⁷ Galbraith, Peter W.

⁴⁶⁸ Galbraith, Peter W. p. 238.

⁴⁶⁹ Gunter, Michael M. "The Permanent and New Realities Facing the Kurdistan Regional Government: Options and Prospects." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2008, pp. 237-249.

democratic society.⁴⁷⁰ Additionally, Bremer lacked experience in post-conflict reconstruction, particularly in Iraq's context. Fourth, the US believed that the American federalism model could be applied on Iraq; for this, it initially attempted to impose administrative federalism on the Kurds, aiming to create a unified and non-sectarian state. These factors, indeed, contributed to raising pressure on the Kurds and preventing them from leading Iraq during the transitional period.⁴⁷¹

However, the situation altered in 2004, as Iraq's safety and stability began to deteriorate, while the KRG emerged as a secure and stable region, leading the Bush administration to reconsider its stance on the Kurds. Consequently, the US supported the KRG as a federal entity, as outlined in the 2004 Transitional Administrative Law, recognizing the KRG across three provinces. Additionally, Article 54 granted the Kurdistan Regional Government the right to rule its internal affairs and control security forces throughout the transitional period. This legislation also acknowledged federalism as Iraq's political framework, marking a significant cornerstone in the Kurdish history, as the US officially accepted federalism as a viable solution.⁴⁷² Meanwhile, the insurgency against American forces in Iraq became more violent, and the security environment further deteriorated, presenting major obstacles to the US policy and its interests in both Iraq and the entire region. The November 2005 US National Security Strategy report pointed out that "Iraq is the central front in the global war on terror. Failure in Iraq will embolden terrorists and expand their reach...Iraq would become a safe haven from which terrorists could plan attacks against America, American interests abroad, and our allies."⁴⁷³ In the same regard, President Bush stated that Iraq was facing serious challenges related to security, and he stressed that:

As the Iraqi people struggle to build their democracy, adversaries continue their war on a free Iraq...The terrorists' stated objective is to drive US and coalition forces out of Iraq and gain control of that country, and then use Iraq as a base from which to launch attacks against America, overthrow moderate governments in

⁴⁷⁰ Galbraith, Peter W. p. 234.

⁴⁷¹ Galbraith, Peter W. p. 237.

⁴⁷² "Iraq's Kurds: Toward an Historic Compromise?" *Crisis Group*, 8 Apr. 2004.

www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/iraqs-kurds-toward-historic-compromise.

⁴⁷³ "National Strategy for Victory in Iraq." *US Department of Defense*, 30 Nov. 2005. georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/iraq/iraq_strategy_nov2005.html.

the Middle East, and establish a totalitarian Islamic empire that reaches from Spain to Indonesia.⁴⁷⁴

As a matter of fact, these security challenges and the growing threat of sectarianism and terrorism compelled the US to strengthen its policy towards the Kurds who were seen as the most reliable and secular elements, and a vital American ally to preserve stability in the country. Indeed, the KRG's importance in the US strategy grew because American officials viewed it as a key ally in combating terrorism and limiting power of the Iranian-backed Shi'a groups in Iraq. As a result, the US supported the Kurdish Regional Government and its calls for greater autonomy.

As the US pressure decreased, the Kurds strengthened their position and successfully included most of their demands in the 2005 Constitution. This was a critical accomplishment for the Kurds, as this constitution preserved many rights they had waived in the Transitional Administrative Law. It also emphasized the establishment of a central authority paired with strong federal power, acknowledging a democratic and federal system in Iraq. The constitution also confirmed Iraq's multicultural and multi-ethnic identity, stressing the existence of two major nations, Arabs and Kurds. Furthermore, it limited the central government's domination over oil and national resources, emphasizing the importance of collaboration between Baghdad and Erbil. In essence, the 2005 Constitution restricted the central government's power over Iraqi Kurdistan.⁴⁷⁵

The period 2005-2010 witnessed a significant development in the US policy towards the Iraqi Kurds. During these years, diplomatic relations between both sides developed, and the Kurds became important allies of the US in the region. A notable moment occurred in May 2005, when Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited Iraq, meeting Masoud Barzani before heading to Baghdad. This event, indeed, demonstrates the strong and important position of the Kurdistan Regional Government in post-Saddam Iraq. According to Michael Rubin, "by going first to Barzani's headquarters rather than to Baghdad, she bolstered the Kurdish leader's position in the eyes of his constituents and among the other Iraqi political leaders negotiating in the nation's capital."⁴⁷⁶ During the

⁴⁷⁴ Bush, George B. "The Struggle for Democracy in Iraq: Speech to the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia." 12 Dec. 2005. www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/12.12.05.html.

⁴⁷⁵ Galbraith, Peter W. p. 141.

⁴⁷⁶ Rubin, Michael. "The Arafat Model for the New Iraq." *The Progressive Conservative*, vol.7, no. 201, 2005. www.proconservative.net/PCVol7Is201MandelArafatModelIraq.shtml.

meeting, Rice and Barzani discussed major issues, focusing on the political landscape in the country and the need for reconciliation among the different Iraqi factions during the constitutional drafting process. Rice also reaffirmed the US commitment to ensuring security and stability in Iraq, especially in Kurdistan, and she asserted that a democratic constitution was essential for safeguarding both the Kurds and Iraq as a whole.⁴⁷⁷ On October 25, 2005, Barzani visited Washington for an official meeting with George Bush at the White House. This visit marked a significant milestone, because it was the first time that a US president formally engaged with a Kurdish leader. In fact, this crucial shift was mainly due to the belief that the Kurds could be trusted allies and could play a significant role in advancing the American objectives in Iraq, including making strategic allies in Baghdad, eliminating terrorist groups and reinforcing the US influence in the region.

After finalizing strategic agreements between the United States and Iraq, the Kurds sought guarantees from the US to protect them from potential risks. The US asserted its commitment to a democratic and federal Iraq. Additionally, the Security Agreement explicitly stated that in case the Iraqi federal system was under threat, the US would intervene to address the situation. This assurance was very important for the Kurds, who did not trust the central government and feared that once the US left Iraq, the Iraqi authorities would undermine the federal system and consolidate power in Baghdad. For this, the Kurdish leaders increased their attempts to discuss the future of the American policy towards Iraqi Kurdistan during Obama's administration. This issue was a major focus during a meeting between Robert Gates, the US Defense Minister, and Masoud Barzani in Erbil in December 2009. Following their discussions, Barzani stated that Gates emphasized the US commitment to sustaining strong and friendly relations with the Iraqi Kurds, and he also promised that they would not be left to face challenges alone.⁴⁷⁸

4.3. The US Perspective on the Kurdish Issue in Iran

The US position on the Kurdish issue in Iran is shaped by a complex interplay of regional politics, human rights concerns, and longstanding alliances with Kurdish groups across the Middle East.

⁴⁷⁷ Rubin, Michael.

⁴⁷⁸ "President Barzani and Defense Secretary Gates in Erbil reaffirm long-term KRG-US Relations." 11 Dec. 2009. www.krg.org/articles/detail.asp?1ngnr=12&smap=o210100&rn=223&anr=32969.

4.3.1. The Kurdish National Movement in Iran

The Kurds are the second largest ethnic minority in Iran, numbering nearly 8 to 10 million, which is about 10% of the country's total population. Most Kurds are Sunni Muslims, living in a predominantly Shi'a country.⁴⁷⁹ They mainly inhabit the provinces of West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Kermanshah and Ilam, as shown in the following map.

