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The Kurdish Problem in Perspective

A Research Paper

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The Kurdish Problem in Perspective

A Research Paper

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on 30 June 1979.*

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The Kurdish Problem in Perspective



Key Judgments

The fall from power of the Shah of Iran and the instability that has plagued the Khomeini regime have focused international attention on the Kurds. A distinct ethnic group with their own language and culture, the Kurds for several thousand years have occupied a mountainous region, historically known as Kurdistan, which includes parts of southeast Turkey, northwest Iran, and northern Iraq as well as smaller enclaves in Syria and the USSR.



Although the Kurds constitute the fourth most numerous people in the Middle East (after Arabs, Turks, and Iranians), they have not achieved territorial independence because:

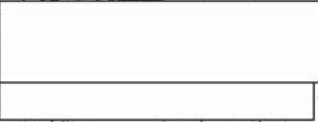
- Tribalism, differences in religion and dialect, and national barriers have prevented the development of any real Kurdish unity; as a consequence, Kurdish nationalist groups have tended to act independently of one another.
- Competing groups within Turkey, Iran, and Iraq have almost always been able to unite to frustrate Kurdish separatist or autonomist aspirations.





The chances that the Kurds will be able to achieve self-determination in the future are not good:

- Even though the Kurds in Iran have assumed de facto control over much of the predominantly Kurdish area of the country, the revolutionary government will not permit infringements of its ability to conduct foreign, defense, or economic policy to go unchallenged. Most Kurdish leaders recognize that when the government's forces are sufficiently rebuilt, it will, if necessary, use force to reestablish its control over the Kurdish region. Moreover, most Iranian Kurds probably would prefer to settle for autonomy than risk open conflict with the government.
- The Turkish Government will not grant the Kurds in Turkey greater political autonomy, although Ankara might allow its Kurdish minority greater freedom of cultural expression.
- The Iraqi Government will continue to use a combination of military force and economic inducement to discourage a resurgence of dissident activity among Iraqi Kurds.
- The Kurdish community in Syria has been assimilated by the local society to a greater degree than Kurdish minorities in neighboring countries, and antigovernment activity by the Syrian Kurds seems unlikely.





Although full-scale conflict between the Kurds in Iran and the revolutionary government does not seem likely in the near term, an attempt by the government to extend its control in the Kurdish region led to serious clashes in late July. Guerrilla activity, especially by Kurds in Iran and Iraq, is likely to continue. Over the longer term, the possibility of more serious conflict between the Kurds and the governments of the states in which they live probably depends on two factors: whether future events so weaken the control of the governments in question as to provide the Kurds with an opportunity to press for greater self-determination; and whether any of the Kurdish communities is able to obtain substantial outside aid such as that provided by Iran to the Kurds in Iraq before March 1975. 

The Soviets would undoubtedly like to use Kurdish dissidence to put pressure on neighboring governments that are not considered pro-Soviet. They are inhibited from providing large-scale, direct support to such minorities in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey, however, by their desire to avoid severe damage to their relations with these states. At the same time, the Soviets may indirectly support the Kurds by condoning third-party transfers of Soviet equipment. As most Kurdish dissident leaders have ties to pro-Soviet Communist parties, such arrangements would be relatively simple. In doing so, they would hope to encourage continued instability in Iran and create problems for the increasingly anti-Soviet Baathist government in Iraq; such action would also serve to remind area states of the Soviet capability to create dissension among their minorities. 





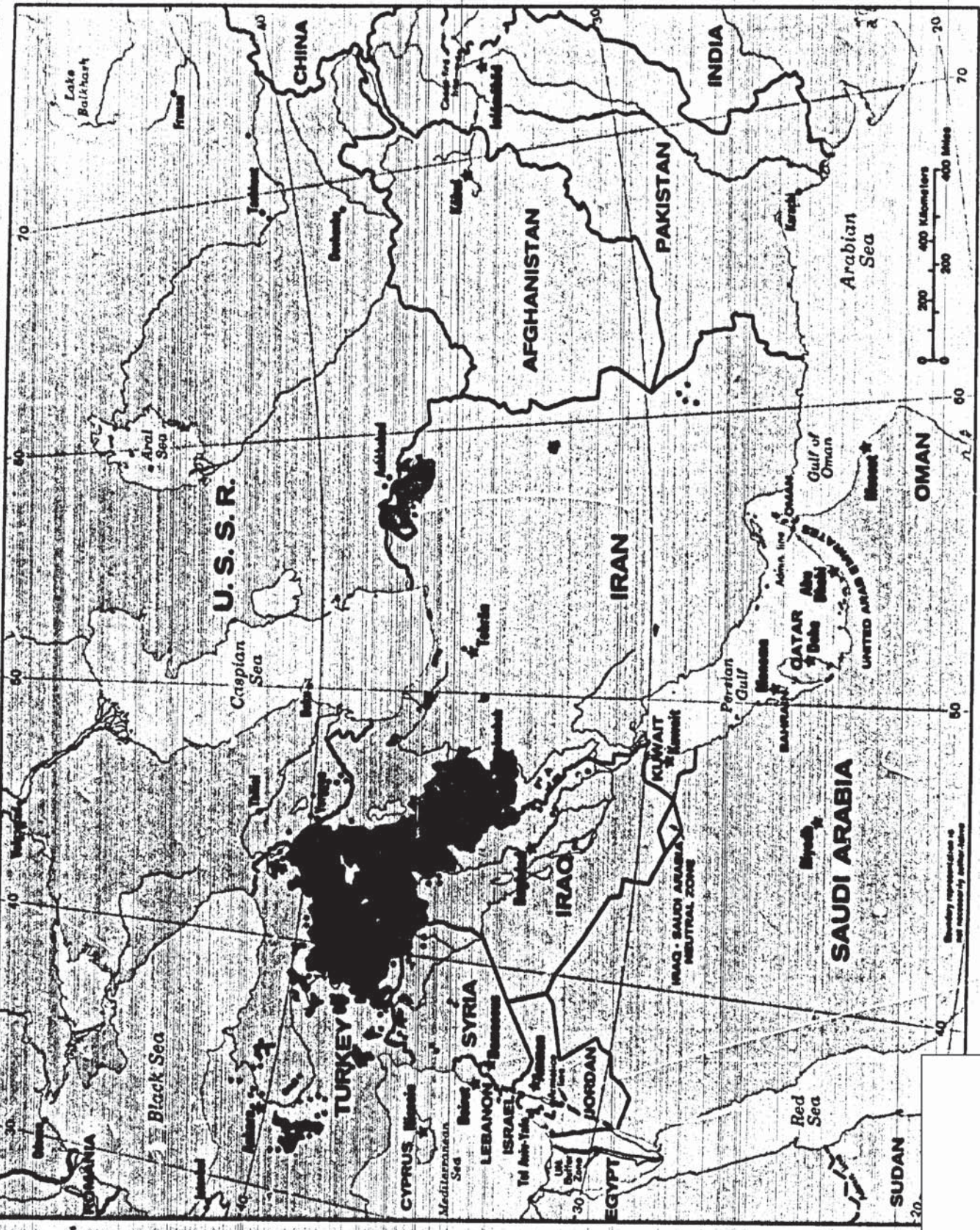
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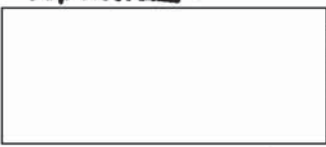


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Kurdish Areas in the Middle East and the U.S.S.R.



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The Kurdish Problem in Perspective

Background

Since ancient times, the Kurds have inhabited the mountainous region stretching from southeast Turkey across northern Iraq and into northwestern Iran, with small enclaves in northern Syria and in the Transcaucasus region of the USSR. The total area, covering approximately 287,000 square kilometers, has never constituted a formal political entity, despite ill-fated attempts over the years to establish a separate Kurdish state. Nevertheless, this area has historically been labeled "Kurdistan." Other small communities of Kurds have emigrated from the Kurdish heartland to more economically advantageous urban areas or have been relocated by the governments of the states in which they live.

Ethnic Origin

It is generally thought that the Kurds are the descendants of Indo-European tribes that settled in the Kurdish areas perhaps up to 4,000 years ago. The Kurds consider themselves, inaccurately according to some historians, to be the direct descendants of the ancient Medes, conquerors of Ninevah in 612 BC, who were defeated by the Persians 62 years later. In physical appearance the Kurds vary throughout

Kurdistan as a result of mixing with other ethnic groups over the centuries. They are, however, regarded as a distinct and separate ethnic group.

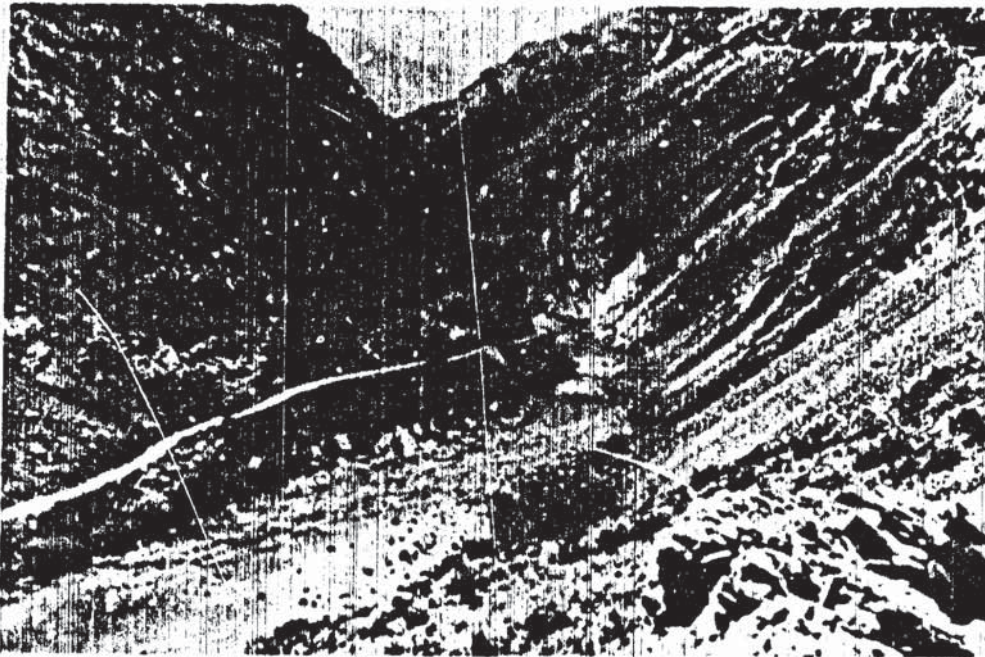
Population

Most estimates of the number of Kurds living in the region range from 9.65 to 12.4 million—4 to 6 million in Turkey, 2.8 to 3.5 million in Iran, 2.5 million in Iraq, 250,000 to 300,000 in Syria, and 100,000 in the USSR. Estimates by some Kurdish sources of a total population of around 16 million seem high and may be designed to justify territorial claims. Although there are a smaller number of Kurds living in Iraq than in Turkey and Iran, they account for some 20 percent of Iraq's population, as opposed to approximately 10 percent in Turkey and Iran. The Kurds in Syria constitute only 5 percent of the total population.

Although most Kurds in Turkey inhabit the mountainous areas in the southeastern part of the country, some are found in central Anatolia. In addition, several hundred thousand Turkish Kurds have migrated to Ankara and Istanbul in search of employment.

Mountainous terrain west of Lake Urmia in Iranian Kurdistan.





The Great Zab River Valley near Hakkari, Turkey, an example of the deep, narrow valleys and swift moving streams common throughout Kurdistan.

In Iran, the Kurds are found mainly in the mountainous northwestern part of the country, although some 300,000 inhabit the mountainous area northwest of Mashad along the Soviet border. Iranian Kurds are also found southwest of Khorramabad, near Shiraz, near Birjand in eastern Khorasan Province, and south of Zahadan in Baluchistan va Sistan Province. There are also Kurds living in Tehran and other large cities in the country, although no figures are available.

Most Kurds in the Soviet Union live in the republics of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaidzhan. In 1944 a sizable Kurdish minority in the Georgian-Turkish border area, as well as some Georgian Muslims and a number of Armenians living along the Turkish border, was deported to Soviet Central Asia in anticipation of a Soviet military move against Turkey.

Language.

