Edited by Kumar Rupesinghe

Internal Conflict and Governance

INTERNAL CONFLICT AND GOVERNANCE

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Internal Conflict and Governance

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The Kurdish Question in Regional Politics: Possible Peaceful Solutions

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1. INTRODUCTION

Kurdistan, in Kurdish and other Iranian languages means, 'the land of the Kurds' – like in Hindustan, Afghanistan, Baluchistan and Pakistan. It is not an independent political entity, but a geographical area that stretches over the borders of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria with some enclaves in the Soviet Union (Azerbaijan and Armenia),[1] covering an area the size of France, some 500,000 Km[2]. The first recorded reference to the name 'Kurdistan' was made in 1150 (See Blau, 1991). The first division of Kurdistan, between the Safavid Persian and Ottoman Empires, took place in 1514. It was later confirmed more definitely in the Treaty of Zuhab in 1639. The second division, into four parts, occurred in 1920 between Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria.

The Kurds are among the oldest peoples of the Middle East. They were an indigenous population who had been living continuously in the same mountainous area until invaded and assimilated by a wave of Indo-European tribes from North of the Caucasus at the turn of the second and first millennia B.C.. Variations of the word 'Kurd' have been found in the cuneiform writings of Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian kings, as well as the chronicles of Armenia, Greece and Rome.[2]

According to Arab historians, the Kurdish areas were integrated into the Moslem realms, after an initial and extended

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fierce resistance, in the year A.H.16 (A.D.637). But with the weakening of the Abbasid Caliphate, a number of independent Kurdish dynasties and city-states were founded between the 10th and 13th centuries. Most prominent among these were the Shaddadids (951-1199), the Marwanids (984-1083), the Hasanwayhids (959-1095), the Annazids (991-1117) and the Aiyyubids by Saladin (1187) (Jwadie, 1960, pp. 27-37).

These dynasties were destroyed by the subsequent Mongol and Turkomen invasions of Hulago and Tamerlane, in the 13th and 14th centuries, that wrought havoc and destruction to Kurdistan. According to various sources, many parts of Kurdistan were depopulated by massacres and migration. These were followed by Ottoman Turkish invasions of Kurdistan.

New self-governing and autonomous Kurdish principalities re-emerged in the 17th to the mid-19th centuries within the Ottoman and Safavid empires, among them Ardelan, Mokri, Baradost, Baban, Sharazoor, Soran and Botan. These autonomous principalities gradually lost their relative independence by the mid-19th century in the aggressive drive for greater centralization by both states when confronted with an expanding and energetic Europe. The last of such principalities was that of Botan in 1848 (See McDowall, 1989).

The Kurds, like many other subject-nations of multi-ethnic empires, came to be influenced by the ideas of the European Enlightenment, the French Revolution and Nationalism in the early 20th century. However, certain modern nationalist sentiments had been expressed in the epic poem *Mem u Zin* of Ehmedé Khani in the late 17th century, by the poet Haji Qadir Koyi in the mid-19th century and by the leader of the 1880 uprising that aimed at establishing an independent Kurdish state of areas within Iran and the Ottoman state, Sheikh Ubeidullah Nahri (Hyman, 1988).

Kurdish hopes for self-government and an independent Kurdistan were further boosted by the break-up of the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of World War I, with US President Wilson's 14-point programme for peace, the establishment of the Arab states of *Hijaz*, Syria and Iraq, and the Treaty of Sévres of 1920 that recognised the right to establish an independent state of Kurdistan in articles 62-64. However, this Treaty was repudiated within two years by the new Turkish Republic proclaimed by Kemal Ataturk; a new treaty (Lausanne 1923) was concluded that contained no mention of the Kurdish question (Sim, 1980).

The various Kurdish uprisings in this century should be seen in the light of these aspirations towards self-government and the establishment of a national state. In the course of the current century, the Kurds have managed to establish two short-lived semi-independent political entities: the Kingdom of Kurdistan in Iraq (1922-1924) by Sheikh Mahmoud Barzinji, and the Democratic Republic of Kurdistan of Mehabad in Iran (1946) (See Galbraith, 1991; Talabani, 1971).

The Kurdish language belongs to the West Iranian group of Indo-European languages. It is thus related to Persian, but not to Arabic or Turkish.

Today, there are about 20-25 millions Kurds: the fourth largest population group of the Middle East after the Arabs, Turks and Persians. There are 12 million in Turkey, 6 million in Iran, 4 million in Iraq, up to 1.5 million in Syria and 0.5 million in the Soviet Union. Kurdistan is also inhabited by a number of non-Kurdish minority ethnic groups, mainly Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriacs, Armenians, Turcomens and Arabs.[3]

Kurdistan is a religious mosaic. The majority are Sunni moslems of the *Shafei* school (which separates them from the Arabs in Syria and Iraq, and the Turks who are mainly *Hanafis*).[4] A minority are Shiites (*Alawites* and *Jafaris*). Some are *Yezidis*.[5] Then there are sects like the *Ahle Haqq* (the holders of the Truth) and *Shabaks*; and minority Christian and Jewish communities still exist in Kurdistan (Bruinessen, 1978).

