

Chapter 6

Autonomy in Kurdistan in Historical Perspective

Ofra Bengio

Wars as Windows of Opportunity

The twists and turns in the fate of the Kurds of Iraq have been shaped by the major wars that have been fought in the region, as well as the intermittent guerrilla war that the Kurds themselves have conducted against the central government. Their fate has also been a reflection of their numbers: too large to be utterly crushed, not enough to dictate outcomes. The exact number of Kurds in Iraq today is not known, although it is thought that they comprise at least one-fifth of the population. According to the General Census of 1947, the Kurds numbered 900,000; the governorates of Erbil and Sulaimania were almost 100 percent Kurdish, Kirkuk more than 50 percent, and Mosul about 35 percent (Edmonds 1957, 438–40). The future of the Kurds of Iraq, as before, will be shaped by the military outcome of the new Gulf War and what uses the Kurds make of their numbers.

The First World War and the division of the Ottoman Empire ended with the formation of new Arab states, including Iraq. But it left the Kurds of the new state in an ambiguous situation for some seven years. In 1918 the British occupied Mosul *wilayet*, populated by a very clear majority of Kurds, and added it to the other parts of Mesopotamia (the rest of the future Iraq) that they had occupied earlier. During this period, the British fed Kurdish aspirations for autonomy and independence. The indecisive, ambiguous, and inconsistent policies of the British and the struggle between Turkey and Iraq over the inclusion of the Mosul *wilayet* in their respective states enabled the Kurds to enjoy de facto autonomy until the end of 1925, even though the promise of an independent Kurdistan had been withdrawn. By 1925, Britain, with vested interests in this oil-rich region, put all its weight behind the annexation of Mosul *wilayet* to Iraq. (They had also left Turkish territorial nationalists with grievances.)

The Second World War brought new challenges and new expectations to the Kurds of Iraq. Led now by the charismatic Mustafa Barzani, the Kurds took advantage of the unstable situation in the country in the aftermath of Rashid 'Ali al-Gaylani's revolt against the British in May 1941 to initiate an insurrection against the central government in Baghdad. But the pressure of the Iraqi army and the establishment in December 1945 of the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad in neighboring Iran under the auspices of the Soviets moved Barzani, together with 2,000 Kurds, to join the first true experiment of an independent Kurdish state. Sentenced to death in absentia in Iraq, Barzani was declared Field Marshal in the new republic (Longrigg 1968, 327). But the collapse of the Republic of Mahabad at the end of 1946 compelled Barzani and some 400 of his supporters to seek refuge in the Soviet Union. This forced exile lasted until the July 1958 coup of 'Abd al-Karim Qasim, who decided to call Barzani and his men back to Iraq with the aim of achieving reconciliation. The honeymoon period ended in September 1961, when the Kurds initiated a new round of insurrections, which continued until the fall of Qasim in February 1963 and from then on flared up intermittently until March 1970.

The decade of Kurdish insurrection brought about surprising results for the Kurds. The second Ba'ath regime that came to power in 1968, at the initiation of its strongman, Saddam Hussein, recognized in March 1970, for the first time in Iraq's history, territorial autonomy for the Kurds (on this short-lived grant of autonomy, see Ghareeb 1981; Gunter 1992, 14–19; and for its legal content, Hannum 1996, ch. 9). This daring move shocked neighboring Syria, Turkey, and Iran, which feared spillover effects on their own Kurdish populations. But, what had seemed to be a major strategic reconstruction of relations between the Kurds and the Iraqi state turned out to be a merely tactical maneuver aimed at gaining time for the government to consolidate its power. The best proof for this was the failed attempt on the life of Mustafa Barzani on 29 September 1971, engineered by none other than Saddam Hussein himself: one source claimed that Saddam was directly involved in the attempt through Barzani's son, Ubaydallah (*Al-Nahar Arab Report*, 11 October 1981). This outbreak of hostilities developed into a full-fledged war in April 1974, four years after the autonomy agreement.