The Kurdish language is a central element of the cultural heritage of the Kurds. Their demand that Kurdish be adopted as the official language in Kurdish-speaking areas has long been a serious point of contention between Kurdish groups and the governments of the countries in which they reside. In Turkey, the teaching of Kurdish in schools was forbidden, as was the case in Iran before the revolution. Unlike the Turks, however, the Iranians allowed the printing of Kurdish books and the broadcasting of Kurdish radio programs. Since the Shah's overthrow, the Kurds in Iran have proclaimed Kurdish an official language, and in towns such as Sanandaj, Mahabad, and Kermanshah, the Kurdish language reportedly is being taught in schools. Currently in Iraq there is some indication that the Baathist government is considering

Most Iraqi Kurds live in the mountainous region of the north, although some are also found along the Tigris River south of Mosul, along the Tigris River southeast of Baghdad, and in Baghdad. There are several large towns in northern Iraq, but only Sulaymaniyah is predominantly Kurdish. An Iraqi Government Kurdish resettlement program initiated after 1975 forced the relocation of thousands of Kurds to the area south of Baghdad, although most have since been permitted to return north.

Most Syrian Kurds are located in the northern section of the country along the Turkish border and in the northeastern Jazirah area between Turkey and Iraq. Approximately 30,000 Syrian Kurds live in Damascus.

Kurdish village in
northwestern Iran.



granting some linguistic autonomy to the Kurds and will permit the expansion of Kurdish-language radio and television broadcasting. As recently as two years ago, however, the government was accelerating its efforts to curtail the teaching of the Kurdish language in elementary and secondary schools in the Kurdish region, as well as doing away with all Kurdish studies in Iraqi universities. The Kurds in the USSR are permitted to use Kurdish in schools, radio programs, and newspapers.

Kurdish belongs to the Iranian branch of the Indo-European family of languages and is related to Farsi, Baluchi, and Pushtu. It has been characterized by one scholar as a "special language, the sister of Farsi, and perhaps the more ancient of the two." Kurdish is divided into two broad classifications of dialects: Kurmanji, spoken throughout the northwestern portion of Kurdistan, and Kurdi, prevalent in the southeastern region. Zaza, spoken by Kurds in central Turkey, is sometimes listed as a third major dialect, although it may be a separate language. Many variations of these groupings are spoken by the Kurds and are known throughout Kurdistan by their local names. In Iraq, for example, the major dialect used in the dominant Kurdish tribal areas and among most Kurdish urban dwellers is Sorani, which is closely related to the Kurdi dialect.

Differences in dialect tend to offset any unifying influence that a common language might have. Some spoken dialects have diverged to the point of mutual unintelligibility; to complicate matters even further, in some areas the Kurdish dialects have been so heavily influenced by neighboring languages that in their vocabulary they often more closely resemble Turkish, Arabic, or Farsi.

The most common form of written Kurdish is literature published in Kurdi (or Sorani), which is based on the Sulamaniyah dialect. It uses a modified Arabic script. Some literature in Kurmanji has been published using a script based on the Roman alphabet. Kurds in the Soviet Union use a script consisting largely of Cyrillic characters plus a few Roman characters.

Religion

Even though the majority of Kurds are Sunni Muslims of the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence, religion has acted as a divisive factor. Many Kurds are drawn to various Dervish orders, and differences over practices and adherence to Sufi mysticism have added to overall tribal divisions. In addition, many tribal leaders combine hereditary religious leadership with their temporal authority, adding to the intensity of tribal distinctions. In Iraq and Iran, where some Kurds are

Shias, religious differences are further compounded. Iranian Kurds in the Kurdish provinces of Kermanshahan and Ilam are virtually all Shias and identify with fellow non-Kurdish Shias. Kurds from the more northern Kurdish region of Iran do not regard the Shias in the south as Kurds at all and frequently refer to them as *Far* (Iranian). Kurds in the USSR have included Sunnis, Shias, and Yezidis (a minor, pre-Muslim sect), but these distinctions have become blurred over the years. There are also small groups of Jewish and Christian Kurds, but their present status is unknown.

Structure of Society

Tribalism has also acted to promote disunity. Over the centuries, it was the tribe that received the primary allegiance of most Kurds, and even Kurds who have been settled for many generations maintain their tribal affiliation. Such fervent tribal loyalty, combined with the mountain isolation which inhibited intertribal communication, promoted tribal feuding and mutual suspicion, which still exists today. During the height of the Kurdish uprising in Iraq during the early 1960s, some tribes fought on the government's side, and others switched back and forth. Some families assured their fortunes either by having one branch stay neutral or by making sure that one group fought on each side of the conflict.

In general, the Kurds have refused to be assimilated under any central governmental authority; they have instead looked to their tribal leaders or *aghas* for support and guidance. The *aghas* spent most of their time negotiating, or feuding, with the government or other tribes, conducting intertribal business where tribal alliances existed, and resolving disputes within the tribe. In return for their leadership, the tribes supported the *aghas*—many of whom were wealthy landowners—by sharecropping on tribal land or through direct contributions in the form of gifts. In some instances where the tribe had no title to the land it used, other than traditional grazing rights, the *aghas* were able to acquire legal possession of the tribal lands, thereby safeguarding their incomes and acquiring large landholdings in the process.

Information available on the role and significance of individual Kurdish tribes outside Iraq is very limited as well as dated. In Iraq, the most important tribes are the Barzani, Talabani, and Jaf. Historically the Barzani tribe has been regarded as the most warlike and independent of all the tribes. Located in northern Iraq around the village of Barzan near the Turkish border, the Barzanis are a settled tribe, chiefly involved in farming. They have long feuded with nomadic tribes that migrate seasonally across grazing lands regarded by the Barzanis as their private lands; in its conflicts with the Barzanis, the government has often been aided by their traditional tribal enemies, both settled and nomadic. From the late 1930s until his death in early 1979, Mulla Mustafa Barzani¹ was the undisputed leader of the Barzanis.

Some members of the Talabani tribe are located in villages northwest of Khanaqin, while the majority of the tribe lives in the area around Kirkuk. One faction of the Talabani tribe, which like the Barzanis is a settled tribe largely engaged in agriculture, is composed of followers of Jalal Talabani,² long a principal opponent of Mulla Mustafa Barzani for leadership of the Kurdish movement. Other factions of the Talabani tribe are led by various family sheikhs.

The Jafs are believed to be the largest of all the Kurdish tribes. Most Jafs live in three areas of Iraq—Diyala, Kirkuk, and Sulaymaniyah. Until prevented from doing so by the Iranian Government in the late 1960s, the Jafs migrated to Iran for summer grazing, and some have remained there. Since the late 1960s, the Jafs have turned to a settled existence. In the early 1970s, they were described as neutral in the conflict between the government and the Barzanis.

Although the majority of Kurds today live a settled agricultural or seminomadic existence, tribal pride and identity continue to be important. Tribal disputes center on such topics as grazing rights and marriage

partners. There are indications, however, that tribal bonds among Kurds are weakening. A traditional ruling family may retain some control in settled village communities, but the customary social order is no longer close-knit. Within the urban areas, tribal identity is less important economically. Although belonging to a particular tribe may still have some social significance, many better educated Kurds identify with the overall Kurdish cause rather than a particular tribe. Kurdish leftists have accused wealthy Kurdish tribal leaders, along with affluent Kurdish merchants and religious men, of perpetuating the oppression of the poorer Kurds.

In Iran, the Shah's land reform laws broke up most large estates held by the Kurdish landowning class, destroying much of the influence of the Iranian tribal chiefs or khans. Kurdish tribesmen in other countries are also breaking with the tradition of financially supporting their leaders. While younger Kurds, as well as those now living along the periphery of traditional Kurdistan, still maintain their sense of ethnic identity, many are straying from the old tribal traditions. The effect of these changes, along with the policies of individual governments intended to incorporate Kurds under a centralized authority, has been to reduce and, in some cases, eliminate the political power of many traditional tribal chieftains.

Economic and Social Situation

Years of unrest and resistance to central authority, indifference by the various governments, and the mountainous terrain have checked the spread of modern health practices and education among the Kurds. The traditional nomadic way of life led by most Kurds has offered little opportunity for economic improvement. In recent years, however, some governments have come to recognize the need for economic and social improvements in the Kurdish areas—if for no other reason than to improve security. Under the land reform laws of 1970 in Iran, large Kurdish holdings were broken up and turned over to the Kurdish peasants who farmed it. Since the end of the

Kurdish revolt in Iraq in 1975, the government has moved some Kurds from their isolated mountain homes to "modern model villages" supplied with electricity, running water, schools, and medical clinics. In the USSR, life on the collective farms offers the Kurds more security than their former nomadism, but at the expense of their traditional lifestyle.

Although there are still some nomadic pastoral tribes, most Kurds are now settled farmers. Despite the use of traditional farming methods and equipment and the difficulty of the terrain, Kurdish agriculture is believed to be fairly productive. Where conditions permit, tobacco is the principal cash crop.

The illiteracy rate of the Kurds is somewhat above the generally high levels prevailing in the Middle East. Nevertheless, over the last few decades a small Kurdish intelligentsia has developed among the educated and professional class of Kurdish society. It was this almost exclusively urban group that provided the impetus for the nationalist aspirations of the Mahabad Republic¹ and has played an increasing role in national movements since then. Graduates of universities in the Middle East, Western Europe, and North America, the educated Kurds tend to leave the Kurdish areas to seek employment in urban centers or even outside the country. In the USSR, some educated urban Kurds are involved in the media, teaching, and, at times, local government.

The Rise of Kurdish Nationalism

The early history of the Kurds records little evidence of Kurdish unity or national cohesion, although short-lived Kurdish principalities flourished in a few areas. Located between the rival Turkish and Persian empires, individual tribes aligned themselves with one

¹ See pages 22-23.



Kurdish women in tribal dress.

side or the other and often fought each other. In the early 17th century, the Turkish-Persian frontiers were finally stabilized, with three quarters of the Kurds falling under Ottoman rule and the remainder under the Savafid dynasty of Persia. The few attempts to penetrate or pacify the Kurdish area, however, were unsuccessful. Despite a series of insurrections in the early 19th century, there was no sign that the tribes were becoming one nation. The first indication of Kurdish political nationalism was the revolt led by Ubaydallah of Shaminan in the 1880s which was aimed at uniting the Kurdish peoples of the Turkish and Persian empires into one state, but this failed when both empires cooperated to eliminate the common threat.

In the years immediately before World War I, Kurdish intellectuals established secret nationalist societies but modern Kurdish nationalism did not take shape until the end of the war. The promise of self-determination held out following the defeat of Turkey raised the hopes of the non-Turkish peoples of the Ottoman Empire, including the Kurds, that they would be able to control their own destiny. The Treaty of Sevres signed by Turkey and the allied powers in August 1920 acknowledged the existence of a distinct Kurdish community and called for provisional recognition of an

independent Kurdistan made up of territory that today composes part of southeastern Turkey

The Treaty of Sevres was never ratified, however, and in July 1923 it was replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne, which ignored the Kurdish minority. "Southern Kurdistan"—the Ottoman province of Mosul, which was under British control when the war ended—was made part of the newly created state of Iraq—which was placed under British mandate. The remainder of Kurdistan fell under the control of Turkey and Iran, with small areas in Syria and the Soviet Union

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The Kurds in Iran fared little better between the wars. The government of Reza Khan, later Shah Pahlavi, forged a new national unity by defeating tribe after tribe by force of arms or intrigue. He placed influential Kurdish leaders in enforced residence in Tehran or elsewhere. Revolts in 1920, 1926, and 1930 led by Agha Ismail, known as Simko, of the Shikak tribe, were suppressed. Efforts were made by the Iranian Government to impose the Persian language on the Kurds and to replace traditional Kurdish dress with Western dress. A revolt in 1931 by Sheikh Tafar of the Hamadan tribe was put down harshly, after which the government declared with some truth that "it had no Kurdish problem." []