The Kurds consider themselves to be a distinct ethnic group with a distinct language, common origins, a shared historical experience, a common culture and, to a certain extent, a common destiny and set of aspirations.[6]

2. DYNAMICS OF THE ETHNIC CONFLICT

Ethnicity and nationalist phenomena have attracted considerable attention during the last decade, as a result of national and ethnic conflicts in many parts of the world – in the Third World, in Europe (the Soviet Union, a number of Central and Eastern European countries, Spain, Ireland, in Canada and the United States). The intensity of such conflicts has surprised and astonished many observers, especially given earlier hopes during the 1950 and 1960s for greater and more comprehensive economic and political integration. It was assumed that ethnic and nation-

al conflicts between different groups within and among states would weaken and eventually vanish under the impact of modernization and industrialization. The ethnic revival of recent decades, and particularly after the collapse of the totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe, came as an unexpected surprise. National loyalties and passions as well as ethnic origins and identification have proven themselves far more resilient than expected.

Studies of ethnic or nationalist movements have shown that it is nearly impossible to eliminate or repress such movements once ethnic mobilisation and national consciousness have begun to manifest themselves within a group. They tend to flare up, and then to recede during periods of oppression, only to re-emerge even more forcibly at a later date (Suhrke & Noble, 1977).

Since World War II, and more especially since the late 1950s, the Kurdish ethnic revival and nationalist movement has grown and gained momentum during the shifting but perennial conflicts within and between a number of states in the Middle East. By the mid 1970s, the movement had become an important non-state actor in the politics of the region.

Since 1961, an armed conflict has intermittently raged between the Kurds and varying Iraqi governments. A similar armed conflict has been going on between the Kurds and the Islamic Republic in Iran, since 1979, a conflict which can be seen as part of the tradition of armed uprisings against the earlier regime of the Shah. The Kurds in Turkey have shown signs of following a similar development, since 1984. Syria's Kurds have shown periodic dissatisfaction and resistance to the Syrian government. Like other national and ethnic groups in the Soviet Union, the Kurds too have recently raised demands for the return of a separate autonomous region in the Caucasus to coincide with the historical region of 'Autonomous Kurdistan' that existed until 1929 (Haydari, 1991, pp. 11-12).

This sharpening of the ethnic conflict between the Kurds and the power elites of the majority nations in the states concerned can be attributed to a number of factors.

A great sense of ethnic injustice has been provoked among Kurds by the harsh oppressive measures used by the power elites of these states against the Kurds as a group – among them mass-deportations and arrests, executions, war, genocide, denial of their existence and the denial of cultural and political rights

coupled with blatant forms of ethnic discrimination. The absence of democratic procedures and pluralistic political processes in most of the states that include parts of Kurdistan have seriously blocked possibilities of democratic political action and solutions in the Kurdish quest for equality and freedom. The Kurds have been forced to resist, rather than to work within the framework of the political systems.

The development of a stronger Kurdish ethnic identity can be seen as a reaction to attempts to force the Kurds to assimilate – an approach which forms a part of the majority's programme to build new nations in states artificially created after World War I. It should also be understood as a reaction to the aggressive Pan-nationalist movements that have arisen in these states. Assimilation or 'forced integration' policies have failed because of the sheer number of Kurds, their geographic concentration, inaccessibility, cultural and linguistic identity, and their alienation from the majority societies as a result of inequality and ethnic discrimination. Moreover, these policies were carried out by force rather than voluntary participation (Galbraith, 1991, p. 23).

The realization is currently growing among the Kurds that they share the same plight as other ethnic groups and peoples in former colonies and non-self governing territories. There is also a growing awareness that some of these have now achieved independence, and established their own nation-states within the United Nations. Some of those nations number no more than a few thousand people, while a nation of more than twenty million is still denied its right to existence and self-determination.

Societal developments and technological changes (e.g. the expansion of the educational system, information and communications), economic development and the emergence of modern industrial change in the states that dominate Kurdistan, have served to favour greater homogeneity and increased interaction among the Kurds. They have strengthened their national identity – contrary to the expectations of the power elites of these states, who had hoped to use such changes in their assimilation drive and in the 'nation-building' process.

Higher levels of education among the Kurds may have led to the assimilation of some of them, but, in general, education has made the greater part of the masses of the people more aware of the state of 'internal colonialism' that has led to a 'cultural division of labour' and ethnic separation (Hechter, 1975).