This war between the Kurds and Baghdad, which lasted for one year, became a turning point because it regionalized the issue of the status of the Kurds in Iraq. Iran was drawn into this previously internal conflict. But Iran's support for the Kurds of Iraq stopped abruptly when the two rivals, the Shah of Iran and the strongman of Iraq, reached an agreement in 1975. The Iraqi concession of delineating the border in the Shatt al-'Arab region according to

Iranian demands was reciprocated by the termination of Iranian aid to the Kurds. This pact resulted in the collapse of the Kurdish rebellion, Mustafa Barzani's second exile (from which he would never return), and the dispersal of many Kurds to Iran, other parts of Iraq, and many other countries. The brief experiment in autonomy ended in a national catastrophe for the Kurds that erased their previous achievements.

The recovery of the Kurdish movement from the 1975 collapse was very gradual, and it came to a halt with the eruption of the war between Iraq and Iran, which lasted for eight years from September 1980 until August 1988. The Kurds were drawn into the war, willy-nilly, as part of their conflict with the Iraqi central government and their ambiguous relations with Iran that drove (some of) them to side with Tehran against Baghdad. The price they eventually paid during this war was the worst catastrophe in their modern history. In the infamous genocidal Anfal campaign of the summer of 1988, the Iraqi government used chemical weapons in Halabja and other places, destroyed thousands of Kurdish villages, and, according to Human Rights Watch, killed at least 50,000 people (Middle East Watch 1993a, 1993b, 13).

The Kurds of Iraq had hardly recovered from the Iran-Iraq war when, three years later, the United States and its coalition allies defeated Iraq after Saddam Hussein's attempted conquest of Kuwait. The crushing defeat of the Iraqi army encouraged the Kurds (and the Shi'a) to rise in rebellion against the central government. Once again, however, the Kurdish population paid a heavy price. The non-intervention of the U.S.-led coalition and the swift reaction of the Iraqi army forced more than one million Kurds to flee to Turkey and Iran in the spring of 1991. Yet this event proved an opportunity and a boon in the long run. The U.S. and the UK felt obliged to declare a "no-fly" zone in northern Iraq and to create a "safe haven" for the Kurds. This shift eventually led to the withdrawal of the Iraqi army from Kurdish-dominated areas and to the formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

The war that the Americans, the British, and their allies initiated against Iraq in March 2003 will prove, for better or worse, another turning point for the Kurds. The questions that loom ahead are obvious: Will the United States for geopolitical reasons opt against the Kurds, as Britain had done before? Will the Kurds once again miss a historic opportunity to establish either autonomy or federation? Will Iraqi Kurdistan revert to its previous status? Assessment of what is likely to occur must focus on the three major developments of the last decade: the transformations in the Kurdish region itself, the shifting balance of power among the different states surrounding Iraqi Kurdistan, and the role of international players.

Autonomy in the Making

The most important development since 1992 as far as the Kurds are concerned is the autonomy they and the minorities within the jurisdiction of the KRG have enjoyed for over a decade. This phase of autonomy may usefully be compared with the political performance of the Kurds of Iraq in earlier periods, with that of other ethnic or religious groups in Iraq, and with that of the Kurds in other states.

For the Kurds of Iraq, this has been the longest period within a century in which they have experienced autonomous self-rule. The *de facto* autonomy of sorts that prevailed after World War I lasted for some seven years, and that of the Ba'ath era for only four years. There is hardly room for a comparison between the present experience of autonomy and past instances. The early 1920s contributed very little to Kurdish identity and the creation of autonomous socioeconomic and political infrastructures. The autonomy of the 1970–1974 period, which enjoyed the blessing of the central government, was partial and too short to make any difference, and even during this interregnum the Kurdish autonomous government was in constant conflict with the Ba'ath. No less important, the region's previous experiences of autonomy did not evolve under a protective great-power or international umbrella of the sort the region had enjoyed since 1991. To the contrary: in the 1920s, Britain used its own air force to subdue the Kurds and protected the central government against them (Longrigg 1968, 144, 146, 152, 194).