Map 4.8. Kurdish areas of Iran

⁴⁷⁹ Yildiz, Kerim and Taysi, Tanyel B. *The Kurds in Iran: The Past, Present and Future*. Pluto Press, 2007. p. 3.

IRAN'S MAINLY KURDISH AREAS



Source: Alay, Josep L. "Iranian Kurdistan." X, 20 Apr. 2023, twitter.com/josepalay/status/1649071754462085122/photo/1.

After the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514, the Ottomans managed to take control of the largest part of Kurdistan from the Safavids. This region, later known as Turkish and Syrian Kurdistan, remained under the Ottoman rule, and Iran never managed to reclaim it. In the aftermath of World War I, the idea of self-determination started to spread among the Kurdish communities in Iran and the remnant states of the Ottoman Empire, leading to the rise of the Kurdish national movements which advocated for autonomy and independence of the ethnic minorities. In Iran, Ismail Agha Simko made the first attempt to establish an independent Kurdish state in West Azerbaijan in early 1920;⁴⁸⁰ however, the Iranian forces defeated Simko and restored control over the province.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁸⁰ Ismail Agha Simko was the chief of the Shakkah tribe. He controlled the area west of Lake Uromiyah where many Azeri-speaking Shi'as and Christian Assyrians live, but they had never been willing to take part in the Kurdish claims to self-determination; thus, Simko's rule was unwelcomed by those mentioned minorities, resulting in unrest and small fighting there during the early years of the 1920s.

⁴⁸¹ "The Forgotten Kurds of Iran: A Primer on Rojhelat." *Washington Kurdish Institute*, 3 Mar. 2020. dckurd.org/2020/03/03/the-forgotten-kurds-of-iran-a-primer-on-rojhelat/.

In 1921, Reza Pahlavi assumed power. Under his rule, the Kurds faced increased discrimination and oppression due to his aggressive policies towards minority groups. Influenced by Kemalism in Turkey, Reza Shah embraced a policy of persianization through assimilation. He strongly believed in the ideology of “one-nation = one language”; thus, all non-Persian languages, including Kurdish, were banned. The Kurds were not even considered as a minority but as mountain people who had protected the Iranian borders for centuries. Therefore, they were not allowed to use their own language in education and public speech.⁴⁸² Despite this persecution, the Kurds refused to abandon their language and culture. Some writers and poets like Noori challenged the state’s restrictions and continued to write in Kurdish. Noori argued in his memoirs that the state’s ban of the Kurdish language only strengthened his resolve to write in it.⁴⁸³

Despite his defeat in 1920, Simko continued to launch small attacks against the state’s army. He was captured by 1924 but was later pardoned by the Iranian government. In 1925, Simko pledged allegiance to Reza Shah, but his loyalty was short-lived. In 1926, he joined a Kurdish rebellion led by Hadj Agha of the Herki tribe and Bezzadeh of Mergever and Tergever in 1926. However, the revolt was crushed by the Shah’s forces, and Simko fled to Turkey. In 1930, he returned to Iran and launched another attack on the Shah’s army near Oshnu, but he was killed on June 21.⁴⁸⁴ Following Simko’s death, no other major uprisings occurred in Iranian Kurdistan for the rest of the decade.

In fact, Simko was criticized by many researchers such as Izadi, Kreyenbroek and Sperl, who believed that Simko was not a true Kurdish patriot, but was more interested in preserving his power and wealth, even by fighting other Kurdish leaders who threatened his authority.⁴⁸⁵ Izadi also stated that Simko had no strong ideological objection to accepting support and assistance from groups opposed to the Kurdish movement and independence, including Kemalists in Turkey.⁴⁸⁶

The occupation of Iran in 1941 led the overthrow of Reza Shah and the split of the country into two zones: the Soviets controlled the north while the British took control over

⁴⁸² Sheyholislami, Jaffer. “Kurdish in Iran: A Case of Restricted and Controlled Tolerance.” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, vol. 2012, no. 217, 2012, pp. 19-47. doi.org/10.1515/ijsl-2012-0048

⁴⁸³ Sheyholislami, Jaffer.

⁴⁸⁴ Entessar, Nader. *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992. pp. 12-13.

⁴⁸⁵ Kreyenbroek, Phillip, and Stefan Sperl. *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*. Routledge, 1992. pp. 175-177.

⁴⁸⁶ Izad, Mehrdad R. *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook*. Taylor and Francis Inc., 1992. p. 57.

the south. This division placed the Kurdish region under the Soviet influence, though not under its direct control. This situation gave the Iranian Kurds their first real opportunity to achieve their dream of independence. In 1942, Kurdish intellectuals and tribal leaders gathered in Mahabad and established a national organization, Komala, which advocated for self-governance in Iranian Kurdistan. The organization became a mass movement and a significant force in the region; and though it did not have a formal leadership, its members accepted Qazi Mohamed, a Sunni religious figure from Mahabad, as their spiritual leader in 1944. However, the need for an entity capable of participating in the political arena led to the dissolution of Komala in 1945 and the creation of the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (KDP-I), with Qazi Mohamed at the helm. Two months following its creation, the party issued a statement outlining the Kurdish requests, including local self-rule in Iran, the use of Kurdish in education and administrations, the appointment of local officials in the Kurdish areas, and the use of the natural wealth to improve the different sectors in Iranian Kurdistan, especially economy and education.⁴⁸⁷ However, the Iranian government rejected these demands and considered the statement as a direct threat to its authority in the Kurdish region. Indeed, the Iranian regime was too weak to take a serious reaction during this period, and its weakness encouraged the Kurds of Iran to establish and proclaim the Republic of Mahabad officially on January 22, 1946. Prominent Kurdish political figures attended the proclamation, including Mullah Mustafa Barzani, whose presence added more credibility to the new republic.⁴⁸⁸

In a brief period, the Republic succeeded in achieving many of the KDP-I's goals. In the words of Ghassemlou:

Kurdish became the official language in the administration and in the schools. Several Kurdish periodicals appeared regularly, notably Kurdistan, the KDP organ, Halala (The Tulip), a paper for women, and Grougali Mindalan (The Children's Babil), a children's magazine. The first Kurdish theatre was founded. Kurdish women began to play an active part in social and political life for the first time.⁴⁸⁹

Indeed, Britain and the United States decided to ignore the establishment of the Mahabad Republic, because they feared that showing support might encourage similar

⁴⁸⁷ Yildiz, Kerim and Tanyel B. Taysi. pp. 14-17.

⁴⁸⁸ Yildiz, Kerim and Tanyel B. Taysi. .

⁴⁸⁹ Yildiz, Kerim and Tanyel B. Taysi. p. 17.

calls for self-determination and independence among the Kurdish groups in the neighbouring states, especially in the oil-rich Kurdish regions. They were also worried that supporting the new republic could lead Turkey change its stance in the war and ally with the Soviets. These concerns, in fact, forced the British and the Americans to avoid officially recognizing the republic.⁴⁹⁰

Although the Kurdish region was under the Soviet control, relations between the Kurds and the Soviets were not strong or dependable, especially because the KDP-I was not a communist party. Some politicians and researchers, including Marianna Charountaki, believe that the Mahabad Republic was a Soviet puppet, used to weaken the Iranian government.⁴⁹¹ This theory was confirmed when the Soviets abandoned the Kurds and withdrew from the region after receiving guarantees of oil concessions from the Iranian regime. By late 1946, geopolitical shifts in the region, particularly the withdrawal of Soviet support, left the Republic isolated. The Iranian government, backed by Western powers, launched a military campaign to restore control over the region. In December 1946, the Republic of Mahabad fell. Qazi Muhammad and other leaders were arrested, and the dream of an independent Kurdish state was dashed, marking the end of an unfulfilled experience in Kurdish nationalism.