Some theorists of nationalism maintain that the interest in spreading a national consciousness usually develops first within the middle class (Nairn, 1977) or a 'middle group' (Seton-Watson, 1981). Others maintain that nationalist ideas emerge first among intellectuals (poets, writers, researchers, scientists, etc.) and are later picked up by the educated and 'revolutionary interested' groups in society (teachers, journalists, lawyers, engineers, etc.) in their aspirations towards ethnic independence. The revolutionary interested groups often see their career paths as blocked by various factors. Therefore, to overcome their frustration they seek new paths towards maintaining power through some sort of a collective identity (Smith, 1981; Smith, 1986).

Such a elite Kurdish elite has developed more forcefully since World War II, in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. The group of educated and intellectual Kurds, which grew in size as a result of the developmental process in Syria, Turkey, Iran and Iraq in these countries' aspirations to 'modernise' their 'free' countries -in other words their nation-building – became increasingly aware of discrimination against their members. As Kurds, they represented a category that was culturally and linguistically divergent from the point of view of the majority. Their career paths into the administration were blocked and their aspirations to power were ignored in Arab, Persian and Turkish dominated societies. The discriminated intelligentsia in Kurdistan within the ranks of the Kurdish political movements have successfully utilized this model of 'internal colonialism' in their agitation to mobilize their own people towards a collective identity based on ethno-national grounds. They have contributed greatly towards developing a symbol-mythology aimed at forming a sense of community among the masses of the Kurdish people (Smith, 1981): the flag, the national day, the national anthem of the Mehabad Republic, and commemoration of national uprisings, etc.

Increased interaction among Kurds in exile and during periods of national trauma such as the collapse of the Mehabad Republic (1946), the collapse of the autonomy movement in Iraq (1975), the Halabja tragedy (1988), and the refugee exodus in the aftermath of the Second Gulf War (1991), as well as greater degrees of cross-border cooperation between the different resistance movements in Turkey, Iran and Iraq, have further

strengthened Kurdish identity and homogenized their outlook.

Radical changes in information channels, increased availability of materials in printed Kurdish, better economic conditions, and higher levels of interaction and cooperation among Kurds have made them more aware of cultural similarity and affinity among themselves, and of their cultural distance from members of the majority nations.

Such developments were hindered in the past because, in all these states, Kurdistan was located in the periphery and in effect deprived of the benefits of the developmental projects, in comparison with majority populations. The lack of an infrastructure, a relatively under-developed communication system and the division of Kurdish territory between different states blocked the effective organization of ethnic agitation by the Kurdish nationalist groups. The schools, too – if they existed – were under hostile control. The development of a unitary and standard language was complicated by widespread illiteracy and the political division of the territory. Printed materials in the Kurdish language were lacking, and their spread was hindered in many parts of Kurdistan until the mid 1940s, and in Turkey up to the late 1970s.

3. GEOSTRATEGIC FACTORS

These dynamics of the ethnic conflict in Kurdistan are affected by certain geostrategic factors linked to Kurdistan's location. The degree and the level of the ethnic conflict is more or less determined by such geopolitical factors.

The territory of Kurdistan is divided into four parts between Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. This, together with its location as a land-locked area without access to the sea or to states other than those that occupy Kurdistan, has forced the Kurdish nationalist movements to follow modest strategies of self-government within these states, in order not to undermine their possibilities of negotiated accommodation with the central governments, or of cooperation with opposition political forces, for finding democratic solutions to their common problems.[7] This division has constituted the main obstacle to the formation of unitary or pan-Kurdish movements. Other states too, that might be interested in getting involved in Kurdish affairs are constrained by this geopolitical reality and the danger to their diplomatic and trade relations with Iran, Turkey and the Arab states.

The existence of a large, ethnically homogenous population in the heartland, and a more ethnically mixed population in the periphery of Kurdistan, as well as large colonies of Kurdish groups residing in the capitals or industrial centres of their respective states, might lead to bridge building and reduction of the ethnic conflict, through increased political and social interactions in common national associations and organizations. On the other hand, if such population movements are a result of deportation of Kurds and settlement of majority groups in Kurdistan, they are bound to lead to bitter and intensified ethnic conflict.[8]

The existence of relatively rich natural resources in Kurdistan, in the form of oil, minerals (including rich deposits of uranium), agricultural products and abundant water, that are being exploited without their benefits accruing to the local population, has resulted in an increased sense of ethnic injustice and discrimination. The power elites in these states consequently hold on more strongly to their respective Kurdish areas, and tend to interpret the slightest demands by the Kurds for justice and a new division of benefits, as steps towards separation. They therefore resort to repression rather than accommodation. The recent increased importance of water resources as a strategic weapon and a source of future potential conflicts in the Middle East might further complicate ethnic relations, as many of the major rivers of the area originate in Kurdistan – e.g. the Euphrates, the Tigris and the Zabs.