In Iraq a revolt by Sheikh Mahmud in the Sulaymaniyah area in 1919 was put down by the British. Another revolt in 1923 by Sheikh Mahmud, who proclaimed himself the King of Southern Kurdistan, was again suppressed, but it secured for the Kurds the right to teach Kurdish in the schools, a right incorporated in the terms of the 1925 League of Nations mandate to the United Kingdom. Although British foreign policy was not actively hostile to Kurdish desires for autonomy, the discovery of oil in southern Iran and the possibility that oil was also present in northern Iraq worked against British support for an independent Kurdistan. The discovery of oil in 1927 near Kirkuk in a concession held by US and European oil interests acted to limit Western sympathy for the Kurdish independence movement. In 1932 Iraq, which had become independent in 1930, enacted constitutional safeguards for the Kurdish population in order to satisfy requirements for membership in the League of Nations. In the same year, however, efforts by the government to establish firmer control over the northern region triggered a revolt led by Mullah Mustafa Barzani. Airstrikes by the British, who maintained a military presence in Iraq after independence, forced Mullah Mustafa and his supporters to withdraw into Turkey. The Barzanis again revolted in 1943 and were not subdued until 1945 when Mullah Mustafa fled to Iran. []

The Soviet-British occupation of Iran in August 1941 provided the Kurds with the opportunity to form the only independent Kurdish state in modern times. The

Soviet zone of occupation included most of the Kurdish region of Iran; for over four years, the Kurds and the Azerbaijanis, both of whom revolted against the Iranian central government at the time of the occupation, effectively ruled themselves. In December 1945, both national groups proclaimed independent republics: the Democratic Republic of (Iranian) Azerbaijan and the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad. The president of the Kurdish republic was Qazi Mohammad, who had headed the committee that had ruled the district since the 1941 uprising. Only the presence of Soviet troops prevented the Iranians from reasserting their control over the district; when the Soviets, reluctantly adhering to the terms of a treaty concluded with Iran, withdrew in May 1946, the two republics collapsed. Qazi Mohammad and a number of other leaders of the Kurdish republic were executed. Mullah Mustafa Barzani, who had taken command of the armed forces of the republic, fled to Iraq and shortly thereafter to the Soviet Union, where he remained for 11 years. []

The decade following the collapse of the Mahabad Republic was relatively peaceful as the governments of Iran and Turkey moved to disarm and subdue their Kurdish populations. This period of tranquility was followed in 1960 by another uprising in Turkey, where the Kurds took advantage of political instability accompanying the overthrow of the government by the Turkish armed forces to demonstrate forcibly against repressive government policies; the army, however, moved to crush the rebels. []

In Iraq, government refusal to meet Kurdish demands triggered a conflict that was to last with occasional cease-fires for 14 years. The return of Mullah Mustafa to Iraq from the Soviet Union shortly after Abd-al-Karim Qasim took power in July 1958 precipitated a struggle between the Barzanis and other Kurdish tribes. Although Mullah Mustafa extended his hegemony over much of the Kurdish population, Qasim, fearful that the Barzanis were becoming too powerful, began to aid traditional enemies of Mullah Mustafa. Hostilities began with government bombing of the traditional stronghold of Barzan in September 1961 in retaliation for an attack on army forces by a tribe allied with the Barzanis. []

Mullah Mustafa's return to Iraq also marked the beginning of a successful effort on his part to control the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), the principal political organization of the Kurdish movement. Founded in 1946 in Iran from the remnants of prewar Kurdish political organizations, the party revealed in its program as well as its structure—it has a Politburo and a Central Committee—considerable Communist influence. Despite the Soviet sponsorship of the party, however, control of the party has largely remained in the hands of leaders devoted more to Kurdish independence than social revolution. In 1959, Mullah Mustafa expelled members of a pro-Communist faction from the party and moved the orientation of the party to the right. The party remained, however, essentially an urban-based organization with its greatest appeal among educated, detribalized Kurds. In 1964, more militant party leaders, including Jalal Talabani and party secretary Ibrahim Ahmad, attempted to depose Barzani as head of the party, but were forced by Barzani's tribal supporters to flee to Iran. In later years, the Iraqi Government reportedly subsidized the Talabani faction in an effort to weaken Barzani.

Between 1961 and 1970, the government initiated a number of offensives against the Kurds, but none were successful in suppressing the Barzani-led forces, in large part because of Iran's willingness to aid the Kurds and to allow its territory to be used for their supply and support. Despite Iran's experience with its own Kurdish minority, the Shah perceived support for the Kurds in Iraq as a means of containing a pro-Soviet socialist neighbor. Both the Kurds and the Iraqi military, which at times had as much as 80 percent of its forces deployed against the rebels, suffered heavy losses. The military wing of the KDP, the Pesh Merga, meaning "those who face death," constituted the principal Kurdish fighting force.

In 1970, conscious that the strains caused by the war in the north had brought down a series of regimes, the Baath government under Saddam Husayn concluded a peace agreement with Mullah Mustafa. The provisions of the accord between the Kurds and the central government granted Barzani and the KDP greater concessions than they had ever received. It recognized the binational character of Iraq—in effect establishing the Kurds as free and equal partners with the

Arabs—reaffirmed Kurdish linguistic and cultural rights, and provided for economic rehabilitation and development of the devastated regions of Kurdistan. Most important, the accord provided for the establishment of a self-governing region of Kurdistan. An official census was to determine those areas in which the Kurds were a majority.

In the subsequent four years during which the accord was to be carried out, the two sides were unable to agree on its implementation. Disagreement over the disposition of oil-rich Kirkuk Province prevented agreement on the territorial limits of the proposed autonomous region. The Kurds accused the government of attempting to Arabize the Kurdish area by settling Arab tribes there and granting cultural rights to other minorities in order to undermine the Kurdish position in Kirkuk. Several attempts to assassinate Barzani and his sons confirmed the Kurdish belief that the government did not intend to honor the accord.

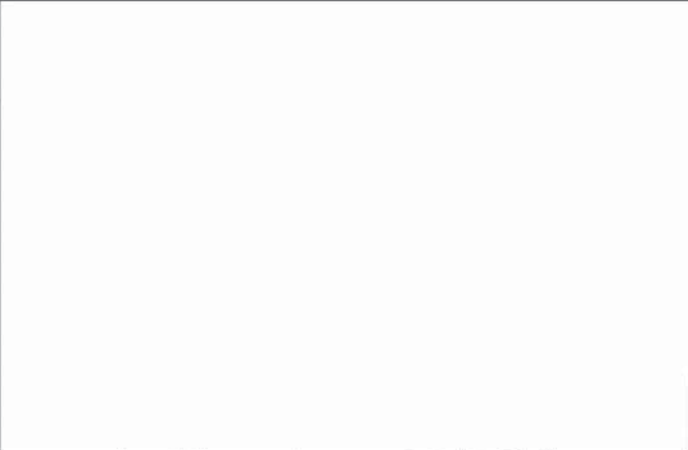
An autonomy law unilaterally promulgated by the government in March 1974, which in effect would have restored the control of the central government over the Kurdish areas, was rejected by the Kurds as a violation of the 1970 accord. Fighting broke out the same month and lasted until the following year. By late 1974, however, as Iranian military units became increasingly involved in border incidents with Iraqi troops, the Shah's perception of the advantages of continued support for the Iraqi Kurds clearly began to change. It is doubtful if the Iranian leader really wanted a clear-cut Kurdish victory. His main goal was to keep the Iraqis so preoccupied that they would be unable to interfere with his policies in the Persian Gulf. He apparently came to see a Kurdish victory as a greater threat to Iranian unity and security than an Iraqi Government victory.

Consequently, in March 1975 in the Algiers Accord, Iraq and Iran agreed to the demarcation of territorial and maritime borders and "the establishment of mutual security and confidence along their joint borders to put a final end to all subversive infiltration from either side." In the agreements following the Algiers Accord, Iraq made several concessions, both



territorial and political, to Iran. Iraq had long encouraged Arab and Baluchi resistance to the Shah and had laid claim to the Khuzistan Province in Iran as part of the Arab homeland. The Baathist government conceded all claims to Khuzistan and agreed to a boundary along the center of the Shatt al-Arab. It also acceded to other territorial border arrangements long sought by Iran. Iran, in turn, stopped aiding the Kurds. In return for its concessions, Iraq was able to reach an agreement with Iran ending the Kurdish revolt and the threat of foreign intervention.

Since the end of the fighting in March 1975, Iraqi military vigilance and a program of economic incentives to the Kurdish minority have kept the level of antigovernment activities to a minimum, although some incidents and attempts to assassinate Kurds who have cooperated with the government have occurred.



The Kurdish Problem and Government Policy

The area traditionally known as Kurdistan includes territory in five states: Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and the USSR. An examination of the policies of these countries toward their Kurdish minorities and the Kurds throughout the area follows.

Iran

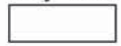
From the late 1940s until early 1978, the Shah's government was able to keep the Kurds in Iran relatively quiet by maintaining a large-scale military presence in the Kurdish area, selectively arming Kurds loyal to the government, exiling tribal leaders suspected of antigovernment activities, and increasing economic development and educational programs in the Kurdish area. Kurds who advocated Iranian nationalism as opposed to Kurdish rights were among the most prominent supporters of Prime Minister Mossadeq in the early 1950s; under the Shah, an increasing number of Kurds came to see their future linked to that of Iran.

The more than 40 Kurdish tribes and confederations in Iran have a strong and continuing tradition of disunity and fighting among themselves, and there is no single leader to whom a majority of the tribes give allegiance. Land reform, which tends to weaken the authority of tribal leaders, has been applied more rapidly and effectively in the northwest than in any other area of Iran, although some tribal leaders thought to be loyal to the government have been allowed to retain large holdings. In addition, the movement of many younger, better educated, and more ambitious Kurds to the cities has reduced the number of potential leaders and linked the welfare of a growing number of families to Iran proper.