Following a failed attempt to assassinate the Shah in 1949, the government launched a brutal campaign against democratic and opposition movements throughout the country, including Kurdistan. However, when the National Front gained prominence in the early 1950s, with Mohamed Mossadegh at the helm, the situation of the Kurds underwent some changes.⁴⁹² The Kurds, indeed, strongly supported Mossadegh as he granted them some linguistic and cultural rights. Moreover, the KDP-I was restored and renewed its political activity, albeit covertly. In 1952, members of the party participated in the provincial elections and won a significant number of votes; however, the Shah cancelled the elections and reasserted strict control over Mahabad. And although Mossadegh opposed the Shah's policies towards the Kurds, he was not able to change the situation, because under the Iranian Constitution, the Shah was the Commander in Chief who had the absolute power over the armed forces. When Mossadegh's government was toppled during Operation

⁴⁹⁰ Eagleton, William Jr. *The Kurdish Republic of 1946*. Oxford University Press, 1963. pp. 62-64.

⁴⁹¹ Charountaki, Marianna. p. 100.

⁴⁹² The National Front was a movement founded by Mohammad Mosaddegh in 1949 on the ideas of nationhood, self-determination and anti-imperialism.

Ajax⁴⁹³ in August 1953, the Kurds faced harsher restrictions and repression by the Shah. Consequently, some sporadic uprisings occurred, including the Javanioudi tribe's revolt in 1956, but these were swiftly crushed by the state's army.⁴⁹⁴

Realizing that they did not have power and resources to challenge the Shah's strong army, the KDP-I leaders decided to shift their strategy from guerrilla warfare to establishing a strong base among the Iranian Kurds who were living abroad especially in Western countries. In the early 1970s, the Kurdish national sense of identity among the Iranian Kurds experienced a revival, especially with the arrival of Mullah Mustafa Barzani and other Iraqi Kurdish exiles in Iran. However, the 1975 Algiers Accord between Iran and Iraq removed any hope of reigniting the Kurdish movement in Iran. Consequently, the Kurdish region remained relatively quiet until the Iranian Revolution in 1979.⁴⁹⁵

4.3.2. The 1979 Iranian Revolution

When the Iranian Revolution broke out in 1979, the Kurds of Iran were enthusiastic supporters. They saw the revolution as a chance not only to oust the Shah but also to gain autonomy. Just before the revolution, Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou returned from exile in France, hopeful that the Kurdish issue in Iran would see significant progress. However, the Kurds became disappointed as soon as the real intentions and goals of the revolution became obvious. Consequently, many Kurdish leaders put aside their differences and joined the Council of the Kurdish People led by Shaikh Azzedin Hussein, with Ghassemlou as the council's spokesman. Moreover, the KPD-I, along with other groups, refused to participate in the March 1979 referendum, which asked the Iranians to choose between monarchical rule or an Islamic Republic. While 98.2% of Iranians voted for a republic rule, the Kurds boycotted the referendum, arguing that it ignored their right to self-determination.⁴⁹⁶

As the regime of the Shah was overthrown, Iran was declared an Islamic Republic and a new constitution was drafted. In fact, religious minorities such as Christians and

⁴⁹³ Operation Ajax refers to the 1953 coup in Iran which was backed by the US and UK, leading to ousting Mohammad Mosaddegh from power and reinstalling Mohammad Reza Shah as Iran's leader. "1953 Coup in Iran." *Britannica*, www.britannica.com/event/1953-coup-in-Iran. Accessed 15 Aug. 2024.

⁴⁹⁴ Entessar, Nader. pp. 23-26.

⁴⁹⁵ Entessar, Nader. pp. 28.29.

⁴⁹⁶ Entessar, Nader. p. 30.

Jews were recognized under this Islamic Constitution;⁴⁹⁷ however, Islamic minorities, including the Kurds, were regarded as part of the broader Islamic Umma.⁴⁹⁸ This meant that they were not accorded any recognition or privileges, or even guarantees to worship freely.⁴⁹⁹ This situation led to the emergence of some clashes between the Kurds and the Republic's army during the spring and summer of 1979. The Kurdish fighters managed to seize land and divided it among themselves. However, Khomeini launched a Holy War on the Iranian Kurds in August; he outlawed all Kurdish parties and described the KDP-I as the party of Satan, and declared both Hussein and Ghassemlou as enemies of the state.⁵⁰⁰

The clashes between the Iranian troops and Kurdish militants resulted in the execution of many Kurds after brief trials.⁵⁰¹ On November 2, a ceasefire was announced; and negotiations started between the government and the Kurds represented by Hussein. However, the Iranian regime insisted on the full disarmament of the Kurds and refused absolutely to recognize them as a distinct minority. Another ceasefire was declared in January 1980, and Khomeini promised a constitutional amendment to protect the rights of the Sunni Kurds. Nevertheless, the Kurds objected to this amendment because they wanted to be recognized as an ethnic minority, not just as a religious group.⁵⁰²

In September 1980, Saddam Hussein invaded Iran, hoping to quickly defeat the Islamic Republic which was going through a tumultuous political turmoil at the time. While some thought that the Iran-Iraq War might provide potential opportunities for the Kurdish people in both countries, it turned out that the governments of Iran and Iraq used the conflict to address their own Kurdish issue. Each country attempted to exploit the Kurdish problem in the neighbouring state to weaken it internally.⁵⁰³

Initially, the Iran-Iraq War seemed like a significant chance for the Iranian Kurds. The state's forces, which had been suppressing Kurdish uprisings, were relocated to fight

⁴⁹⁷ Article 13 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran stipulates that Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are the only recognized religious minorities, who, within the limits of the law, are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies, and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious education. Iran (Islamic Republic of) 1979 (rev. 1989). www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran_1989. Accessed 29 May 2021.

⁴⁹⁸ Umma is an Arabic term which literally means a nation.

⁴⁹⁹ Ciment, James. *The Kurds, State and Minority in Turkey, Iraq and Iran*. Facts on File, Inc., 1996. p. 106.

⁵⁰⁰ Ciment, James. p. 69.

⁵⁰¹ Kreyenbroek, Phillip, and Stefan Sperl. p. 185.

⁵⁰² Kreyenbroek, Phillip, and Stefan Sperl.

⁵⁰³ Ciment, James. p. 199.

the Iraqi invaders. As a result, there was a power vacuum in the Kurdish areas, giving the Kurds an opportunity to reorganize and restore control over the region, with military and financial assistance from Iraq.⁵⁰⁴ However, once Iran managed to achieve victory over Iraq in 1982, it returned its military back to the Iranian Kurdish areas and launched a massive attack on the Kurds in an effort to regain control over the region. The Kurds were completely surrounded and unable to request support from the Iraqi Kurds, who allied with Iran against Baghdad.⁵⁰⁵ In 1984, Iran launched another offensive, resulting in the destruction of Kurdish towns and villages, in addition to tens of thousands of refugees and significant casualties.⁵⁰⁶ Moreover, Saddam Hussein's chemical weapon attacks on Iraqi Kurds in 1988 affected Iranian Kurdish areas, resulting in numerous civilian deaths and long-lasting health consequences for thousands.⁵⁰⁷

Despite heavy casualties, the Kurds did not abandon their demands for autonomy. Ghassemlou made several efforts to negotiate with the government; however, he was assassinated on July 13, 1989. His successor Sadeq Sharafkandi was also killed in 1992. Factually, it is believed that the Iranian regime was behind these assassinations, although Tehran denied any participation in those crimes. Following the deaths of their leaders, the KDP-I and Komala's situation deteriorated, and many members fled with their families to Western Europe to escape the danger.⁵⁰⁸

Following the Iran-Iraq War, which lasted eight years (1980-1988), the Iranian government focused its forces on the Kurdish region, which had served as bases for many opposition groups during the war. Consequently, hundreds of villages were destroyed, and hundreds of thousands of people were deported.⁵⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch (1997) stated that "more than 271 Iranian Kurdish villages were destroyed and depopulated between 1980 and 1992."⁵¹⁰ Landmines were placed along the Iranian borders, and thousands of the

⁵⁰⁴ Ciment, James.