The use of Kurdistan by these states as a buffer-zone and a battlefield in past or any eventual conflict with their respective neighbours, together with the danger of spillover effects of any changes in the status of the Kurds in any one of these states, with political repercussions for the stability and security of their neighbours, prompted almost continuous collaboration and cooperation among the states against the Kurdish nationalist movement until the 1960s. This has gradually given way to increased levels of verbal and military conflicts, increasing the Kurdish movements' chances of political manoeuvrability. Furthermore, continuous changes in governmental structures, whether through military coups, popular uprisings (Iran), or, more rarely, through democratic changes (Turkey), have led to shifting policies towards their Kurdish areas. During periods of tolerance, some reform measures have been taken, Kurdish political and cultural institutions have been tolerated and persecution eased. Iraqi Kurdistan experienced such periods between

1958-61, 1964-68, and 1970-74, while Iranian Kurdistan had much shorter such periods in 1979 and 1980. By contrast, during repressive periods, mass executions, deportations, and military campaigns have been used against the Kurdish people.

The strategic military location of Kurdistan in the heartland of the Middle East as a natural geographical barrier between states, and in the different alliance systems that emerged after World War II, was considered paramount in the military doctrines of both East and West, who attached great significance to the control and acquisition of this territory in any eventual military conflict. The East wanted to use it as a springboard to reach ice-free, international sea-lanes and the strategic oil resources of the area and the Gulf, while Western strategy aimed to utilize the territory as a natural barrier against precisely these Soviet ambitions (Pelletiere, 1984; O'Ballance, 1984).

The rigid, bipolar international system, with its strong regional alliances and pacts, aimed at preserving the status quo and the political borders that emerged in the region after World War I. The nature of conflict and confrontation, with the threat of nuclear war always present, demanded that the borders of these states be declared 'sacred', with no room allowed for any form of balkanisation or change. Any such change was regarded as a potential strategic success for the opposing bloc, to be resisted at all costs.[9]

Gradually, however, both superpowers started to lose their leverage vis-a-vis their client-states in the area. The overthrow of the Shah in 1979, and the start of the First Gulf War in 1980, resulted in the states themselves violating their own international borders. Iraq invaded Iran in September 1980, in the hope of annexing Khuzistan or 'Arabistan', and possibly encouraging the secession of Iranian Kurdistan and Baluchistan, as well as toppling the clerical regime (Pelletiere, 1984; Hiro, 1984). After the summer of 1982, Iran repeatedly attempted to invade Iraq and establish an Islamic regime there too. In 1983, 1984, 1986 and 1987, Turkey violated Iraq's international borders and carried out military incursions into Iraqi Kurdistan in order to suppress the Kurdish resistance movement – all with the approval and support of the Iraqi government. After 1985, Turkey started to make statements to the effect that it had vital interests in Kirkuk and Iraqi Kurdistan, 'the historical Vilayat of Mosul', and that it would occupy and annex Iraqi Kurdistan if Iran invaded and occupied Iraq.[10] Syria was deeply involved in

Lebanon and was busy contemplating either the annexation of parts of Lebanon or the establishment of a client state there. In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon and practically annexed the Golan Heights of Syria. There were attempts to annex other occupied territories as well, but these were hindered by international pressure. In 1990 Iraq invaded and annexed Kuwait, but was stopped by the intervention of the international community and the Second Gulf War. These developments have created new possibilities for the Kurdish nationalist movement, by removing the straitjacket of 'sacred' international borders and the objections to a possible balkanisation of the area, since the states themselves have initiated such a process.[11]

During the 1950s and 1960s, the Kurdish movement was only active and articulate in the Iraqi part of Kurdistan. Today, it has developed into a mass movement in Iran, Iraq and Turkey with closer and better ties and cooperation over borders. This has created new possibilities for joint action, coordination and the exchange of information.

The example of the Palestinian *intifada* and the mass popular uprisings of the peoples of Eastern Europe, together with the introduction of new, advanced military technology, and the use or threat of chemical and biological weapons against the Kurdish resistance movement, have changed the balance of forces radically. The earlier form of Kurdish resistance – guerrilla mountain warfare – has become obsolete and ineffective. This may cause the Kurdish movements to rely more on mass political actions and civil-disobedience strategies in the future, instead of armed resistance and unpredictable alliances with neighbouring countries (the enemy of my enemy) imposed by geopolitical necessities.

Local and international opinion used to be scarcely aware of the plight of the Kurdish people. Today, thanks to media coverage, humanitarian organizations, human rights institutions, and international discussion, the world has gradually become much more engaged and committed to the defense of human rights for the Kurds.

The 'domino effect' of developments towards democratization and pluralism, so dramatic in Eastern Europe, has already influenced political developments in some Asian, African and Latin American countries. Political processes in the Middle East are certain to be affected as well.

4. REGIONAL POLITICS: 1958 AND ONWARDS

In recent decades, relations between the four occupying countries have oscillated between extreme cooperation and extreme conflict – in part, influenced by the respective governments' stance on the Kurdish nationalist movement. This state of affairs has sometimes led to very complicated and strange political alliances, as well as the manipulation and exploitation of tensions and conflicts.