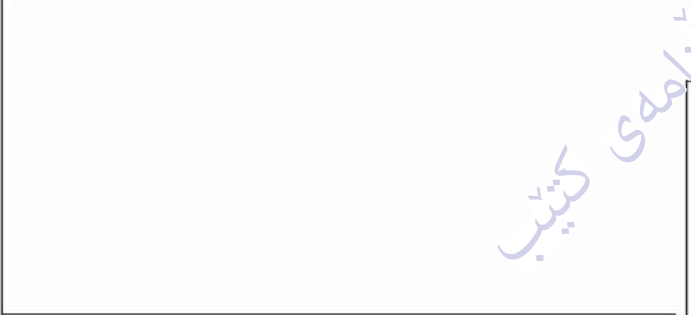


Iran: Kurdish Areas

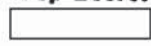
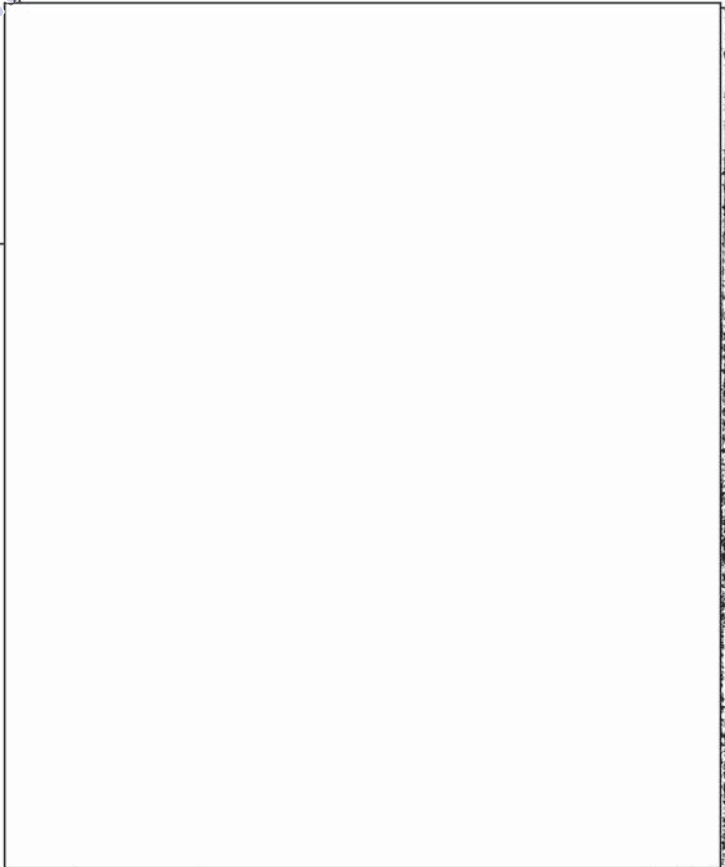
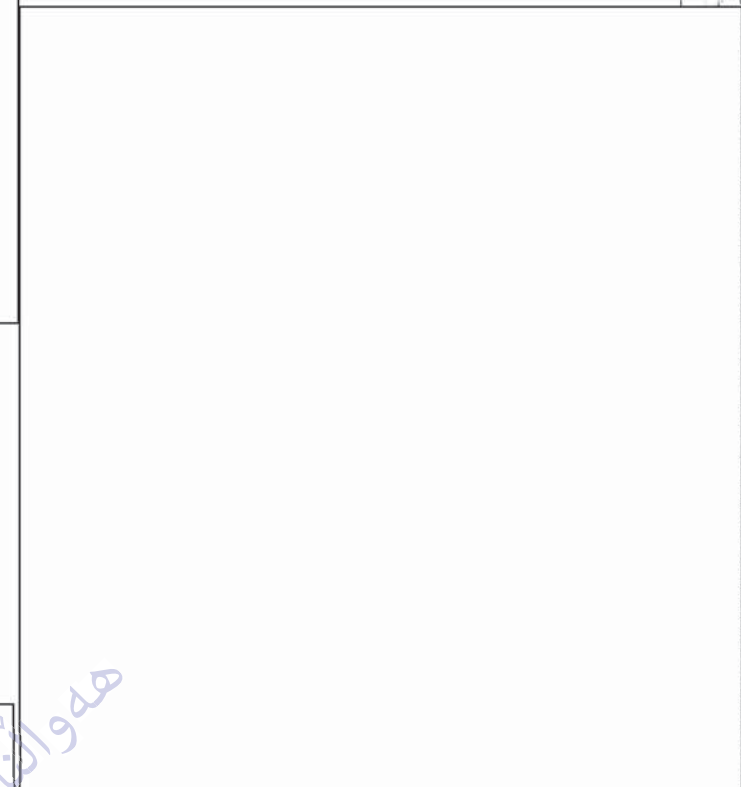
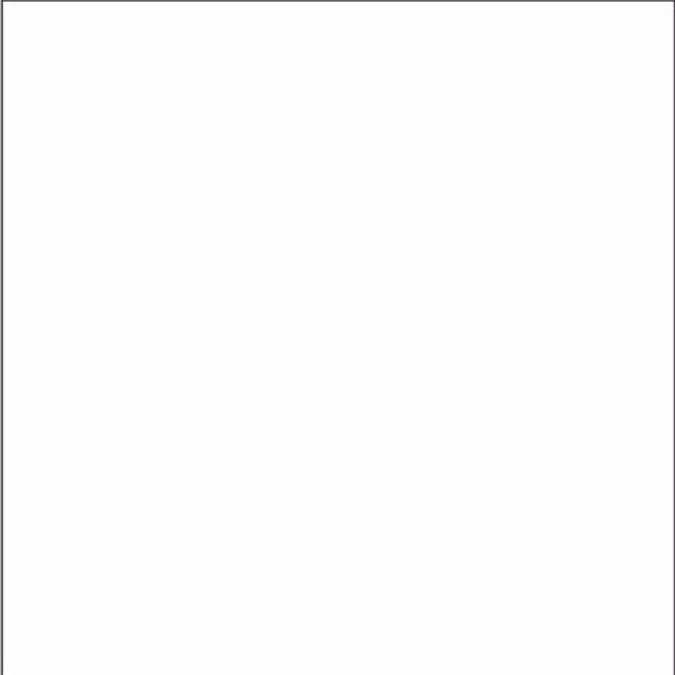


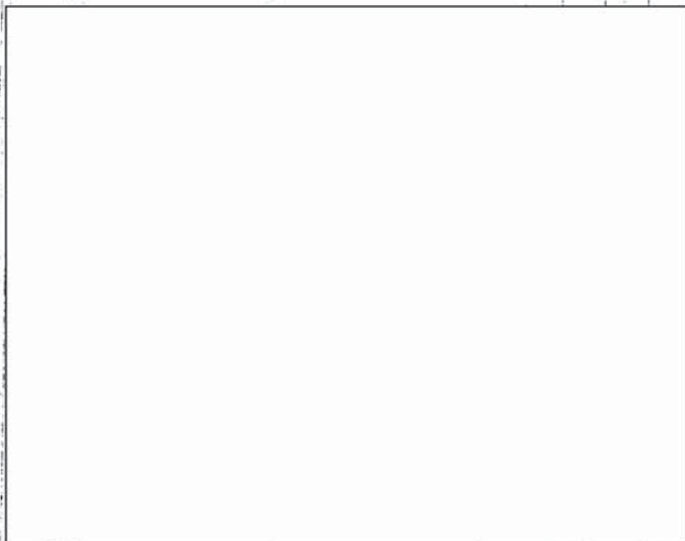
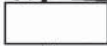


Government Policies and Attitudes. When Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan took office in February 1979, he found that a loose federation of well-armed Kurdish tribal, religious, and political leaders, backed by guerrilla forces and army deserters, had assumed control in much of the area of the northwest where Kurds predominate. Tensions quickly rose, and several violent incidents occurred as Kurdish factional leaders, government representatives, and local pro-Khomeini leaders maneuvered for position.



هدوان نامدی کتیب

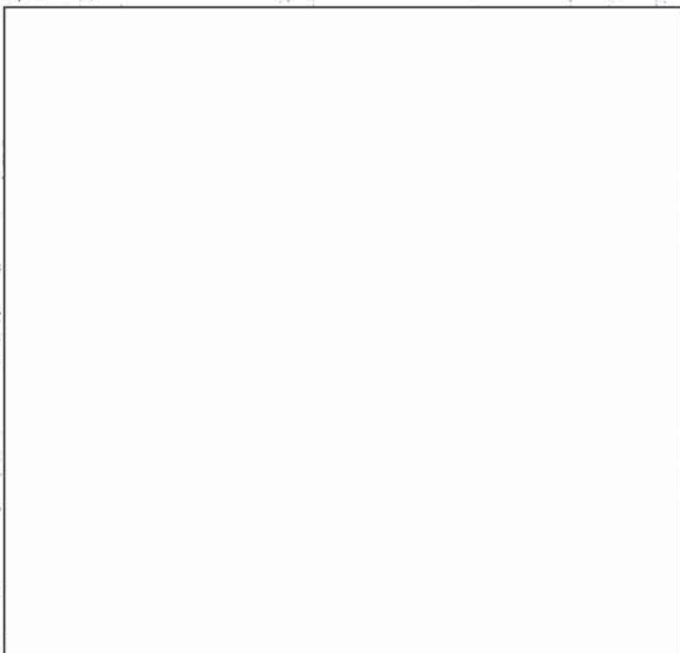




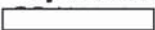
Sheikh Ez-ed-Din Hoseini, the principal Sunni cleric in Mahabad, the capital of the short-lived Kurdish republic, appears to be the most popular and influential Kurdish religious figure. He has led several efforts to negotiate with the principal religious and political leaders of the revolutionary government, although he is deeply suspicious of Khomeini and his intentions. In mid-May 1979, Hoseini and other Kurdish clerics met with Khomeini, whom Hoseini described as not "indifferent" to Kurdish autonomy, and with Ayatollah Talegani, who negotiated a settlement between dissident Kurds and pro-Khomeini forces earlier this year.

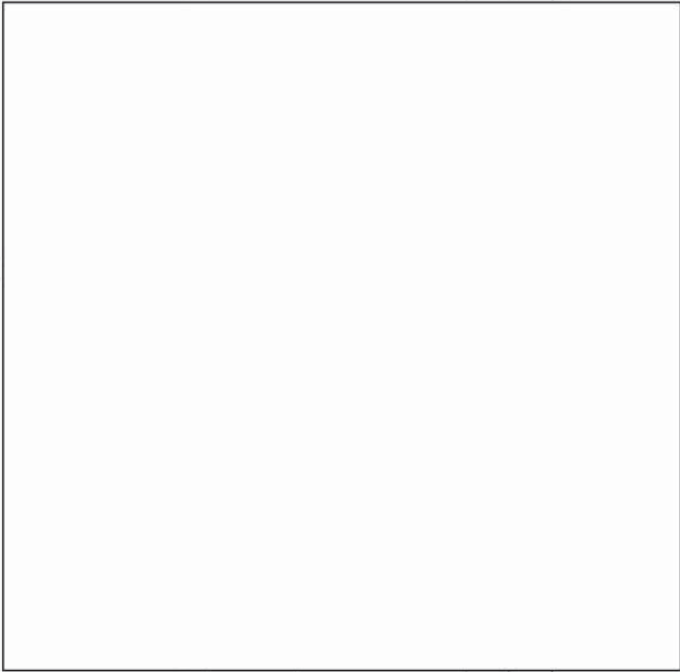


As of mid-1979, Kurdish leaders and their followers were actively protesting the text of the new Constitution and the process by which it would be approved. The Kurds—like other minorities—believe that the constitutional provisions for regional autonomy and respect for Sunni Muslims are too weak. Hoseini has said the Constitution's provisions for minorities are "old concepts with new names" and that its specification that Shia Islam is the state religion is "certain to provoke sectarian conflict." Ahmad Moftizadeh, the government's designated Kurdish leader, has also criticized the text of the draft Constitution and has called for the elimination of its reference to Shia Islam as the state religion. Moftizadeh and Hoseini have issued a joint protest calling for an Islamic republic without reference to sects and for minority representation on the council that will review the constitutionality of all new laws.



Cooperation With Neighboring Kurds. Dissident Iraqi and Iranian Kurds have a long history of cooperation. KDP Secretary General Qasemlu has had close ties to the Iraqi Communist Party, which has a large Kurdish membership.



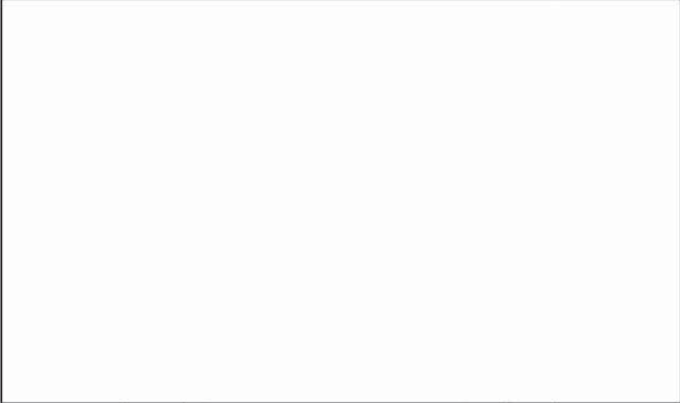


Iraq

Relations between the Kurds of Iraq and the Arab-controlled central government in Baghdad have been shaped by years of conflict and by a deep-seated Kurdish distrust of Baathist schemes for Arab unity, which they regard as detrimental to their own aspirations. Although the Kurds have taken advantage of periods of weakened central authority and promises of outside assistance to stage several revolts against the government, for the most part they have not sought independence from Iraq; rather they have fought for equal rights with the Arabs and self-rule within a single Iraqi state. When Kurdish hopes for autonomy and equality were quashed by Qasim following the 1958 revolution, they began 14 years of intermittent revolt. Failure to end that conflict contributed to the fall of three Iraqi governments in the 1960s.