The most important achievement of the last decade has been the forging of a more cohesive Kurdish identity. This has been made possible by a combination of factors: the modernization of Kurdish society; vital support from the outside world; and the disappearance of the Baghdad government. This growing Kurdish regional identity has taken substantive and symbolic forms. The Kurdish language has been developed and employed in the public sphere, including schools, universities, the administration, and broadcasting and print media. There has been widespread development and display of national symbols, such as Kurdish flags (beside or instead of the Iraqi flags), a Kurdish hymn, and the erection of statues and portraits of Kurdish heroes, such as Mustafa Barzani and Mahmud Barzani. (The Kurds even experimented for a while with a new calendar, with the year 2001 parallel to the year 2700 of the Kurdish calendar.)

Another important boost for Kurdish identity and confidence in self-rule has come from the development of the local socioeconomic infrastructure. Under Baghdad's control, the region's infrastructure had been entirely dependent on the central government, and later much of it was destroyed in war.

The fact that the Kurds have managed to rebuild this infrastructure almost from scratch, albeit with outside support, speaks volumes about their aptitude for self-government. Last but not least, the Kurdish region created a political framework that has functioned independently of the Ba'ath regime in the center. This framework has included the management of local government in different parts of Kurdistan by Kurdish officials not appointed by the Ba'athists; the open and free activities of Kurdish parties, something formerly the monopoly of the Ba'ath party or pro-Ba'ath Kurdish parties, and the institutionalization of a Kurdish parliament with more or less free elections, which took place in May 1992 (*Agence France Press*, 22 May 1992; *Le Monde*, 24–25 May 1992). Together these events and developments have constituted a Kurdish government and moved toward a de facto state. Notwithstanding its many mistakes and weaknesses, this government has, for the first time in decades, given the Kurds the sense that they are masters of their house. A new political language has emerged which refers to these institutions in the terminology of statehood: Kurds speak of the "Government of Kurdistan," the "Prime Minister," "cabinet ministers," and the like.

The experience of the Kurds contrasts sharply with the situation of the Shi'a of Iraq. Theoretically speaking, the Kurds and the Shi'a could have been in a similar position, for they had simultaneously started an Intifada against the Ba'ath in 1991 and later both enjoyed the protection afforded by "no-fly" zones. Moreover, the position of the Shi'a as a numeral majority in Iraq should have given them an edge over the Kurds. In reality, however, the situation of the Shi'a became much worse than before the Intifada (*Al-Milal wal-A'raq* 1995, 47–52). In contrast with the Kurdish movement, the Shi'a have lacked organization, cohesiveness, integrated socioeconomic, religious, and political organizations, and real support from the outside world (even Iran has neglected them). In post-Saddam Iraq, the Shi'a, unlike the Kurds, have had to start from scratch.

The situation of the Kurds of Iraq also contrasted with that of the Kurds in other countries. Until the Kurdish Intifada, Baghdad used to boast of its magnanimous treatment of "its Kurds," claiming to have allowed them more autonomy than either Iran or Turkey did "their Kurds." It was not true then, but it became the case against the will of regime after 1991, when the Ba'ath pulled out of the region. At present, in no other state do the Kurds enjoy autonomy of any sort, cultural or political. The precedent set by the Kurds of Iraq appears so threatening to the surrounding states that they have regularly vowed to fight it, lest the contagion spread to their own Kurds.

The unique situation of the Kurds of Iraq was due, above all, to the distinct situation created by the unfinished aftermath of the liberation of Kuwait.

Part of it may be attributed to the deliberate decision Saddam made to withdraw the Iraqi army from Kurdistan at the end of 1991. Saddam later rationalized this withdrawal: “we said let us withdraw the Army because it cannot perform its duty when things have reached such a low level” (*Al-Thawra*, 22 March 1991). But, in fact, his decision was based on two erroneous assumptions. First, he believed that the Kurds would not be able to survive without the services of the central government even for one day and would rush quickly back to the arms of the Ba’th. Second, he thought that the world would remain indifferent to the fate of the Kurds, as had been the case after the chemical attacks against them in 1988. Saddam fully expected that his regime would return to Kurdistan at the invitation of the Kurds themselves, no doubt after internal conflict among them. He was wrong. Even though there was internal fighting later, the Kurds were able to dispense with the services of the Ba’thist state. During the regime’s last decade, the autonomy of Kurdistan came to haunt the central government, which feared that the same democratic aspirations might infect Baghdad itself, or at least the Shi’a and Iraq’s minority ethnic and religious communities.