⁵⁰⁵ Ciment, James.

⁵⁰⁶ Ciment, James.

⁵⁰⁷ Yildiz, Kerim and Tanyel B. Taysi. pp. 27-28.

⁵⁰⁸ Yildiz, Kerim and Tanyel B. Taysi. p. 28.

⁵⁰⁹ Ahmed, Mohammed Ali. *The Legal Status of the Kurds in the Middle East: the Twenty-first Century Policies of Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq towards the Kurds*. 2010, University of Exeter, PhD dissertation. p. 158.

⁵¹⁰ Ahmed, Mohammed Ali.

state's soldiers were stationed in the region. Despite these harsh measures, sporadic armed clashes continued.⁵¹¹

In the mid-1990s, the situation for the Iranian Kurds started to change. The rise of Mohamed Khatami to power in 1997 marked the beginning of a period of reform. Many Iranians, including the Kurds, supported Khatami's reform movement as they were dissatisfied with the Iranian Islamic administration.⁵¹² Khatami promised political and social liberties for all Iranians, including ethnic and religious minorities. However, his promised changes were unrealized, because according to the Iranian political system, power is divided between the political leader Khatami and the religious leader Ali Khomeini, who had been appointed Supreme Leader in 1989.⁵¹³ Therefore, significant restrictions prevented Khatami from implementing his planned reforms.

During his term, Khatami appointed the Kurdish politician Abdollah Ramazanzadeh as the first Governor General of Iranian Kurdistan. Ramazanzadeh managed to reduce tensions in the region, but he later moved to Tehran to serve as the Cabinet Secretary during Khatami's second term. Eventually, his departure halted progress in the Kurdish region. In 2001, many Kurdish Parliament members resigned, citing discrimination by the Khatami administration.⁵¹⁴ Relations between the Kurds and the Iranian regime worsened in 2004, as most of the Kurdish MPs were not allowed to participate in the parliamentary election. Consequently, more than 70% of the Kurds boycotted the vote, leading to increased tension and unrest in the Kurdish cities.⁵¹⁵

The 2005 presidential election brought Mahmud Ahmadinejad to power, but he was not supported by the Kurds since they believed that he had participated in the assassination of Ghassemlou.⁵¹⁶ In fact, during Ahmadinejad's early years in office, the Kurdish political and social situation deteriorated significantly. The president excluded the Kurds from his cabinet, and denied them high-level positions in the state. Furthermore, opposition was harshly oppressed, with increasing cases of arbitrary detentions, unfair

⁵¹¹ Hicks, Elahe Sharifpour, and Neil Hicks. "The Human Rights of Kurds in the Islamic Republic of Iran." in *Kurdish Identity: Human Rights and Political Status*, edited by Charles Macdonald and Carole O'Leary, University Press of Florida, 2007. pp. 201-212.

⁵¹² Yildiz, Kerim and Tanyel B. Taysi. p. 28.

⁵¹³ Yildiz, Kerim and Tanyel B. Taysi. pp. 28-29.

⁵¹⁴ Yildiz, Kerim and Tanyel B. Taysi. p. 44.

⁵¹⁵ Yildiz, Kerim and Tanyel B. Taysi.

⁵¹⁶ Yildiz, Kerim and Tanyel B. Taysi. p. 45.

trials and death sentences. Minority groups, including Kurds, were frequently targeted by police.⁵¹⁷

On July 9, 2005, students demonstrated peacefully in Mahabad to commemorate the anniversary of the 1999 students' uprisings in Tehran, which had been violently suppressed by the Iranian army. However, the 2005 protests faced a similar fate.⁵¹⁸ The Iranian forces stormed Esteghlal Square to arrest Shawaneh Ghaderi, a Kurdish activist and organizer of the demonstrations. When Ghaderi attempted to escape, security forces shot him, bound him to a vehicle and dragged his injured body through the city of Mahabad until he died.⁵¹⁹ This brutal incident sparked a wave of anger and unrest in the local Kurdish community, leading to eight days of protests. In response, the Iranian authorities intensified their oppressive measures against the Kurds, targeting journalists who covered the killing of Ghaderi and the subsequent protests.⁵²⁰

Iranian Kurdistan suffered under Ahmadinejad's rule (2005-2013) because of the harsh policies of the Iranian regime. Kasra Naji stated that "like many young pro-Khomeinists, Ahmadinejad saw the Kurds as posing the greatest danger to the Islamic regime. He felt that they were about to break up the country and declare independence. Kurdistan had become a major base against the Islamic Republic."⁵²¹ Therefore, Ahmadinejad's administration was marked by violent treatment of the Kurdish population, which increased dramatically during these years, resulting in the execution of many politicians, journalists and human rights activists. Ramezanzadeh said that "Ahmadinejad era was a nightmare that will remain in Iranian history."⁵²²

4.3.3. The Impact of US-Iranian Relations on the Kurdish Issue

The US presence in Iran goes back to the 19th century when American missionaries arrived in Persia in 1834. These missionaries played a significant role in establishing

⁵¹⁷ Yildiz, Kerim and Tanyel B. Taysi.

⁵¹⁸ Hassaniyan, Allan. *The Iranian Kurdish Liberation Movement: Cross border Interaction and Mobilization (1950-2015)*. 2018, University of Exeter, PhD dissertation. p. 231.

⁵¹⁹ Hassaniyan, Allan.

⁵²⁰ Hassaniyan, Allan. p. 232.

⁵²¹ Naji, Kasra. *Ahmadinejad: the Secret History of Iran's Radical Leader*. University of California Press, 2008. p. 231.