Under the Baghdad Pact (later CENTO), which lasted until 1958, Iran, Iraq and Turkey cooperated in order to suppress the Kurds (Pelletiere, 1984, pp. 93-119). When the Republic of Iraq was established in 1958, it left the Baghdad Pact and also recognized Kurdish rights to self-government and cultural autonomy. This caused a marked deterioration in Iraq's relations with both Iran and Turkey. In 1963, however, when a Baath government came to power through a military coup, Iraqi relations with Syria, Iran and Turkey improved considerably. Syria, too, was then ruled by the pan-Arab Baath Party which had come to power through a military coup in March 1963. Syria even dispatched one of its army divisions to help in the Iraqi war against the Kurdish freedom movement (See O'Ballance, 1973). Iran and Turkey, too, were planning a joint military action with Iraq, in the autumn of 1963, against the Kurdish freedom movement in Iraq. However, this plan was never put into effect because the Iraqi Baath government was toppled before the operation could begin.[12]

Between 1965 and 1975 Iran became a main supplier of aid and support to the Kurdish nationalist movement in Iraq (Benjamin, 1977; Harris, 1977). War was avoided only with the signing of the Agreement of Algiers, in March 1975, which forced Iraq to make significant concessions to Iran in the border areas and in *Shatt Al-arab*. This agreement, which was seen as a humiliation and a psychological defeat by the Iraqi government, also led to the dissolution and capitulation of the Kurdish resistance movement in Iraq (Benjamin, 1977; Harris, 1977; Vanly, 1980). Iranian and Iraqi relations then entered a period of cooperation and collaboration until the fall of the Shah in 1979.

Syria, on the other hand, began a period of heightened conflict with Iraq after 1975, even though both countries were ruled by different factions of the Baath party. Conflict centred around ideological issues and rights over water resources from the

Euphrates river. In consequence, Syria started actively to support the new Kurdish armed resistance movement in Iraq from 1976 onwards (Vanly, 1980; Malek, 1989).[13]

The first Gulf War (between Iran and Iraq) started with a symbolic gesture from the Iraqi president, when on 17 September 1980 Saddam Hussein tore up the Algiers's Agreement on Iraqi Television, and declared it void (Hiro, 1984; Bruinessen, 1986; Malek, 1989; Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett, 1987). During the long, drawn-out Iran-Iraq war both parties to the conflict sought cooperation from the adversary's Kurdish resistance movements. The Kurdish movement, too, attempted to exploit the conflict for its own ends (Bruinessen, 1986; Ibrahim, 1990; Malek, 1989; Sheikhmous, 1989). When the ceasefire was agreed upon between the warring parties in August 1988, and a peace agreement was in sight, the Kurdish nationalist movement was faced with a complicated and uncertain future and went through a period of crisis in both Iran and Iraq.

Turkey, always extremely sensitive about Kurdish freedom movements in the region, repeatedly interfered in the internal affairs of Iraq (1963, 1966, 1984) and Iran (1979) when any of these states demonstrated a willingness to recognize Kurdish rights to self-government or autonomy. Turkey protested vehemently on these occasions and threatened with hostile actions (Pelletiere, 1984, O'Ballance, 1973; McDowall, 1989). During the first Gulf War, Turkey launched four military expeditions- in 1983, 1984, 1986 and 1987- into Iraqi territory against the Kurdish resistance movement. In the later phases of the war when Iran was threatening to occupy Iraq, Turkey threatened to occupy Iraqi Kurdistan (Ibrahim, 1990; Bruinessen, 1986; Mushin, 1986; *New Statesman*, 15 July, 1983). Relations between Syria and Turkey have worsened noticeably in recent years, partly due to the large Turkish dam project, *GAP*, along the Euphrates and the apportionment of its water resources, and partly due to Syrian support for the Kurdistan Workers Party, (*PKK*), in Turkey (Gunter, 1988).

The Second Gulf War, in 1991, can be seen partly as a result of the economic consequences of the First Gulf War for Iraq, and of Saddam Hussein's ambitions to become a dominant leader in the Gulf and the Arab world. While Syria and Turkey joined the international alliance against Iraq, Iran remained neutral. At the same time, all three states were supportive of the Iraqi opposition forces (including the Kurdish movement) in their efforts to

overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein (*Time Magazine*, April 8, 1991; *The Economist*, September 1 & October 13, 1990; Galbraith, 1991). One dramatic consequence of this latest crisis in the Middle East has been Turkey's official acknowledgement of the existence of 12 million Kurds in Turkey (for the first time since 1923) and permission for the use of the Kurdish language in private, though not in public (*The Economist*, February 9, 1991; *Reuter*'s dispatch from Ankara, March 21, 1991; *Cumhuriyet*, January 31, 1991; *Yüzyil*, February 10, 1991). The other consequence was the acceptance, in theory, of a Kurdish self-governing administration within the borders of the state of Iraq.[14] Furthermore, Turkey has on several occasions received high-ranking Kurdish delegations from Iraq for official discussions.[15]