Another factor working in favor of the Kurds was the enhanced international humanitarian awareness of their plight. The poignant flight of some one million Kurds after the Intifada dramatized the Kurdish cause and won it international attention and recognition. The immediate outcome was the installation of an effective “no-fly” zone in the north (in contrast to the ineffective one in the south)—an internationally enforced measure that made possible the emergence and survival of Kurdish autonomy. Since it already enjoyed autonomy, the Kurdistan Regional Government has raised the political stakes in post-Saddam negotiations, moving from an insistence on autonomy to demanding federation with the rest of Iraq. The Kurds had declared this to be their goal already in 1992, after long deliberations between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), led by Masoud Barzani, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), led by Jalal Talabani. A resolution in early October 1992 by the Kurdistan National Assembly stated a unanimous commitment “to determine its fate and define its legal relationship with the central authority at this stage of history on the basis of a federation (*al-ittihad al-fidirali*) within a democratic parliamentary Iraq” (“Voice of the People of Kurdistan,” 5 October 1992, *Daily Report*, 7 October). This formula was a compromise between Talabani’s camp, who since 1988 had called for independence, and the more moderate and perhaps more realistic camp of Barzani, who had opted for autonomy. (This characterization of the two parties does not apply to their respective KRGs, however; in the KDP-controlled areas only the Kurdish flag flies, whereas in PUK-controlled areas both the Iraqi and Kurdish flags fly.)

On the whole, the Kurds of Iraq have been cautious in the past in not voicing the goal of independence so as not to over-antagonize the central government or their potential supporters in the surrounding states. But they have insisted on their inherent right to self-determination, and many decision-makers in Ankara, Damascus, and Tehran assume that the Kurds are acting to establish an independent Kurdish state.

Another interesting development was that the Kurds of Iraq were allowed para-diplomatic representation in Turkey, Iran, France, Britain, and most importantly the United States—at a time when Baghdad itself had no ambassador or other representative in Washington. This was a far cry from the days when Washington concealed its contacts with the Kurds under a blanket of secrecy. (When the legendary Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani came to Washington for treatment of his fatal cancer in 1979, he was treated under total anonymity; see Korn 1994.) There were three main reasons for the change: there was a compelling need to work with the KRG; to keep the pressure on Baghdad through the Kurds; and to prevent the possibility that any one outside player would have too much influence at the expense of another. It is true that the Kurdish representatives abroad have lacked formal diplomatic status. Nevertheless, they have managed to advance the Kurdish cause in key capitals, have had some influence on decision-making, and may ultimately leave some enduring impact on the future status of the Kurds.

The Kurds' Achilles Heel

The picture, however, has had its darker side. Worst of all is the fact that the Kurdish national movement still lacks full-scale cohesiveness, and tribal and sectional interests at times overshadow national ones (van Bruinessen 2003). The prime example is the war between the KDP and the PUK, which raged for more than two years between May 1994 until October 1996 and required American mediation. The causes for the fighting were manifold, including historical enmity between the parties' leaders dating from the time when the KDP was headed by Mustafa Barzani, Masoud Barzani's father; local land disputes; rivalries over oil revenues, which were controlled by the KDP (through whose territories the transactions were made with Turkey); and dissatisfaction of both parties over the power-sharing formula in the parliament and cabinet established in 1992.