⁵²² Hassaniyan, Allan. p. 231.

important institutions, including schools, colleges, and medical schools and hospitals. By 1895, 117 schools had been founded in and around Urmia.⁵²³

Although American-Persian diplomatic relations were officially established in 1883, the US did not consider Iran as crucial to its interests. However, the discovery of oil in Iran in 1908 changed the American perspective on the region, which was divided into British and Russian spheres of influence. Yet, it was not until the aftermath of World War II and the weakening of the European powers that the United States managed to secure a dominant position in Iran.⁵²⁴ Relations between the US and Iran's ruler, Mohammad Reza Shah, developed especially due to the Shah's pro-American stance. However, the Shah was unpopular among Iranians, who favoured Mohammed Mossadegh and elected him Prime Minister in 1951. Mossadegh could not stay long in power due to the US-backed coup in 1953, which resulted in reinstating Mohammad Reza Shah.⁵²⁵

In the early 1960s, the Shah declared the White Revolution, a series of intensive reforms aimed at westernizing Iran. Women were granted the right to vote and attend schools and colleges, and they started to dress in western fashion. Moreover, the Shah built new shopping malls which effectively made local shopkeepers unemployed.⁵²⁶ These changes, in fact, caused deterioration in the financial and social situation of the Iranian citizens, decreasing the Shah's popularity. Meanwhile, the Shiite cleric Ayatollah Khomeini emerged as a strong religious influencer and started to criticize the Shah's westernization policy. Perceived as a threat to the Shah's rule, Khomeini was sentenced to exile in 1964.⁵²⁷

The US and Iran maintained a close and friendly relationship for several years. However, the situation changed in the late 1970s, as mass protests took place across Iran in 1978, resulted in the overthrow of the Shah and the establishment of an Islamic Republic. The 1979 Iranian Revolution marked a turning point in the US-Iranian relations. During the protests, the revolutionaries chanted "death to America", making it a central

⁵²³ Zirinsky, Michael P. "A Panacea for the Ills of the Country: American Presbyterian Education in Inter-War Iran." *Iranian Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1993, pp. 119-137.

⁵²⁴ Hussain, Nazir. "US-Iran Relations: Issues, Challenges and Prospects." *Pluto Journals*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2015, pp. 29-47.

⁵²⁵ Polk, William R. *Understanding Iran*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. pp. 108-116.

⁵²⁶ Zahrani, Mustafa T. "The Coup that Changed the Middle East: Massadeq v. the CIA in Retrospect." *World Policy Journal*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2002, pp. 93-99.

⁵²⁷ Zahrani, Mustafa T.

slogan and a key part of the new regime's principles.⁵²⁸ Their hostility towards America was demonstrated when they captured the US embassy in Tehran, leading to the Iranian Hostage crisis. This event resulted in the official end of diplomatic relations between the United States and Iran.⁵²⁹

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini passed away one year after the end of the Iraq-Iran war. He was succeeded by Ayatollah Khamenei, the president of Iran during the period 1981-1989. This change; however, did not significantly reduce the Islamic Republic's anti-American attitude, since Khamenei perceived the US rejection of the Islamic regime as a threat to the Iranian sovereignty, and believed that the United States aimed to change the regime in Iran.⁵³⁰ Meanwhile, George H. W. Bush became the US president. In his inaugural address, he asserted that "goodwill begets goodwill" and hinted that US-Iranian relation could improve.⁵³¹ This initiative encouraged the Iranian President Akbar Rafsanjani to secure the release of the American hostages in Lebanon. Nevertheless, this was seen by the US as merely "doing the right thing", which means that Iran's gesture went unacknowledged. This was perceived by the Islamic Republic as a US betrayal, reinforcing the belief that the US aimed only to serve its interests.⁵³²

When Mohammad Khatami became president of Iran in 1997, US-Iranian relations entered a promising phase, especially when Khatami expressed in his inaugural speech Iran's willingness to welcome relations with "any state which respect our independence."⁵³³ Moreover, the president expressed regret for the hostage crisis in an interview with CNN in 1998, a move that was unexpected and unprecedented from the Islamic Republic. He also proposed "an exchange of professors, writers, scholars, artists, journalists and tourists to help removing the bulky wall of mistrust between Iran and the US administration."⁵³⁴ In response, President Clinton welcomed these endeavours to improve relations between the two countries, and he sent American wrestling team to Iran, which received a warm welcome by the Iranian public. Also, Khatami visited Washington

⁵²⁸ McCain, Chase. "The History of US-Iran Relations and its Effect on the JCPOA Negotiations." *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*, 2015, p.11. digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/2241/.

⁵²⁹ McCain, Chase. p. 12.

⁵³⁰ McCain, Chase. p. 14.

⁵³¹ McCain, Chase.

⁵³² McCain, Chase. p. 14.

⁵³³ Slavin, Barbara. *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies: Iran, the U.S., and the Twisted Path to Confrontation*. St. Martin's Griffin, 2009. p. 192.

⁵³⁴ Slavin, Barbara.

in 1998 and a detente was on the verge. However, relations deteriorated again in 1999 as Iran refused to help the United States in investigating the Khobar Towers bombing.⁵³⁵ Despite their strained relations, Iran condemned the September 2001 attacks on the United States, and thousands of Iranians enthusiastically took to the streets in support of the Americans.⁵³⁶

Then, the US war on Iraq in 2003 forced Tehran to reconsider its relations with America, as the invasion seemed to confirm the US interest in regime change. In response, Khatami's government moved quickly to resolve its differences with the Bush administration. A number of concessions were offered by the Islamic Republic, including ending support and assistance of Hezbollah, recognizing Israel, and engaging in discussions about its nuclear program.⁵³⁷ In exchange, Iran demanded assurances that the US would not attempt to overthrow its regime, and that the sanctions imposed on the republic would be lifted. These demands, which became known as the Grand Bargain, were ignored by the United States, which not only disregarded Iran by ignoring its concessions, but also President Bush made things worse by declaring Iran as part of the axis of evil, alongside Iraq and North Korea.⁵³⁸ This was perceived as a great insult to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The coming of the conservative Mahmud Ahmadinejad to office in 2005 added more tensions between Iran and the West especially the United States, as the new president supported Hezbollah and insisted on continuing Iran's nuclear program.⁵³⁹ However, as Barack Obama became president in 2008, a new chance was offered for US-Iranian relations. President Obama attempted to repair America's reputation, particularly in the Muslim world; and he emphasised on establishing relations based on mutual respect.⁵⁴⁰ Moreover, the president addressed a speech to the Islamic Republic in 2009, in which he praised the Persian Empire and its historical contribution to civilisation. Obama

⁵³⁵ On June 25, 1996, a US Air Force housing complex in the city of Khobar in Saudi Arabia was attacked, resulting in the death of 19 US service members and the injury of more than 500 Americans. "Khobar Towers Bombing of 1996." *Britannica*, www.britannica.com/event/Khobar-Towers-bombing-of-1996. Accessed 16 Aug. 2024.

⁵³⁶ Slavin, Barbara.

⁵³⁷ Axworthy, Michael. *Revolutionary Iran: A History of the Islamic Republic*. Oxford University Press, 2013. p. 214.

⁵³⁸ Axworthy, Michael.

⁵³⁹ McCain, Chase. p. 17.

⁵⁴⁰ McCain, Chase. p. 19.

also expressed a willingness to participate in the nuclear negotiations and sought peaceful solutions to the historical differences between the two states.⁵⁴¹ These efforts by the Obama administration left no excuses for the Islamic Republic to continue its hostility towards the United States, at least during Obama's first term.

4.3.4. Iranian Kurds in the American Foreign Policy

As mentioned earlier, it was not until after World War II that the relationship between the United States and the Middle East countries became more structured. At the time, the US realised that maintaining access to the Middle East oil deposits and preventing the spread of Communism were very essential to its national security.⁵⁴² To achieve these goals, the US aimed to establish pro-American regimes in the region. This led to both overt and covert efforts to overthrow hostile governments, such as the 1953 coup against Mohammad Mossadegh, the Prime Minister of Iran, as the US feared that Mossadegh's close ties with the Soviets might endanger the rule of the pro-Western Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.⁵⁴³

In fact, the Kurdish issue in Iran became entangled in the US-Soviet rivalry. This was demonstrated in 1946, when the Americans and the British withdrew from Iranian Kurdistan; however, the Soviets remained and increased their troops to consolidate power in the region. During this period, relations between the Kurds and the Soviets improved, as the Soviets backed nationalist and secessionist movements in Kurdistan and Azerbaijan. The Soviets also invited Qazi Muhamed, Komala's leader, to visit Baku to discuss the possibility of Kurdish autonomy. Meanwhile, Mustafa Barzani, who had been defeated in northern Iraq, escaped to Iranian Kurdistan, where the Republic of Mahabad was proclaimed in 1946. Map 4.9. shows the position of the republic within Iran.