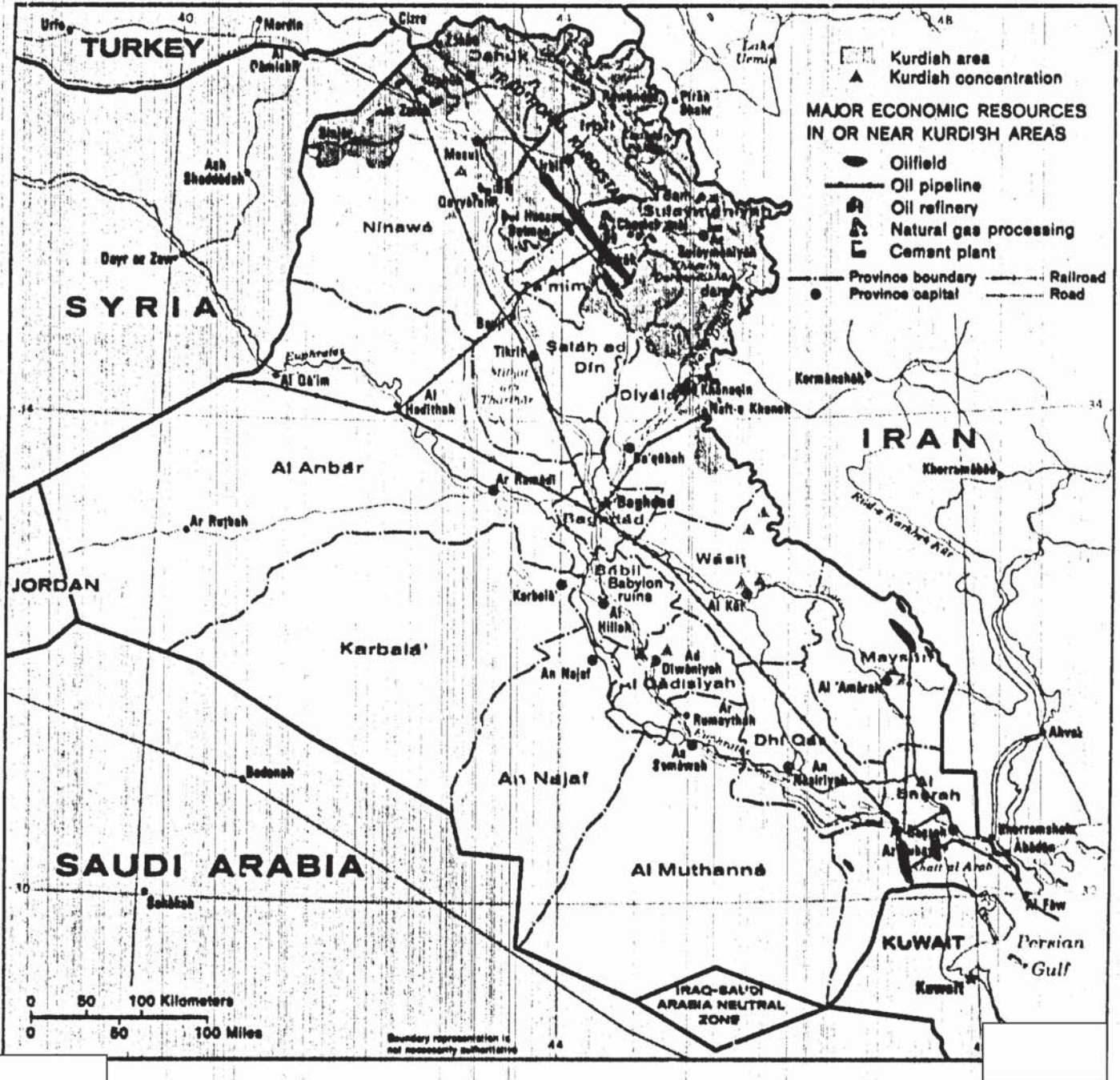
Kurdish ambitions came closest to fulfillment in 1970 when the Baathist government under Saddam Husayn signed an accord with Mullah Mustafa Barzani recognizing the national rights of the Kurdish people and granting them regional autonomy. Kurdish was to be the official language in the Kurdish autonomous region, and Kurdish educational institutions, including a university at Sulaymaniyah, were to be established. Kurds were to be appointed to posts in the military, the police, and the universities in proportion to their number in the general population. The KDP was officially recognized, and the Baathist government promised to appoint a Kurd vice president of the republic. Barzani was permitted to retain his heavy arms, while the government promised to pay his Pesh Merga troops, who had fought the rebellion, to act as a frontier force.



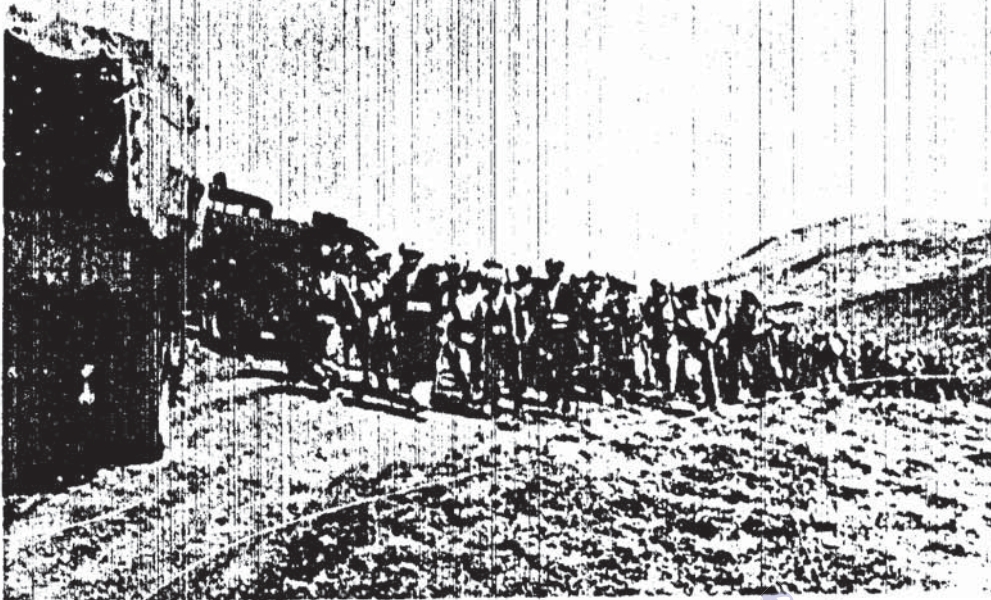
The Baathist government, in power only two years and in need of internal security and stability, had made major concessions to Kurdish aspirations. Barzani gained control of more territory than he had ever held, a Kurdish newspaper and radio station began operation, and the Pesh Merga remained armed and intact. Over the next four years, however, relations between the central government and Mullah Mustafa deteriorated as the Baathists consolidated their control of the government and as the Kurds escalated their demands for territory and oil revenues.



Iraq: Kurdish Areas



Pesh Merga troops surrendering to Iraqi Army in April 1975.



The renewal of fighting in March 1974 was probably inevitable. The government was unwilling to grant the Kurds economic and political privileges that it denied the rest of Iraq's population. Of particular importance was the government's refusal to conduct a census in Kirkuk to determine the ethnic makeup of the city. The autonomy plan put forth by the Baathist government in March 1974 granted nominal self-rule to the three provinces where the Kurds constituted a majority, but in reality gave the Kurds only a semblance of self-rule. The members of the executive and legislative councils established by the autonomy law were chosen by the government. The progovernment Kurds who were appointed as Cabinet members and as vice president were careful not to test the extent of their authority. In March 1975, the 14-year rebellion of the Iraqi Kurds against the government was effectively ended by the Algiers Accord between Iraq and Iran, which destroyed the ability of the Kurds to resist government efforts to pacify the Kurdish area.

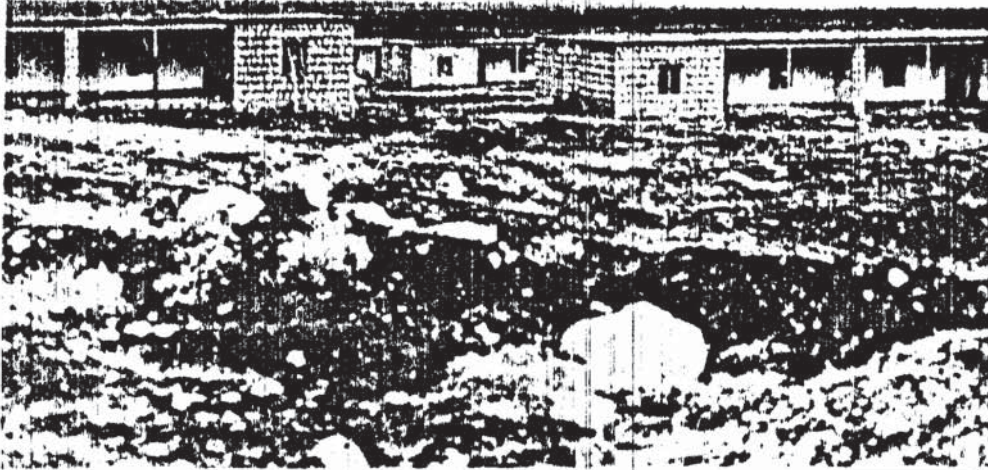
Government Policies and Attitudes. The Baathists are determined to deny the Kurds the opportunity to regain the capacity for independent action. As of mid-1979, the government maintained a significant military presence in the north, while at the same time it was allocating large sums for the economic and social development of the region.

Baghdad keeps five of its 11 Army divisions in the northern provinces, as well as 50,000 police, border guard, and reserve brigade personnel. Military control in the traditionally Kurdish region is thorough and sometimes oppressive, especially in areas near the Turkish and Iranian borders. The Army maintains a highly visible presence with armed camps and outposts on the hilltops and soldiers in the towns. A 20-kilometer security zone has been created along the border with Iran and Turkey in which the regime has destroyed villages and forcibly relocated large numbers of villagers to less sensitive areas in the north. In areas away from the border regions and outside the difficult mountain terrain, the Iraqi military presence is more discreet, and village life appears to be normal.

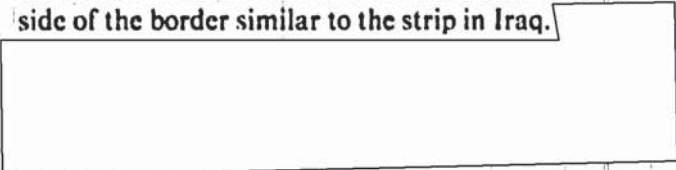
Iraq became increasingly concerned in the spring of 1979 about the possible resurgence of dissident activity following reports of Kurdish unrest in Iran and Turkey. Through November 1978, Iraq and Iran had conducted joint military operations aimed at pacification of the border. Baghdad's concern about the increased availability of arms in the area, the lack of border controls in Iran, and "hot pursuit" of Kurdish insurgents led to the overflight of Iran's border and bombing of Iranian villages in June. Baghdad has warned Tehran about abrogating the Algiers Accord



Housing built by Iraqi Government at Sulaymaniyah for relocated Kurds.



and offering aid to Iraqi Kurds. Iraq is pressing Turkey for establishment of a free-fire zone on the Turkish side of the border similar to the strip in Iraq.



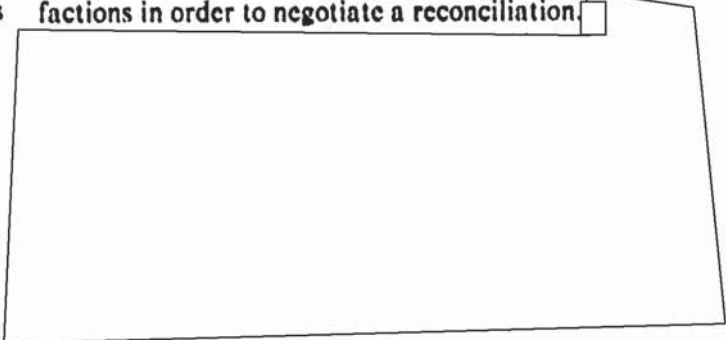
The government has tempered its threats to use military force and other repressive tactics with offers of amnesty and promises of generous economic and agrarian reform. In December 1977, in an act clearly aimed at the Kurds, the government announced an amnesty for all political exiles living abroad. In March 1979 an unknown number of Kurds who had fled to Iran in 1975 were allowed to return. Most of the Kurds resettled in the south after the end of the civil war have been permitted to return north, although not to their traditional villages. Instead, they are being "encouraged" to settle in small groups in newly constructed reservations scattered throughout the north. Families of missing Pesh Merga fighters or suspected saboteurs apparently remain in enforced exile either in the south of Iraq or in Iran.

The government also is making a massive economic investment in the north. Following a trip by Saddam Husayn to Sulaymaniyah and Irbil in late March, the

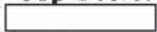
government announced that 30 percent of the 1979 development budget—or more than \$3 billion—would be spent on programs in the three Kurdish provinces. The largest share of the money, 30 percent, will be allocated for the improvement of transportation and communications, necessary for military operations as well as civilian use. Education received the smallest allocation, only 5 percent. Baghdad also has been promoting tourism in the region and building extensive resort facilities, hoping eventually to tie Kurdish economic interests to tourism and continued stability.



Baghdad has tried over the past several years to contact representatives of the Barzani and Talabani factions in order to negotiate a reconciliation.



Kurdish nationalists were concerned last year by the government's decision that 40 percent of all instruction





Children studying the Kurdish language in an outdoor classroom in northern Iraq.

in Kurdish schools, excluding language training, be given in Arabic. Although Baghdad argued that the purpose of the reform was to develop a balanced educational program, Kurdish nationalists saw the move as a further attempt by Baghdad to Arabize the Kurdish homeland.