However, the collapse of the Shiite and Kurdish uprisings in Iraq in the aftermath of the Second Gulf War and the exodus of around 2.5 million refugees into Iran and Turkey has had tragic and catastrophic consequences for the Kurdish people in Iraq.[16] The dimensions of this exodus, together with the fear of its destabilizing effects on Iran, Iraq and Turkey, led the United Nations and a number other international actors to view the situation as a threat to international peace and security. Allied troops and UN guards were sent to the area to establish and supervise a free zone in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Kurdish question thus became an international issue as never before in history. Some voices were even raised in support of a regional political solution to the Kurdish question – e.g. by the EEC countries, the Pope and President Mitterand of France (*International Herald Tribune*, May 14, 1991; *The Times*, June 18, 1991; *The Sunday Times*, April 21, 1991; *Newsweek*, April 29, 1991).

Despite the enormous human cost of the Kurdish tragedy in Iraq, it carries within it the seeds of potentially positive developments for the international community as a whole. For example, *Halabja* started a much more determined process towards a total ban on the production and use of chemical and biological weapons. The refugee issue has revitalized and strengthened the United Nations as an international governing body, which in Resolution 688 has set new precedents in international law concerning its right to intervene in the internal affairs of states that seriously violate human rights and are seen as grave threats to international peace and security.[17] In the future, this may constitute a highly effective deterrent against further viol-

ations of human rights within member states. The Kurdish refugee issue even helped the European Community to overcome some of the serious rifts that had developed within it during the latest Gulf Crisis (*The Sunday Times*, April 21, 1991; *Newsweek*, April 29, 1991).

Over the years, a number of other regional and international actors have also been involved in the Kurdish nationalist movements. These include the United States, the Soviet Union, Egypt, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Libya, Jordan and the PLO.[18]

5. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

So far, most of the various Kurdish movements have demanded a federal solution, autonomy, cultural and language freedoms, as well as recognition and preservation of their ethnic identity. But, as in other freedom movements, as the conflicts become more intense and protracted, the stronger do demands become for separatism. Such a development could have a highly destabilising effect on the existing borders of four of the established states in the region, and eventually lead to a process of Balkanisation. Furthermore, such intensified ethnic conflicts could have very damaging consequences for the economic development of these states. Scarce and badly-needed resources would be used for military purposes. The destruction of an already limited infra-structure would have tragic consequences for the civil populations of these countries. Greater conflicts and bitterness between different groups would ensue, and further divide already weakened states. Such conditions invite external intervention or may cause power-holders to resort to adventures with neighbouring states, or even farther afield in order to foster unity at home.

One of the more alarming results of an intensified ethnic conflict could be an increased use of extreme methods by the Kurdish nationalist movement itself. Let us hope that this scenario will never come to pass, and that current efforts to rethink the problem – both within the states concerned and within the Kurdish movement – will achieve a political compromise, either in the form of a federal solution or autonomy.

Since 1948, the peoples of the Middle East have witnessed seven major destructive, inter-state wars and as many civil

wars. These have only served to complicate the issues, rather than solve them. It is high time that peace, dialogue and negotiations be given a serious chance.

The following issues should be addressed in any serious and genuine attempt to find a comprehensive and peaceful solution to the problems of the Middle East:

• Recognition of Israel's right to existence within safe and secure borders;

• Recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination;

• Recognition of the right of the Kurdish people to self-determination;

• Achievement of an equitable peace in Lebanon;

• The peaceful settlement of border disputes and matters related to the distribution of water resources.

If the Kurdish issue is again ignored and excluded from the agenda of any prospective international peace conference on Middle Eastern problems, then that peace will be illusory and incomplete. Instead of stability or apparent successful agreement, it will surely be undermined by the unpredictable and potentially explosive issue of Kurdish self-determination.

A blueprint for peace for the whole region, including the Kurdish issue, could/ought to take the following into consideration:

• The Middle East should be declared a nuclear-free zone;

• Demilitarization should take place in all the states of the region;

• All weapons of mass destruction (nuclear, chemical and biological) should be destroyed;

• All states should refrain from the sales of additional arms to Middle Eastern countries;

• The international community should enforce a stringent policy of arms-control in the region;

• A regional security system for dealing with future conflicts should be established in the area;

• An international peace conference should be convened, to decide on a logical and reasonable solution for the rights of the Palestinian and the Kurdish peoples to self-determination (whether on the basis of a homeland, a federal solution, or other satisfactory forms) as well as other outstanding issues such as the security of Israel, border issues, the Lebanese question;

• A regional economic commission should be established (which might develop into a future common market) as well as a regional development bank, for an equitable distribution of wealth and a better allocation of resources (financial, oil and water) among all the states of the region and for their common development;

• The establishment of constitutional, democratic and pluralistic political systems should be encouraged, coupled with measures such as boycotts and sanctions against states which are dictatorial and which violate human rights.