Map 4.9. The Mahabad Republic

⁵⁴¹ "The President's Message to the Iranian People." *The Obama White House*, 19 Mar. 2009. www.youtube.com/watch?v=HY_utC-hrjI.

⁵⁴² Charountaki, Marianna. pp. 127-129.

⁵⁴³ Charountaki, Marianna.



Kurdish Republic of Mahabad and Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan in 1945-1946

Source: www.iranicaonline.org/uploads/files/azerbaijan_5_fig3.jpg. Accessed 18 Jul. 2023.

Despite the 1942 treaty, which required the evacuation of foreign forces, the Soviets stayed in northwest Iran. This raised US concerns, prompting President Truman to order a deadline for the Soviet forces to leave the country. Under this pressure, the Soviets agreed to withdraw in exchange for Iranian oil concessions. Despite this, the Kurds continued to resist the government's efforts to crush the Mahabad Republic. In November 1946, a telegram was sent from the American ambassador to the Secretary of State, explaining the US stance on the separatist republic:

The announced intention of the Iranian government to send its security forces into all parts of Iran, including any areas of Iran where such forces are not present in control for the maintenance of order in connection with

the elections, seems to me an entirely normal and proper decision.⁵⁴⁴

With Iranian military operations looming against the secessionist republics, the Soviets warned the Iranian government that deploying troops against the Kurdish republic could provoke a Soviet military reaction. In response, the American Secretary of State conveyed to the Iranian government that the United States not only supported Iran's plans to address the separatist republics but also assured that if there were indications of Soviet interference, the US government:

Will be prepared to pursue matter energetically. You can assure Qavam [Iranian Prime Minister] that this government will give its unqualified support to Iran or to any other power the integrity and independence of which may be threatened by external forces.⁵⁴⁵

Without the covert backing of the Soviets, the Mahabad Republic had limited time left. By December 15, Qazi Muhamed surrendered and the republic was quickly crushed by the Iranian forces. Barzani, who fled with nearly 800 of his followers through Turkey into the Soviet Union, pointed out that “the Kurds have not been defeated by the Iranian army; rather it was the Soviet Union that was defeated by the United States and Great Britain.” Factually, the Soviet-Kurdish alliance hindered any US involvement in Iranian Kurdistan. The US did not respond to the establishment or collapse of the Mahabad Republic and made no effort to replace the Soviets when they left the region. Additionally, the US refused to grant asylum to Mustafa Barzani as he was viewed as a Soviet agent.⁵⁴⁶

As a matter of fact, during the rule of Mohammad Reza Shah (1953-1979), the United States was preoccupied with maintaining friendly relations with Iran, as part of its broader containment policy. This demonstrates the absence of direct relationship between the US and the Iranian Kurds for decades. And though the United States often supported minority groups and their right to self-determination, this was not the case for the Kurds in Iran. The United States; however, argued that it considered the Kurdish issue as a local matter that should be resolved by Iran without any external involvement.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁴ “Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, The Near East and Africa, Volume VII.” *Office of the Historian*. history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1946v07/d414. Accessed 18 Feb. 2024.

⁵⁴⁵ “Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, The Near East and Africa, Volume VII.”

⁵⁴⁶ Charountaki, Marianna. p. 129.

⁵⁴⁷ Barkey, Henry J. “Preventing Conflict Over Kurdistan.” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 9 Feb. 2009. carnegieendowment.org/2009/02/09/preventing-conflict-over-kurdistan-pub-22725.

From the 1980s onwards, the lack of official diplomatic relations between the US and Iran due to the Islamic Revolution (1979), the Hostage Crisis (1979) and the Khobar Towers bombing (1995) further hindered the presence of any US-Kurdish interaction.⁵⁴⁸ Moreover, Iran's ability to control and suppress the Kurdish movement during the 1990s and 2000s meant that the US had little opportunity to leverage the Kurdish issue to destabilize Iran or threaten its sovereignty.

Therefore, when analyzing all these events and developments, it becomes clear that the American policy towards the Iranian Kurds was determined by a combination of factors, including the geopolitical situation and the dynamics between the United States and Iran. Furthermore, the fact that Iran's Kurdish movement did not pose a potential threat to regional stability made it a low priority for the US; and as the Iranian Kurds did not have much influence on US interests, their plight was never among the American priorities.

4.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the United States' foreign policy towards the Kurdish issue in Iraq and Iran underwent significant changes influenced by a number of geopolitical interests and regional developments. Regarding the Iraqi Kurds, the US approach was both complex and inconsistent. Initially, this policy was very cautious, depending on the American broader goals in the region. However, after the Gulf War in 1991, the US support for the Kurds increased, culminating in the creation of a no-fly zone over northern Iraq to protect the Kurds from Saddam Hussein's forces, allowing them a degree of autonomy within Iraq. Following the 9/11 events and the subsequent US invasion of Iraq, US-Kurdish relations grew stronger, as the Kurds proved to be reliable allies in the region. Despite this, the US engagement with the Iraqi Kurds remained complicated, shaped largely by shifting alliances and regional dynamics.

⁵⁴⁸ It is important to note that despite the absence of official relations, there were covert and controversial interactions between the US and Iran during the 1980s, such as the Iran-Contra Affair, which involved secret arms deals and negotiations aimed at securing the release of American hostages held in Lebanon by Iranian-backed groups.

Conversely, the American policy towards the Kurdish issue in Iran was more complex, greatly influenced by US relations with Iran. Indeed, the state's strict control over the Kurdish population made them a weak opposition force which did not pose a serious threat on the Iranian and regional stability. Despite the ongoing repression and human rights abuses against the Iranian Kurds, the United States adopted a cautious approach to the Kurds' plight to avoid further tensions with Iran.

Conclusion

This final part of the thesis summarizes the principal conclusions of the study, revealing how the United States foreign policy affected and interacted with the question of Kurdistan between 1945 and 2010. The changing contours of US-Kurdish relations, as bounded by unfolding global political realities, offer abundant insight into the paradoxes and complexities of US foreign policy. Essentially, this thesis demonstrates how US foreign policy was both a spur to Kurdish autonomy in certain situations and a curse to their aspirations in others.

The Kurdish people, widely known as the largest stateless ethnicity in the world, have long suffered from the lack of regional and international recognition and statehood. Indeed, the United States foreign policy has often reflects this dilemma, as it has backed Kurdish self-rule in Iraq, but has never supported wider Kurdish independence or statehood. Looking into how the US has dealt with the Kurdish issue could reveal some of the complexities in American foreign policies regarding sovereignty, minorities, self-determination, and international legal norms.

The United States foreign policy towards the Kurdish issue in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran between 1945 and 2010 reflects a complex interplay of strategic interests, regional stability concerns and humanitarian considerations. Over this period, the US navigated shifting alliances, geopolitical changes and the persistent challenge of balancing national sovereignty with minority rights. This dissertation concludes by synthesizing the key themes and implications of US policy towards the Kurds in these four pivotal countries.