Although some escalation of guerrilla activity was evident in early 1979 and small clashes were occurring almost daily in mid-1979 between Iraqi Army patrols and Kurdish guerrillas, there was no major upsurge of dissident activity. Continued guerrilla activity, however, has exacerbated government fears of outside meddling. Kurdish guerrillas mount hit-and-run operations against isolated Army units, but fighting between the various Kurdish factions, difficulty in maintaining supply routes, and intense government military pressure have weakened their ability to strike effectively at government forces. The freedom of action the Kurds have acquired in Iran and their access to large stocks of weapons seized from Iranian Army garrisons could pose problems for Baghdad in the future.

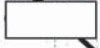
Kurdish Organizations and Leaders. As of mid-1979, the Kurdish nationalist movement in Iraq was in disarray—its leaders in exile, its factions badly split, its organizations virtually nonexistent. Attempts by

rival leaders to patch over their differences and form a common front against the Iraqi Government have failed. Instead, factions loyal to the Barzani family and those loyal to Jalal Talabani continue to accuse each other of signing secret agreements with Baghdad or Tehran aimed at the liquidation of the other.

Events in Iran and the death of Mullah Mustafa Barzani apparently have done little to improve relations between the disparate Kurdish factions.

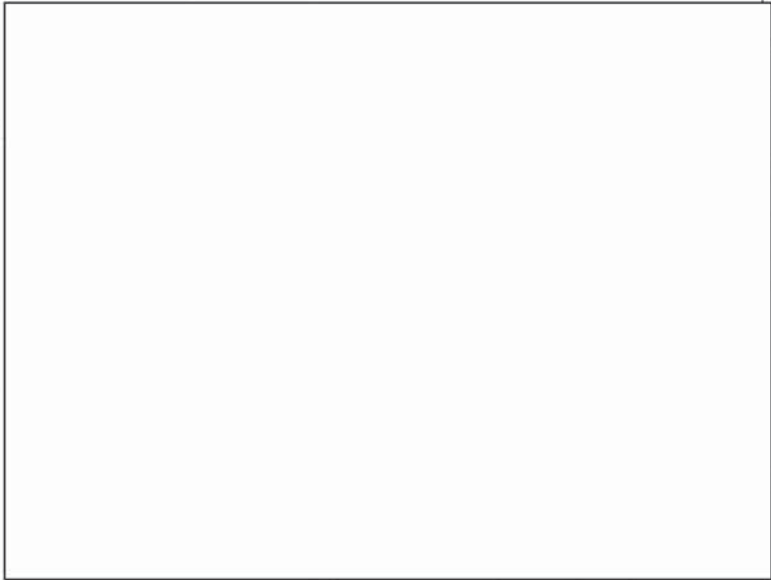
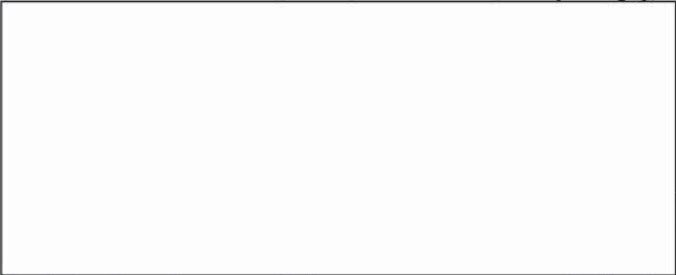
In exile in the United States since 1975, he had only minimal contact with his former Pesh Merga fighters and the KDP. Before his death in 1979, Barzani apparently recognized that the Kurds had few options and was considering easing his demands.

Several contenders are vying to replace Barzani. His sons Masud and Idris claim leadership of what remains of the KDP and of the exile communities in Iran and Europe.



Talabani and the Barzanis have made several attempts at unifying their forces to fight the common Iraqi enemy, but these efforts have all failed. In March 1977 Talabani and Masud Barzani signed an agreement pledging to join forces. Orchestrated by the Syrians and entered into reluctantly by the Barzanis, the agreement was never implemented. The Barzanis objected in particular to Talabani's penchant for urban terrorism. Within six months, the two factions were fighting each other again.

A third contender for the leadership of the Iraqi Kurds—Muhammad Mahmud Abd al-Rahman—has emerged in the past several months and appears to be making a bid for leadership of Kurdish dissidents.



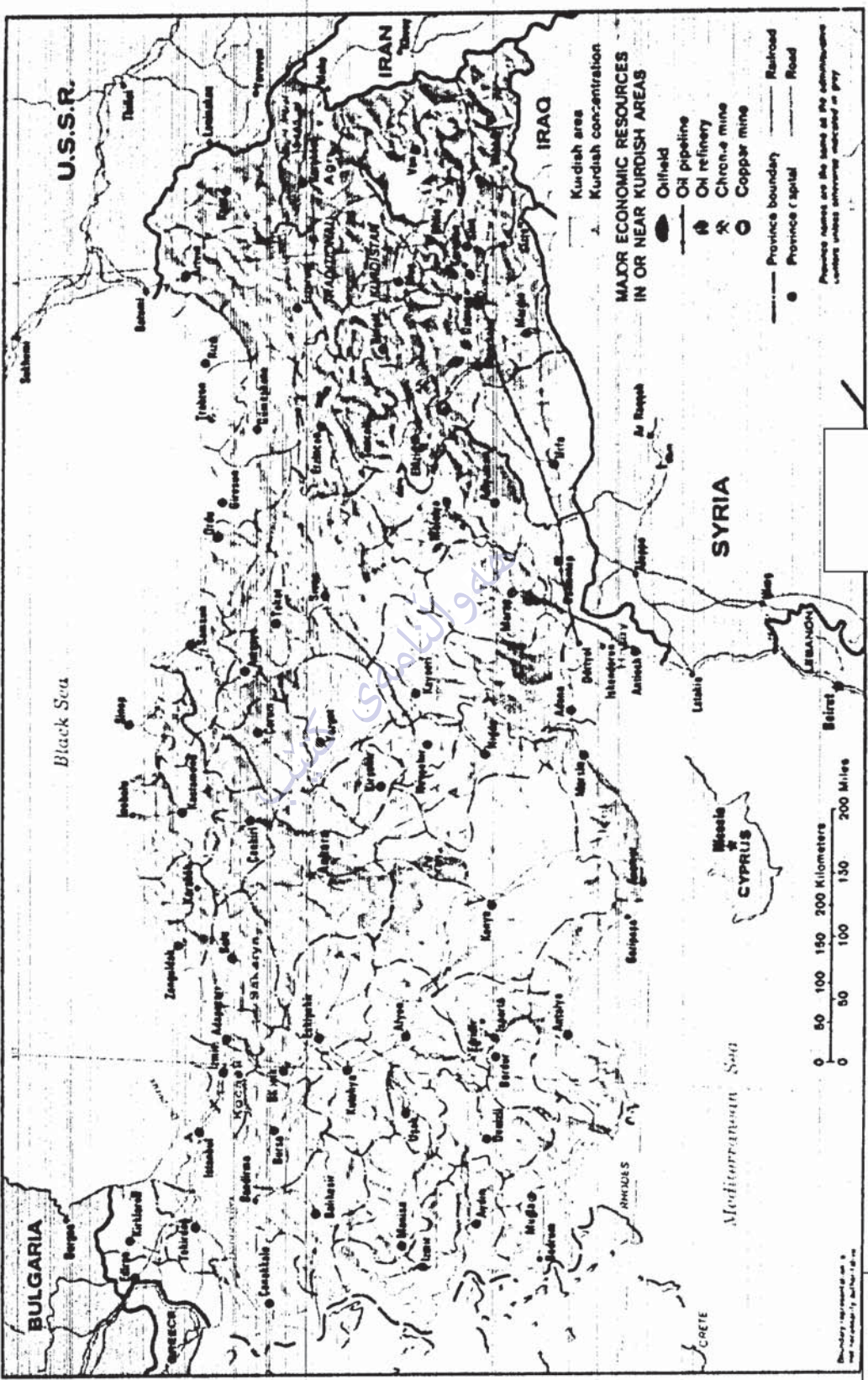
Turkey

In the early days of the Turkish Republic, the government responded to Kurdish protests against Ataturk's modernizing and centralizing reforms by ruthlessly suppressing all antigovernment activity and by attempting, albeit unsuccessfully, to eliminate all manifestations of Kurdish culture and nationalism. With the advent of a multiparty democracy in the late 1940s, however, the government adopted a policy of attempting to co-opt the Kurdish minority. Since then, Kurdish leaders, particularly the wealthy landlords and religious leaders, have been recruited into the ruling elite. Ferit Melen, an interim prime minister in the early 1970s; Deputy Prime Minister Hikmet Cetin,⁶ one of Ecevit's close advisers; and Kamran Inan,⁷ until recently the number two man in the opposition Justice Party, are Kurds. As of mid-1979, the legislature included about 35 Kurdish deputies, led by independent Minister of Public Works Serafettin Elci; this group generally supports Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit.

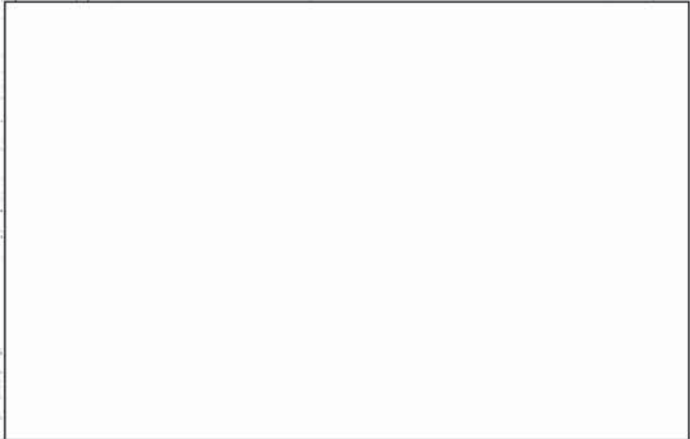
The resurgence of Kurdish separatist sentiment in Iran and persistent Kurdish unrest in Iraq have helped to revive fears among Turkey's leaders that Turkish Kurds may follow suit. Even limited Kurdish unrest while the country is beset by deepening economic and internal security crises, might pose a test for the Ecevit government and for Turkey's democratic institutions.



Turkey: Kurdish Areas



Government Policies and Attitudes. Ankara's concern over the Kurdish problem has been highlighted by a number of developments:



Ankara's efforts to assure the loyalty of individual Kurds have not been matched by any comparable development effort in the Kurdish region. Although data are sketchy, one Turkish publication claims that the eastern provinces have received only 10 percent of state industrial investment and only 2 percent of all commercial investments. Public services such as hospitals and education facilities are thinly spread among the larger cities. Unemployment is above the national average of 20 percent, illiteracy in Turkish among Kurds is 80 percent, and such amenities as electricity, piped water, and passable roads are lacking in more than half the villages. Although this neglect can be explained in large part by the remote and inhospitable nature of the Kurdish region, it is also attributable to the continued hostility between Turks and Kurds. Educated Turks are reluctant to live and work in such "alien" rural areas. The most conspicuous symbol of the Turkish Government, the Army, has at times been viewed by the Kurds as a "colonial" occupation force.

The taboo against public and official discussion of the sensitive Kurdish issue has dissipated in the past few years. Newspapers, perhaps spurred by events in Iran, have been less hesitant to acknowledge that Kurds exist and to discuss their living conditions. At the height of public concern about Kurdish separatism last April, six ministers took the unprecedented step of accusing Minister of Public Works Serafettin Elci of having Communist sympathies and stacking his Ministry with Kurds. Elci created a public controversy when he openly declared himself a Kurd in a heated exchange with a reporter. Responding to press allegations, Elci insisted that acknowledging the existence of Kurds in Turkey was not tantamount to promoting separatism.

Persistence of Kurdish Separatism. The Kurds' sense of separate identity has not been significantly reduced by the government's attempts to co-opt or suppress them. The Kurdish language has flourished, and clandestinely published Kurdish literature is surreptitiously obtainable in Kurdish areas. Kurdish leaders, fearing that development and modernization would undermine the highly traditional social structure and thereby their own positions, have often been unreceptive to Ankara's efforts to extend aid to the Kurdish regions. Kurdish notables reportedly often deliver the votes of their followers to politicians in return for pledges of noninterference in local affairs. Urbanization is taking place, however, and it has somewhat weakened to some extent the hold of traditional leaders. Nationalist Kurdish sentiment now seems strongest among politicized urban Kurdish youth, many of whom are educated.