The process can be envisaged in terms of three stages:

a)   An Arab-Israeli Peace Conference;

b)   Another conference on regional, human and minority rights, including self-determination for specific ethnic groups within states;

c)   Establishment of periodic structures, like the Helsinki Accords, to monitor and report on human rights.

Within such a process, the most reasonable and logical solution for defusing the ever-worsening ethnic conflict between the Kurds and the respective power-elites of the majority nations in the states concerned can be discussed within the conference structures b) and c), and can be outlined as follows:[19]

In the Soviet Union
The autonomous region that belonged to the Kurds until 1929 should be re-established. All Kurds in the Soviet Union ought to have the right to settle in the region, included those Kurds who were deported to Central Asia during the 1940 and 1950s. The wish of other Kurds who may choose to emigrate to other parts of Kurdistan should also be respected.

In Syria
Recognition of Kurdish identity with local administrative self-governing rights in the regions of Djazira, Kurdagh and Ain Al-arab, as well as cultural and political freedom throughout Syria.

In Turkey, Iran and Iraq
Recognition of the right of the Kurdish people within those geographical areas where they constitute a majority, to self-government within existing states in the form of autonomy, federation or confederation. In the case of Turkey, a step-by-step approach could be applied.

The on-going peace process in the aftermath of the Gulf War may lead to certain regional security and economic structures, within which cross-border cooperative political and cultural relations could be promoted between the different self-governing Kurdish entities. This might eventually lead to their peaceful integration into a united entity.

NOTES

1. Some Kurds reside in Georgia (mainly in Tbilisi, the *Yezidis*). In the 1940s, many Kurds were deported by Stalin to Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kirghizia and Uzbekistan. Recently, after the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict concerning Nagorno Karabagh, some 20,000 Kurds have been deported from both republics and settled by the Soviet authorities in Krasnodar Krai and Kirghizia (Haydari, 1991; Kendal, 1980).

2. Despite scientific controversy about the origin of the Kurds, the works of Driver and Minorsky are generally accepted by most specialists on the subject (Driver, 1921 & 1923; Minorsky, 1953 & 1960).

3. There is a general consensus among many experts that the Kurds number more than 20 million people, but controversy still surrounds this subject. Lacking precise statistical data, the authorities in the states concerned tend to minimize the number of Kurds, while Kurdish nationalists tend to inflate their number.

4. This relationship concerns the Arabs immediately to the South of the Kurdish regions. Although the majority of the Arabs in Iraq are Shiites (55% out of 95% Moslems), the power holders have been Sunni Moslems (*Hanafis*). The majority of the Arabs in Syria are Sunni Moslems (*Hanafis*). The Shiite *Alawites* gained power in Syria after 1970. For more details for Iraq, see Batatu, 1978, pp. 37-44.4.22

5. *Alawite* Kurds are concentrated in Northwestern Kurdistan in Turkey while *Jafari* Shiite Kurds are mainly in Southeastern and extreme Southern Kurdistan, in the provinces of Kirmanshah in Iran and Khanaqin in Iraq (Bruinessen, 1978). The most recent work on the *Yezidis* is Guest, 1987.

6. This conclusion is based on an ongoing research project by the author on Kurdish nationalism at the University of Stockholm based on interviews with leading Kurdish leaders and intellectuals, as well as a similar research project by Birgit Amman at the Free University of Berlin. Their common premise is Barth's definition of an ethnic group (Barth, 1969; Entessar, 1984).

7. This of course does not exclude that some Kurdish nationalist organizations might work for separation and independence, e.g. the Kurdistan Workers Party (*PKK*) and others. But such organizations still constitute a minority and go against the mainstream of Kurdish movements.

8. Such deportation and settlement programmes in Kurdistan have been carried out by all concerned governments, since the 1920s. The estimated number of Kurds outside Kurdistan proper is assumed to be: *In Iran*: About half a million in Khorasan, about 300,000 in Baluchistan and 200,000 in Teheran and other major Iranian cities. *In Turkey*: Almost a quarter of the population of Istanbul is Kurdish, and Kurds are numerous in Ankara, Konya, Izmir, Adana, Mersin, etc. *In Iraq*: The authorities have levelled 4000 villages and 18 medium-sized towns in Iraqi Kurdistan and deported their population (nearly one million) to the southern plains of Kurdistan and Central and Southern Iraq. Nearly a quarter of the population of Baghdad is Kurdish. *In Syria*: Around 300,000 Kurds in Aleppo and Damascus. There are also some 100,000 Kurds in Lebanon and Jordan, around 150,000 Jews from Kurdistan in Israel, and an estimated 600,000 Kurds in exile in Europe, the USA, Canada and Australia (Blau, 1991; Sheikhmous, 1990).