In effect, the US approach towards the Kurdish question has been completely dictated by its strategic interests in the Middle East. During the Cold War, it aimed at containing Soviet influence. In pursuit of this objective, the US prioritized its relationship with Turkey at the expense of the Kurdish claims for rights, which meant ignoring the repression of the Kurdish political movements. It was the establishment of the Kurdistan Workers' Party in 1978 that made a crucial turn in this dynamic and influenced how the US treated the Turkish Kurds. Washington strongly supported Turkey against the PKK, classifying it as a terrorist organization in 1997 and designating the Turkish Kurds as “bad

Kurds.” This was done largely to placate Turkey, which was cooperating on the greater part of other issues such as the containment of the Soviet spread and regional stability. The US gave military aid and intelligence for the Turkish efforts of counterinsurgency, often at the expense of the legitimate concerns and rights of the Kurds. The situation thus represents a recurring theme in US foreign policy: preference for strategic partnership over protection of minority rights and humanitarian issues.

In Iraq, the American attitude on the Kurds was inconsistent due to changing political climates and leaderships. Throughout the 1970s, the US secretly supported Kurdish uprisings against the Iraqi regime as a means to weaken Saddam Hussein's Soviet-aligned government. This support, however, was sharply reversed after the 1975 Algiers Agreement between Iraq and Iran that left the Kurds facing Hussein's retaliation. Actually, this event illustrates the pragmatic nature of the US policy in which Kurdish interests were subordinated to the larger geostrategic calculations. During the 1980s, the US approach to the Iraqi Kurds was thoroughly affected by the Iran-Iraq War. The Reagan administration tried to balance its interest in the region by supporting Iraq against Iran due to the latter's revolutionary ideology. In this case, the US support for Hussein's regime indirectly contributed to the suffering of the Kurdish population. In particular, the brutal suppression of the Kurds of northern Iraq included the genocidal campaigns Anfal and Halabja from 1986 to 1989, where even chemical weapons against Kurdish civilians were used. The US mostly placed its strategic goal of containing Iran above the issue of basic human rights. This period demonstrates how far the United States was willing to go to sacrifice humanitarian principles on the altar of geopolitical goals and how much it was willing to have the Kurdish people of Iraq pay the price for this realpolitik approach.

Indeed, the end of the Cold War introduced new challenges for the US policy. In the 1990s, the Gulf War and the subsequent establishment of the no-fly zone in northern Iraq altered the situation of the Kurds, solidifying an autonomous Kurdish region. The US intervention saved the Kurds from Saddam Hussein and resulted in the formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government. However, this American support was not driven by the desire to help the Kurds, but it was almost primarily designed to weaken the Iraqi regime. The 2003 invasion of Iraq and the demise of Saddam's government further shifted the US stance on the Kurds, who proved to be vital allies in advancing Washington's plans towards stabilizing and rebuilding the country in post Saddam Hussein's period. Iraqi

Kurdistan, which benefited from the protection of the no-fly zone throughout the 1990s, emerged as one of Iraq's most peaceful and prosperous regions. Consequently, the 2000s were a period characterized by a more consistent US policy, which supported Kurdish autonomy within a unified Iraq and recognized the Kurdish crucial role as vital partners toward stabilizing and reconstructing Iraq.

However, the US recognition of Kurdish self-governance in Iraq was cautious following the demise of Saddam Hussein. The US did not support an independent Kurdistan as it posed a risk that threatened to fragment Iraq and create an imbalance of power in the region. Indeed, US-Kurdish relations consistently grappled with the challenge of supporting their aspirations for autonomy while also addressing the security concerns of regional powers like Turkey, Iran and Syria. Understanding the paradox of the Kurds' hope for self-determination and the American policy of a unified Iraq can help one understand the delicacy of the management of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq, where the possibility of an eruption of violence constituted a major obstacle for the US foreign policy towards the country and its Kurdish issue.

In contrast, the American policy towards the Kurds in Syria was limited, primarily due to Syria's marginal position in the United States' considerations during most of the 20th century. During the Cold War, the US-Syrian relations deteriorated due to Syria's alignment with the Soviet Union. Internally, the Syrian Kurds were strictly controlled by the Arab authorities, who denied them many basic rights and imposed discriminatory and aggressive policies on them. Despite these human rights abuses, the US largely avoided engaging in the Kurdish crisis in Syria; instead, it focused on countering the Soviet influence and stabilizing the region to preserve its security and national interests. Therefore, until the late 2000s, both Syria and its Kurdish population remained peripheral for the US, compared to other regional actors. By 2010, the political changes and new challenges in Syria prompted the US to adopt a more active stance, recognizing the repressive conditions faced by the Syrian Kurds. However, it continued to prioritize its interests over providing support for the Kurdish aspirations.

Yet, the Kurds in Iran represents another aspect of the Kurdish issue. Though they suffered a long history of discrimination and repression, the Iranian Kurds were ignored by the United States due to ongoing strained relations between Washington and Tehran, especially after 1979. In fact, the US prioritized some significant issues such as the nuclear

program and Iran's growing influence in the Middle East over addressing its violations of the Kurdish rights. This reveals the US indifference to the Kurdish issue and the marginal status of the Iranian Kurds in the US considerations, which were driven by the need to address bilateral tensions than Kurdish grievances.

Throughout the examined period (1945-2010), the United States foreign policy was characterized by a strategy of instrumentalizing the Kurdish issue. The Kurds in the four countries (Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran) were often used as pawns in the political maneuverings, receiving help when their ends benefited America, and facing betrayal and abandonment when the US objectives did not match with theirs. This duality resulted in a deep sense of mistrust among the Kurdish people towards the American intentions. Moreover, the United States failed to adopt the same approach to the Kurdish problem, as its policy varied greatly between Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Syria. This shift reflects the contradictory nature of the American foreign policy towards the Kurds, depending on its relationship with each country where they reside. As a result, the Kurds experienced both support and opposition from the US, which made their quest for self-determination and autonomy more difficult.

In conclusion, the US foreign policy to the Kurdish issue was essentially practical, although it was sometimes inconsistent. Indeed, the Kurdish problem remained a crucial and complex issue that the United States faced in the region; it illustrates the difficulties of balancing geopolitical interests with moral values. As the US maintains its position and role in the region, the Kurdish issue will certainly remain a major and challenging aspect of its foreign policy concerns.

This thesis gives a detailed and comprehensive study of the US foreign policy towards the Kurdish issue between 1945 and 2010, but it also opens up new horizons for further studies. One area for future study is to investigate the US-Kurdish relationship following 2010, especially in the light of the emergence of ISIS and the Kurdish involvement in fighting the terrorist group in Iraq and Syria. The US support of the Syrian Kurdish YPG, despite Turkey's opposition, presents a new challenge in US-Kurdish relations that deserves further investigation.

Lastly, the impact of the Kurdish diaspora on the US policy deserves more attention. The Kurdish communities, particularly within the United States, have a

significant role in advocating for Kurdish rights and promoting US foreign policy actions. Hence, the influence of the Kurdish Diaspora on the US policy, mainly through public diplomacy and advocacy, is one area of research that could be addressed in future studies.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Masoud Barzani’s Correspondence with William Rogers, US Secretary of State, 22 Apr. 1969.

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NND 969000
By CB Date 04/09/02

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

DECLASSIFIED
PA/HO Department of State
E.O. 12958, as amended
June 21, 2006

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
DIVISION OF LANGUAGE SERVICES

(TRANSLATION)

LS NO. 10056
T-58
Arabic

The Honorable William Rogers
Secretary of State of the United States of America

Greetings and respects.