In the past several years, several overt "cultural associations" and covert liberation groups have formed to promote the idea of Kurdish autonomy and independence. The appearance of these groups broadly parallels the growth of Turkish radical leftist student groups that appeared in the late 1960s. These radicals often included demands for greater Kurdish autonomy in their programs, and until the Kurds began to form their own associations, Kurds were prominent in these

organizations. Mahir Cayan, the most prominent martyr of the Turkish left after he was killed by government forces in 1972, was a Kurd. Because avowedly Kurdish organizations are still illegal, the overt radical groups feature nonethnic names such as the Revolutionary Democratic Cultural Association and the Revolutionary People's Liberation Association. They insist that they are interested mainly in social progress and Turkish recognition of long-denied Kurdish cultural rights.

The driving forces for Kurdish nationalism, however, suffer from the same factionalism that has weakened their Turkish counterparts. The cultural associations have small memberships, and the illegal groups, though dominated by urbanized young Kurds, do not seem popular even in the larger eastern towns. This probably results from a generation and cultural gap between youthful, educated Kurds and the more conservative and tradition-bound majority led by coopted elites. The activist groups themselves, moreover, have long quarreled over whether to remain separate from other Turkish radical groups and seek independence or to cooperate with the Turkish proletariat in its "battle against capitalism" as a means of ultimately achieving Kurdish autonomy within a Turkish state.

Kurds in Turkey have shown little inclination to collaborate politically with their Kurdish neighbors in Iran and Iraq. Tribal loyalties appear to be more important than ethnic ties. The warring Talabani and Barzani factions in Iraq, for example, have been aided by some Turkish Kurds and opposed by others during their skirmishes in Turkish border areas. Language differences may partly explain this lack of cooperation. Although approximately half of all Kurds speak the Kurmanji dialect, in Turkey only the Kurds of Hakkari Province speak this dialect.

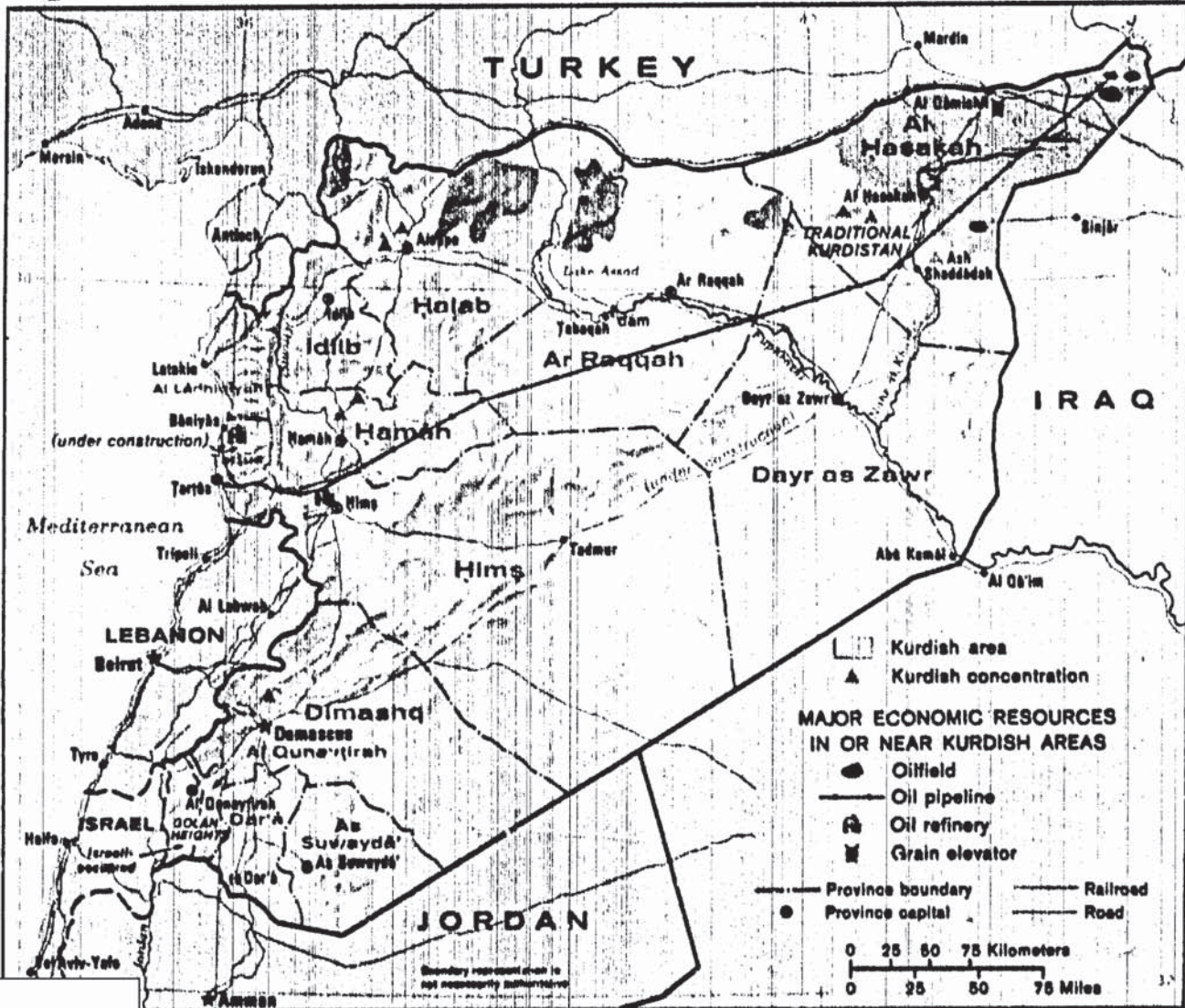
Syria

Relations between the Syrian Government and the Kurdish minority have not been marked by the hostility and conflict that have characterized relations between the Kurds and the Governments of Iraq and Iran. Since Syria was granted its independence by France in 1946, there has been little significant antigovernment activity involving the Kurds. Nonetheless, Syrian authorities have feared that unrest among Kurds elsewhere could spread to Syria. During times of major Kurdish unrest in Iraq, for example, Damascus has kept close watch on its own Kurds. Moreover, from time to time, Kurdish nationalist leaders have been arrested in government moves against the Communists. The government's sensitivity to Kurdish involvement in Communist activities is not altogether unfounded since the founder and leader of the pro-Soviet, legal Syrian Communist Party (SCP) Khalid Bakdash, is a Kurd, and the SCP has long recruited heavily from the Kurdish minority.

In recent years, the Kurdish minority has participated relatively actively in Syrian politics. Some of Syria's most distinguished leaders have been Kurds, including two past Presidents, Husni al-Za'im and Abid al-Shishakli. Under President Assad, himself a member of the Alawite minority, the status of most minority groups in Syria generally has been quite good.

Most Syrian Kurds are distrustful of central authority, and their loyalty to their tribe is probably stronger than their loyalty either to the Syrian state or to a Kurdish nation. Relatively peaceful residence in Syria and gradual assimilation, however, have mitigated their distrust of the Syrian authorities. Damascus, moreover, has encouraged Arab settlement in the northeast to weaken the Kurdish hold on the area. In the last two years, however, there has been a significant influx of Kurds into northern Syria from Iraq. These Kurds are less assimilated than those long resident in Syria.

Syria: Kurdish Areas



[redacted] The KDP has been banned in Syria for several years. [redacted] the influx of Kurds from Iraq was exacerbating Arab-Kurdish tensions in the northeast, but there is no sign that the problem has become serious. There are no local Kurdish parties or any prominent Kurdish political leaders who espouse Kurdish nationalism in Syria. [redacted]

Before the October 1978 Syrian-Iraqi rapprochement, Syria provided support to dissident Kurds in Iraq led by Jalal Talabani. Talabani received arms and his followers were trained at bases in northeastern Syria. After the conclusion of the Charter for Joint National Action between Syria and Iraq in late 1978, Syria's support for Talabani ceased, and he was expelled from Syria. Although the Syrians probably can still contact Talabani if they should desire to renew the relationship, there is no indication they are currently providing support to Kurdish dissidents in either Iraq, Turkey, or Iran. There is also no indication that Syrian Kurds acting independently of the government are supporting their compatriots. [redacted]

USSR
Attitudes and Policies Toward Kurds in Neighboring States. The possibility of Soviet manipulation of their Kurdish minorities has been a matter of serious concern for the Governments of Iran, Turkey, and Iraq. The Soviets would certainly like to make use of the Kurds in neighboring states to advance their own objectives in the area—specifically to put pressure on regimes that have adopted anti-Soviet positions. Soviet inclinations to directly support Kurdish minorities in other countries, however, are inhibited by a desire not to push these states too far and thus risk serious damage to bilateral relations. Funneling assistance indirectly to Kurdish minorities through third parties, however, is a tempting and very real option for the Soviets. [redacted]

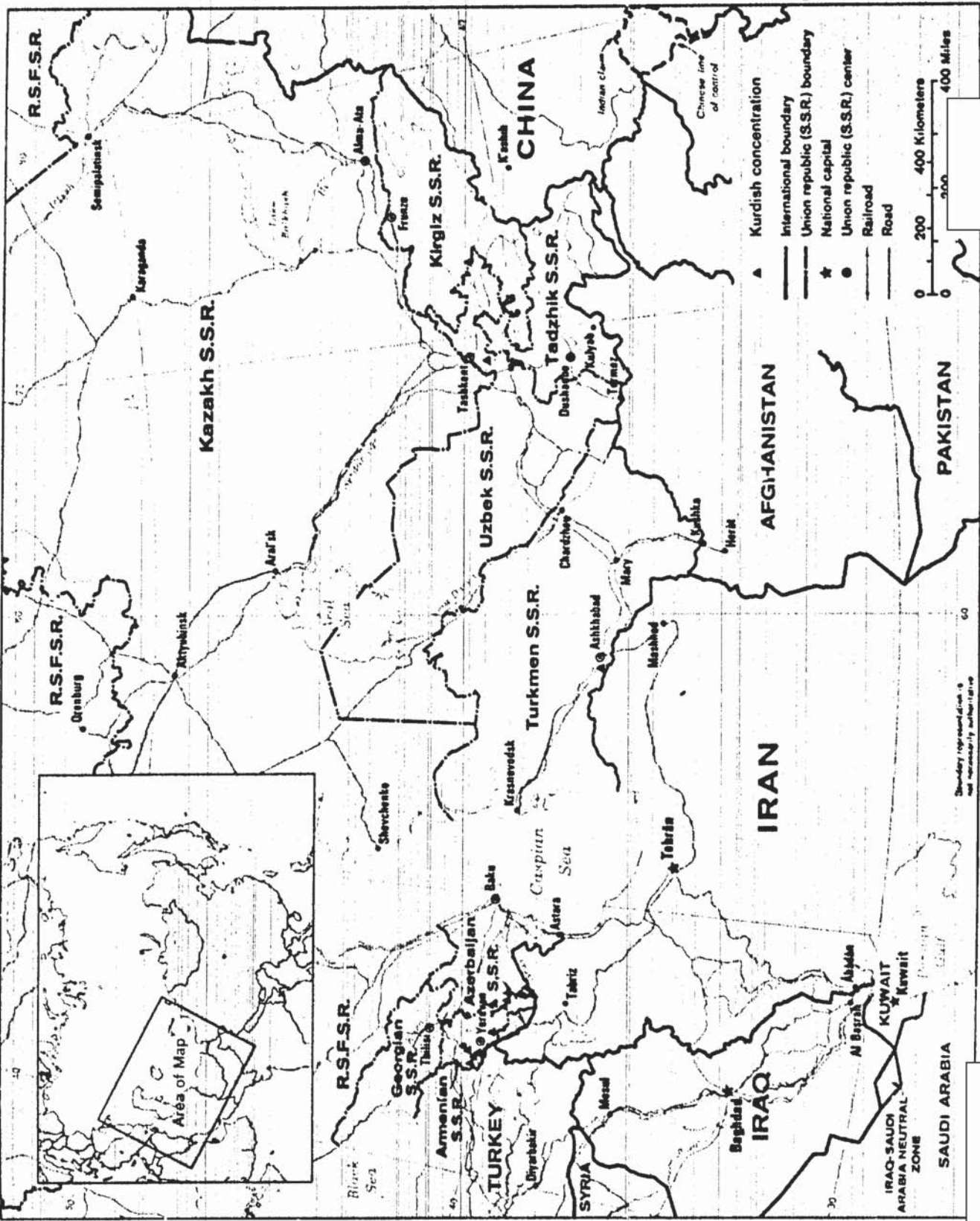
In Iran, the Soviets have sought to advance their relations with the Khomeini-backed regime in order to preserve their economic assets there, encourage continuation of the government's anti-US policies, and prevent repression of leftist elements within the country, especially those that are pro-Soviet. At the same time, they would like to encourage the emergence

of a more pro-Soviet regime. As part of a long-term effort to undermine the government and promote leftist prospects, they have supported the Tudeh Party's efforts to construct a united front of all leftist parties and to infiltrate Khomeini's forces. [redacted]