The fighting broke all records in its intensity and folly and nearly proved the merits of Saddam's gamble. The KDP called the Iraqi army to its help in August 1996—the same army that had been responsible for the Anfal cam-

paign eight years earlier. The PUK called for the U.S. to help them, which did nothing to prevent the return of the Erbil governorate to the KDP. The fighting resulted in a high number of Kurdish casualties (an exaggerated claim of 15,000 PUK losses is cited by the *Daily Report*, 3 September 1996; a credible source, the *International Herald Tribune*, 4 September 1996, talked of 1,000–2,000 dead). The KRG region was divided into two rival entities: the KDP governed “Barzanistan” (with its yellow flag), while the PUK governed “Tala-banistan” (with its green flag). Kurdistan had two executive jurisdictions, two premiers, two cabinets, and two armies (*peshmerga*). The unique window of opportunity for a unified autonomous region seemed to have been lost because of the Kurds themselves, not because of any external force.

Since 1997, the fighting has stopped, and the trend is toward reconciliation and even cooperation. Notably, both parties participated in the opening of the national assembly in October 2002. One might even argue that the rivalry between the two major Kurdish groups—the KDP and the PUK—has enabled the development of a more democratic and pluralistic system than in Baghdad, which has been dominated by one party for more than three decades. However, the achievement of peace between the two groups required the mediation of the United States, Britain, Turkey, Iran, and some Arab countries, giving all these countries additional leverage over the Kurds. Their unity in the future constitutional negotiations over the future of Iraq will be a prerequisite of their success.

The withdrawal of the Iraqi central government from Kurdistan, the establishment of the vulnerable KRG, and the more open and liberal atmosphere that has prevailed in the Kurdish autonomous region have allowed the entry of new political forces that may be a harbinger of helpful pluralism, but may also hamper Kurdish unity. These elements include the Turkish Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK); various radical Islamist groups, Turkomen groups and parties; and other smaller groups—all vying for influence. Clashes between the KDP and the PKK erupted in 1992, shortly after the establishment of the KRG, and went on intermittently for the greater part of the 1990s. The KDP established working relations with Ankara, which needed the KDP for Turkey’s fight with the PKK, which attempted to establish new bases inside Iraq. The PUK, initially a conditional tacit ally of the PKK, moved against it at the end of the 1990s, mainly with a view to improving its relations with Turkey. Kurdish Islamist groups in Iraq, for their part, began clashing with the PUK as early as 1993. Similarly, tensions and latent struggles for power exist between the Kurds and the Turkomen in Iraq. The Turkomen are supported or even instigated by Turkey, which has made them a lever for containing the ambition of

the Kurds of Iraq. Turkey has inflated the number of Turkomen in Iraq, estimating this population at two-and-a-half million, or about 10 percent of Iraq's population. In reality, they number no more than 500,000. In the Iraqi census of 1932 they comprised 2 percent of the population, a figure similar to that given by later authorities (Baer 1960, 105; Batatu 1978, 40; Dann 1969, 2). This mushrooming of rival groups and interests may be problematic for self-rule in Kurdistan: it will be essential for the KRG to be seen to manage the Turkomen reasonably.

Geopolitical constraints are another stumbling block. There is nothing new about this phenomenon; what is new is the redistribution of the relative weights of the regional players. From the 1960s to the 1990s, Iran was the key external regional actor. But, since the early 1990s, Turkey has replaced Iran. Turkey's attitude toward the Kurds of Iraq is thoroughly ambivalent. It has held the key to the survival and even the flourishing of Kurdish autonomy, but it is now formally fiercely opposed to the Kurds' plans for federation. In many ways Ankara has become as important a player as Baghdad itself, and its interests and goals in the region are in constant flux. Looming over Kurdish plans for federation (or even continued autonomy) is Turkey's obsessive fears about its own territorial integrity—a fear that may lead to Turkish military involvement in Iraq in an attempt to control Kurdistan. This time, however, Turkey has a potential veto over its entrance into the European Union standing over its performance with respect to the Kurds of Turkey.