9. Pelletiere, 1984. On US views that any help to the Kurds in Iraq would serve Soviet interests and antagonize Iran and Turkey, see telegram from US Ambassador in Teheran to the State Department in 'The Pike Report', *Village Voice*, 16 February 1976, pp. 84-87; Latham, 1976.

10. In 1979, an agreement was signed between Turkey and Iraq which gave both countries the right of pursuit into each others' territory to a depth of 15 kms against Kurdish resistance movements in both countries. The agreement expired in 1988 (*The Times*, 8 August 1991). On the latest Turkish military incursion into Iraqi Kurdistan on 5 August 1991 and its demand for a 5 km. buffer zone along its border with Iraq, see *The Economist*, August 17, 1991; *International Herald Tribune*, 7 & 9 August 1991; *The Times*, 7 August 1991; see also Ibrahim, 1990; Bruinessen, 1986; *New Statesman*, 1983. London, 15 July.

11. The recent radical changes in established borders in Europe -the reunification of Germany, the independence of the Baltic states, declaration of sovereignty by a number of other Soviet Republics and the changes in Yugoslavia – all inconceivable before 1989, might provide a better international atmosphere and understanding for Kurdish demands to self-determination, especially if carried out peacefully and by democratic means.

12. Ghassemlou, 1968, p.280, mentions 'Operation Tiger' by CENTO's council meeting in Turkey, in July 1963: 'Turkish troops were, with Iraqi connivance, to advance against the Kurdish rebels and to contain and crush them in the sector that reached to Mosul, while from the east the Persians were to take similar action and march on to Sulaimaniya. Iraqi troops were to act in conjunction with them, the overall aim being to make a massive effort to crush the Kurdish Revolt once and for all'; also in O'Ballance, 1973, p.112.

13. On Kissinger's thinking to help Iraq by ending the Kurdish revolt in order to put pressure on Syria and increase the level of conflict between them so that Syria would become more compromising in the Middle East talks that Kissinger held. See Vanly, 1980; Latham, 1976.

14. In a statement, President Özal says: 'Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq oppose an independent Kurdistan', but in talks with Mr. Talabani he accepts autonomy for the Kurds in Iraq and the establishment of a federal system in that country (*Washington Post & IHT*, May 24, 1991; Reuters, May 24, 1991).

15. The first visit was in March, 1991. Others visits and meetings between President Özal and Mr. Talabani were in June and July, 1991 (*Cumhuriyet*, June 13, 1991; *The Times*, June 24, 1991; *IHT*, May 24, 1991; *Financial Times*, April 27-28, 1991).

16. The majority of these refugees have returned since. Around 10,000 are left in Silopi in Turkey and around 350,000 are still in Iran (*The Economist*, 13 July 1991).

17. The French Foreign Minister formulated the policy of 'The duty to interfere'. President Mitterand of France had earlier spoken of 'The Humanitarian Right to interfere' in a speech to the United Nations, in 1988: 'When we are confronted by emergency situations involving great distress and injustice, the world community has a duty to assert its right to assist civilian populations threatened by the cruelty of states' (*Guardian Weekly*, 14 April 1991); British Foreign Minister Douglas Hurd recently wrote: 'Security Council resolution 688 broke new ground in authorising international humanitarian relief inside Iraq to save the Kurds. The principle of non-interference in another country's internal affairs is important, but it cannot be right to leave the international community powerless in the face of terrible human suffering. The resolution sets an important precedent for action if similar conditions should arise again' *(The Times*, 2 August 1991); In the fall of 1991 Soviet Foreign Minister Boris Pankin stated: 'We ask the World to interfere in the internal affairs of other states for the protection of Minorities and Human Rights' (Interview to *Swedish Television* during the CSCE International Conference on Human Rights, September 11, 1991).

18. Unfortunately, lack of space hinders an analysis of these relations. On Israeli involvement with Iraqi Kurdistan see Pelletiere, 1984; *Newsweek*, 7 April 1975; *Washington Post*, 12 May 12 1969 & 17 September 1972; On U.S. involvement *Village Voice*, 16 February 1976; *Newsweek*, 19 April 1991; On Soviet involvement Howell, 1965 Rasoul, 1988.

19. These solutions are based on interviews and discussions with the late Dr. Ghassemlou of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), Mr. Talabani of the Patriotic Union Of Kurdistan (PUK) in Iraq, Mr. Kemal Burkay of the Socialist Party of Turkish Kurdistan (SPTK), Mr. Serhat Dicle of the Vanguard Party of the Workers of Kurdistan (PPKK-*Peshang*) in Turkey (should not be confused with PKK), Professors Nadirov and Shakro of the USSR, and three leaders of the main Kurdish parties in Syria; see also: Talabani, 1991; Talabani, 1990; Interview with Masoud Barzani, 1989 & 1990; Laizer, 1991.

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