Before the fall of the Shah, there had been little indication of Soviet involvement with the Kurdish movement within Iran in recent years—presumably reflecting the Soviet perception that the government's control of the Kurds was virtually complete and that efforts to meddle would antagonize the Shah. With the upsurge in activity among Iran's Kurds in recent months, facilitated by the breakdown in Iranian control of movement in the border areas, the Soviets have probably been tempted to play a more active role. [redacted]

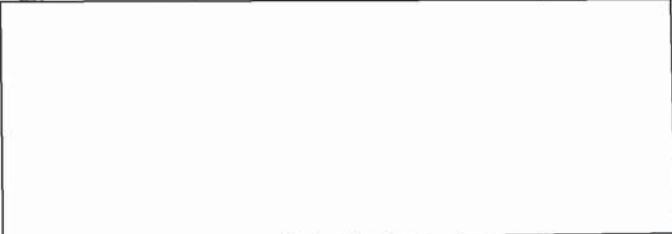
[redacted] The Soviets make a clear distinction between the "legitimate" desires of minority groups for local autonomy and what they term "imperialist-backed separatist" demands. This reflects their own claims to have granted such autonomy to many of their minorities as well as a desire not to provide any opening to these groups to make separatist claims. [redacted]


U.S.S.R.: Kurdish Areas







of the Communist Party of Iraq.



It is likely, however, that the Soviets are reluctant to become directly involved in any large-scale supportive efforts, given the effect discovery of such activities would have on relations with the central government. At the same time, they would probably condone the funneling of Soviet arms to the Kurds by third parties; such a policy would enable them both to deny involvement and to indirectly sustain destabilizing activities within Iran. 

In Iraq, Soviet support for the Kurdish cause has fluctuated over the years in inverse relation to Soviet success in courting the central government in Baghdad. During the early 1960s, Moscow vigorously supported Kurdish autonomy in Iraq. And, in the early 1970s, the Soviets tried to mediate between the Kurds and the Baathist regime with which they were building close ties. With the collapse of negotiations between the Kurds and the Baathist regime in 1974 and the renewal of fighting, the Soviets gave their full support to Baghdad. This decision was made at a time when the USSR saw its overall position in the Middle East deteriorating: Egypt had turned to the United States, and other Arab states (including Iraq) were increasingly oriented economically toward the West. The Soviets, clearly anxious not to lose Iraq's friendship and eager to sell arms for hard currency, presumably had little difficulty making the choice. 

Since the Algiers Accord of March 1975, which effectively ended the Kurdish war in Iraq, Soviet-Iraqi relations have deteriorated steadily, although the mutually beneficial arms relationship has been maintained. The Soviets have resented Iraq's improved relations with both Iran and Saudi Arabia and have been unhappy about Iraq's turn to the West for arms as well as civilian technology. In addition, they have been frustrated by the Baathist disregard for and repression

This may be because the focus of Kurdish activities has shifted to Iran, where there are new opportunities. It may also reflect Soviet sensitivity to the damage already done to relations with Iraq and a desire not to foster further strains or provoke increased repression of Iraqi Communists. 

In Turkey, direct Soviet involvement in the Kurdish movement is precluded by Moscow's desire to maintain good relations with Ankara. Early this year, an advocate of the Kurdish Shia cause was rebuffed by both the Soviet and Bulgarian Embassies in Ankara in



[redacted]

his search for support. A Soviet Embassy officer explained to him that the USSR feared jeopardizing its primary goals of expanding trade with Turkey and unifying the Turkish left behind a pro-Moscow line.

[redacted]

Turkish Government officials maintain, nevertheless, that the Soviets are providing Kurdish dissidents with arms, military training, and financial assistance. They claim that caches of Soviet-made weapons have been discovered in eastern Turkey and that arms are being smuggled across the Syrian, Iranian, and Soviet borders. Undetected border crossings from the USSR into Turkey could be accomplished fairly easily.

[redacted]

[redacted]

Nevertheless, Moscow no doubt wants to avoid alienating any political groupings with which it might have to deal in the future.

[redacted]

Policy Toward Kurds in the Soviet Union. The small number of Kurds in the USSR, estimated at 100,000 in 1979 or less than 5 percent of the total Kurdish population, provides a basis for the Soviet claim to an interest in the Kurdish question. Most of the Soviet Kurds live in scattered communities in the Transcaucasus, and many, particularly those in cities, are gradually becoming integrated into the dominant cultures of the region.

[redacted]

The vast majority of Soviet Kurds speak Kurdish as their native language, but knowledge of Russian and other languages of the area is becoming widespread. In Azerbaidzhan, for instance, the older generations speak Kurdish, but the younger people increasingly speak only Azerbaidzhani or Russian. The most concentrated settlements of Kurds are in Armenia, and here the Kurds have preserved their traditional way of life and Kurdish cultural traditions are strong.

[redacted]

The Soviet Kurds enjoy the use of a comparatively large number of cultural institutions, reflecting the importance the Soviet regime attaches to its Kurdish minority as a potential foreign policy asset. Kurdish is taught in the schools in Kurdish villages. There is a Kurdish newspaper, *Ria Taza*, published in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, and there is some radio programming in Kurdish. The center for Kurdish studies in Yerevan, the only such center in the USSR, offers courses in Kurdish language and culture and publishes in Kurdish periodicals and works of Kurdish poets and writers, some of whom have a reputation in Kurdish communities abroad. One of the main purposes of the center is to support Soviet claims that the Kurds in the Soviet Union enjoy cultural facilities that are not available to those in other parts of the Middle East.

[redacted]

The regime has little reason to fear that its policy of fostering Kurdish national consciousness abroad will encourage troublesome pan-Kurdish sentiments at home. The number of Kurds in the Soviet Union is small, and the regime can count on the more urbanized and educated Armenian majority to act as a restraining influence. The Armenians are unlikely to forget the Turkish massacre, in which the Kurds played a part, and Moscow on occasion has had to warn the Armenians not to discriminate against the Kurdish minority.


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
Outlook

The collapse of the Shah's regime and the assumption of de facto control by the Kurds in much of the predominantly Kurdish areas of Iran have raised aspirations for greater autonomy not only among Iranian Kurds but also among the Kurds of neighboring Turkey and Iraq. To at least some degree, relations between the Kurds and the governments of the other states in which they live will be determined by the course of events in Iran. If the central government in Tehran is able, through negotiation and compromise, to reestablish its authority over the areas under Kurdish control, the prospect for continued peace between the Kurdish minorities and the other governments of the area will be enhanced. If, on the other hand, Tehran is compelled to use force, the resulting conflict could spill over national borders and involve the Kurds in neighboring states.


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



The relationship between the Kurds in Iran and the Tehran government will depend to a large extent on each side's interpretation of the balance struck between minority rights and central control under the constitution now under consideration. Government and religious leaders do not want to grant the minorities rights that could threaten national cohesion; on the other hand, they want to reach an accommodation that will keep the minorities quiet. The Kurds, for their part, do not want to lose the benefits of Iran's oil wealth; at the same time they are unwilling to give up the de facto autonomy they have established, and individual leaders want freedom to compete with their rivals for political influence in Kurdistan. 


Full-scale conflict between the Kurds and the revolutionary government in Iran does not seem likely in the near term, although an attempt by the government to extend its control in the Kurdish region led to serious clashes in late July. There is little prospect that the government will soon be able to rebuild the military or develop its irregular forces to the level needed to reestablish its authority in the Kurdish areas. For their part, Kurdish leaders do not seem prepared for an all-out effort to remove the remaining central government presence in the area. Moreover, the local population, despite its strong ethnocentrism, is unlikely to support a protracted armed struggle in its towns and villages. 

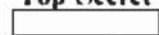
If they chose, the Kurds, even hampered by their disunity, could carry out sustained dissident activity and disrupt Iranian overland trade to Europe and the USSR. The Kurds' challenge to central control would grow more serious if most of the Kurdish tribes were willing to cooperate. Longstanding religious, tribal, and personal rivalries among the Kurds, however, seem to have been only temporarily smoothed over by the revolution and the local autonomy they now enjoy. These differences probably will reappear and may even be intensified as the various leaders try to exploit their new relationship with the central government. The most serious liability facing the Kurds, however, is their lack of continued, substantial support—either open or clandestine—from a neighboring government such as that provided by the Shah to the Iraqi Kurds before 1975. Neither Iraq, Turkey, nor the USSR is

likely to play such a role; the USSR would provide such support only if Moscow decided that its best interests would be served by trying to topple the Khomeini regime and replace it with a leftist government. 

As long as the present unstable situation exists, the central government and Iran's Kurdish leaders will carefully monitor each other's activities. At the same time, the leaders of the various Kurdish factions can be expected to compete actively for influence among their fellow tribesmen. Relatively minor incidents or miscalculations could cause armed clashes—some of which could be serious—between Kurdish and central government forces, dissident and pro-Khomeini Kurds, and supporters of rival tribal leaders. 

In Turkey, the government would fiercely resist any attempt by the Kurdish minority to gain greater political autonomy, although it might grudgingly concede the Kurds greater freedom to express their cultural heritage. The Kurds are aware that the government has large army and security forces stationed in the provinces and is capable of reinforcing them quickly. The most important deterrent to the realization of the desire of the Turkish Kurds for greater autonomy, however, is the absence of a single leader capable of uniting the disparate Kurdish groups. Many important Kurdish leaders have been co-opted or intimidated, while Kurdish leaders active in Turkish politics often hold opposing political views. 

Nevertheless, the Kurds in Turkey will remain susceptible to separatist and pan-Kurdish sentiment as long as Ankara fails to assimilate them into Turkish society. Turkish Kurds could be encouraged to defy Ankara if Iranian Kurds secure a greater degree of autonomy from the new Iranian regime or if the government in Ankara fails to come to grips with Turkey's staggering economic and political problems. 



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The ability of the Iraqi Kurds to effectively oppose the Iraqi military depends on the Baghdad government's domestic political strength and external support for the Kurds from Iran or other countries. As of mid-1979, Baghdad has not been sufficiently distracted by the troubles in Iran or potential problems with the Shias in the south to shift its attention or its troops away from the north. The government is unlikely to permit anything more than the token autonomy it has already granted the three Kurdish provinces' the autonomous region. Iraq has a highly centralized political and economic structure with no room for decentralization as envisioned by Kurdish nationalists. At best, the Kurds may be permitted a wider role through the already existing mechanisms of the executive and legislative councils. They will not be accorded rights and privileges denied the rest of the population. Most Kurds, however, are likely to regard as acceptable the narrowly defined political autonomy offered by the government. That majority probably does not favor a military solution to the problem of assimilation and is unsure that the alternatives to a Baathist Government would improve conditions for the Kurds of Iraq. []

There is little chance that the Syrian Government will grant the Kurds more autonomy in the future. There is little pressure from the Kurds themselves to do so, and the government would be reticent about providing any minority group autonomy for fear that others, like the Druze, would demand similar treatment. []

Although the desire not to damage relations with Iran, Turkey, and Iraq probably will continue to deter the Soviet Union from directly aiding Kurdish minorities in those states, Moscow will probably maintain contact with selected Kurdish groups and may indirectly support them through third parties. In Iran, circum-spect support for the Kurds serves to foster continuing instability, which may eventually produce a more pro-Soviet, leftist regime. In Iraq, such an approach also serves to put pressure on a regime that is increasingly independent and anti-Soviet. At a minimum, Soviet support for Kurdish cultural activities within the USSR and expressions of sympathy for "legitimate" Kurdish requests for local autonomy will serve to remind the states involved that the Soviets retain the capability to encourage dissension among their minorities. []