Your Excellency, you are aware of the fact that the people of Kurdistan of Iraq have been for more than seven and a half years the victims of a racial war waged against them by the dictators in Baghdad, who seized power through bloody military coups.

In addition to the threat which this war has aimed at the existence and legitimate aspirations of our people, both Kurds and Assyrians, it has brought disaster and affliction upon all its victims, deprived the people of Kurdistan, particularly the Assyrians and the Kurds, of education and health [needs], and rendered tens of thousands of them refugees. All these [calamities] have been inflicted upon us only because we have claimed the basic and legitimate human and national rights, to which we, like any other people, are entitled.

On more than one occasion, our people have appealed to the people and Government of the United States of America for assistance in their tribulation and inclusion in

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your country's aid, in all fields, to many of the under-developed peoples.

As we reiterate our appeal to the people and government of the United States through Your Excellency, we hope that President Richard Nixon's administration may usher in more propitious times for our cause, and that this appeal may meet a receptive ear on your part and gain the necessary sympathy and support.

Any serious step you may take towards this end will ensure for your country the generous gratitude and support of our people, as well as prove the best application of the policy of the United States, whose objective is to serve humanity and stand by small nations subjected to distress and suffering.

The delegation consisting of Shafiq Qazzaz, Zia Malak Ismail, and Sam Andrews is authorized to speak on my behalf and to set forth in detail the various aspects of our case. I am hopeful that the delegation will enjoy the favor of an audience with you.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Mustafa Al-Barazani
4/22/69

Appendix II: Urgent Appeal from Jalal Talabani and Masoud Barzani to George H. W. Bush, 31 Mar. 1991.

IRAQI KURDISTAN FRONT

PRESS RELEASE

The Kurdish Leaders, Jalal Talabani and Masoud Barzani, have issued the following joint appeal to President George Bush regarding the present situation inside Iraq.

Mr. President:

RE: URGENT APPEAL FROM THE IRAQI KURDISTAN FRONT

Today, Saddam Hussein's forces began a full scale offensive to recapture Kirkuk. As part of this offensive the center of the city has been subjected to heavy bombardment by fixed-wing aircraft, helicopter gunships, heavy artillery and surface-to-surface missiles causing widespread civilian casualties.

You personally called upon the Iraqi people to rise up against Saddam Hussein's brutal dictatorship. They have now risen and are confronting the might of Saddam's tyranny. They are being subjected to ruthless indiscriminate attacks against which they have no effective defense. The only hope for the Iraqi people to avoid an imminent catastrophe is for the world community to act resolutely, and immediately, to restrain Saddam Hussein from persisting with this barbaric onslaught.

The opposition forces are united in their commitment to achieve a pluralistic democracy which respects the human and collective rights of all the people of Iraq. Fears about the possible disintegration of Iraq are totally unfounded and serve only to provide Saddam Hussein with a pretext for clinging to power. The Iraqi Kurdistan Front, the coalition of all Iraqi Kurdish groups, has made it absolutely clear that it will respect the integrity and unity of Iraq.

The Iraqi Kurdistan Front formally calls on the government of the United States of America to intervene to--

1. Prevent Saddam Hussein from using heavy weapons of mass destruction against civilians, including fixed-wing aircraft, helicopter gunships, surface-to-surface ballistic missiles, heavy artillery, napalm, phosphorus and sulphuric acid.

2. Ensure the distribution of humanitarian supplies to the whole of Iraq by delivering aid directly into the liberated areas by

road convoy from Turkey, Syria and Iran and through captured airfields.

Saddam Hussein cannot again be allowed to benefit from the

international community's indifference to the deliberate abuse of human rights and of international law. The international community has already paid a heavy price for this short-sightedness.

In the name of the principles of freedom, justice and democracy, we appeal to the United States to come to the aid of the people of Iraq.

Jalal Talabani and Masoud Barzani
(Please telephone or fax reply urgently to London (081)667-0681

Appendix III: Correspondence of the Kurdish National Congress of North America with President Bush, 29 Mar. 1991.

8 ... *NSC attn: Sandra Charles* 225986

Kurdish National Congress of North America
P.O. Box 15498, Ann Arbor, MI 48106

Executive Committee

Professor Asad Khailany, D.Sc., President
Professor Ahmed Uthman, D.D.S., Secretary
Mohammed Sinjari, Treasurer

Fouad Darweesh, M.D.
Najmaldin O. Karim, M.D.
Saman Shali, Ph.D.
Kakil Zibari
Jalal Melahaji
Delkhwaz Jaff, M.S.M.
Awat Aliyar, Ph.D.
Heval Shirwan, Ph.D.

9106548
'91 APR-13 5:52 PM
March 29, 1991

President George Bush
The White House
Washington D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

During my interview today on W U of M, the radio station of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Mr. Bob Whitman, has contacted the White House regarding the appeal which was sent to you by the Kurdish leaders Mr. Jalal Talabani and Mr. Mosuod Barzani for U.S. intervention to save the Iraqi people from mass murder by dictator Saddam Hussein. The White House replied that no appeal has been received by them. Enclosed I am sending you the appeal which Kurdish National Congress of North America has received this morning directly from these Kurdish leaders. The Kurdish American Community is greatly concerned about the fate of the Kurdish and the Iraqi people in the hands of the brutal dictator Saddam Hussein.

Mr. President the Iraqi Oppositions have responded to your call to uprising to overthrow the dictator Saddam Hussein. We have learned that your picture is currently hanging over many buildings and places in Iraqi Kurdistan and they are considering you their liberator. As in the Wall Street Journal article of March 27, 1991 it was written that the elderly Kurdish people have given you the title of Hadji Bush which is the title given to the pilgrim of the holy city of Mecca because they consider you to be their savior.

Mr. President, our U.S. government has the moral obligation to intervene immediately to end the regime of dictator Saddam Hussein and to save the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqi people. As you pointed out always we the Americans are against Saddam Hussein and we do have great respect for all Iraqi people. It is inconceivable to let the Iraqi people suffer and the dictator to stay in power.

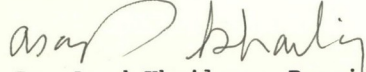
On behalf of the Kurdish American community, we appeal to you to

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see attached

open immediately a dialogue with the Kurdish and Iraqi oppositions to plan for establishing a democratic Iraqi government in place of the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein so that the Iraqi people can live in peace and tranquility.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'asad khailany', written in a cursive style.

Dr. Asad Khailany, President

Appendix V: Election Returns for Iraqi Kurdistan National Assembly and for the Leader of the Kurdistan Liberation Movement, May, 19, 1992

Party/candidate	Votes	Share of total, pct. ^b
Assembly election		
Kurdistan Democratic Party	437,879	45.3
Patriotic Union of Kurdistan	423,833	43.8
Islamic Movement of Kurdistan	49,108	5.1
Kurdistan Socialist Party	24,882	2.6
Iraqi Communist Party	21,123	2.2
Kurdistan Popular Democratic Party	9,903	1.0
Independent Democrats	501	0.1
Total ballots ^a	967,229	—
Leadership election ^c		
Massoud Barzani (KDP)	466,879	47.5
Jalal Talabani (PUK)	441,057	44.9
Others (IMK, KSP)	74,713	7.6
Total ballots ^a	982,649	—

Source: Dahlman, Carl. "The Political Geography of Kurdistan." *Eurasia Geography and Economics*, vol. 43, no. 4, 2002, pp. 271-299.