The Kurds' other point of weakness is that they are not considered a strategic asset by the United States or Britain. True, the Kurds played an important role in weakening the Ba'ath regime and an even more important one in ousting Saddam from power. However, this role might be a transient one, and the fact that the United States has refrained from publicly supporting the planned federation is ample evidence of the limits of Kurdistan as an asset in American eyes. It is perhaps to redress this weakness that the Kurds are now raising the stakes by demanding the inclusion of oil-rich Kirkuk, which they claim as one of their historic and sacred cities. But, even the basic demographic facts are disputed (according to one source, in 1949 the Kurds formed only 25 percent of the city's population; see Edmonds 1957, 435). Kirkuk was subjected to coercive "Arabization" by the Ba'ath regime and excluded from the Kurdistan region. Kurdistan's claim to Kirkuk is a strategic one. After all, oil has been the main incentive for U.S. support for other small states in the Gulf region. The Kurds' hope is driven both by national affinity and geopolitical realism: if they manage to control an important oil-producing region, they will gain the strategic importance they have always lacked.

Whither Kurdistan?

Overall, the balance sheet of Kurdish autonomy in Iraq has been a positive one. The autonomy of the KRG region has survived longer and been more meaningful than any other Kurdish autonomous experiment in recent history. Indeed, it has become a possible model for Iraq as a whole—and Iraq, in the minds of some, is destined to become a model for the Arab world. But the Kurds' situation now is more paradoxical than ever. First paradox: only if the Kurds are united can they face internal and external challenges, but it is exactly the possibility of such unity that frightens the surrounding states and invites their intervention. Second paradox: to mobilize the Kurdish population, the leadership has to set clear-cut goals, but once such a goal is declared—as was the case with the federation—it immediately unites the Kurds' enemies against them. Third paradox: The Kurds need the U.S. to guarantee their autonomy, but this dependence on a superpower might turn them back into a disposable card in the game of great and regional powers. The latest war between the American and British coalition and Iraq provided another window of opportunity for the Kurds of Iraq, but its aftermath might result in disillusionment. The role that the Kurds have played in this war was unique in many respects. For the first time in the modern history of Iraq, Kurds fought side by side with a non-Muslim superpower. The Kurds' contribution was not secret, but made in broad daylight. Nor was it trifling support: sometimes the Kurds played the main role in the fighting while the Americans only provided air cover or intelligence support. In this war the Kurds forsook their habitual mode of fighting in their mountainous strongholds and moved to fight in the plain and to liberate the two major cities of Mosul and Kirkuk. Their role was crucial for the American war effort, because without their help the Americans could not have opened the northern front simultaneously with the southern one (given Turkey's last-minute decision not to allow the passage of American troops through its territory). Because the war had started before the U.S. could move troops to the north, the Kurdish *peshmerga*, who had the necessary intelligence about and experience in fighting against the Iraqi army, carried out the burden of the fighting on the ground on the northern front. The PUK and, to a certain extent, the KDP have proved their usefulness to the Americans by fighting their common enemy, the Islamist radical Kurdish group Ansar al-Islam, which was believed to have ties with al-Qaida. The Kurdish role was underlined because other Iraqi opposition groups, such as the Iraqi National Congress (INC), or the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SAIRI), which the U.S. and Britain had contacted before the war, were not asked or allowed to participate in the actual fighting.

What are the repercussions of the Kurds' stance during the war for their future? On the positive side, they have proved to the Americans that they are skilled and loyal fighters, a factor magnified in importance by Turkey's passive or neutral role. Although the American stance toward the Kurds of Iraq has always been dictated by their consideration for Turkish sensitivities on this issue, it seems less likely that this time they will grant a prize to Turkey by altogether forsaking their new-old Kurdish allies. The Kurds' traditional role as a balance to the central government is likely to be reinforced, at least during the transitional period. Kurdish members have played key roles on the Iraqi Governing Council under the Coalition Provisional Authority. The Kurds' military achievements and capacity on the ground may also translate into assets when reshaping the Iraqi state. The fact that they have enjoyed self-rule for a decade has relieved the Americans of the burden of setting up an administration in that region. Most important of all, their case for demanding the formation of a federal or confederal state has been strengthened significantly.

But this fluid situation is also fraught with dangers. One possible negative result is that the estrangement between the Arab population and the Kurds might grow stronger, precisely because the Kurds are regarded, especially by Sunni Arabs, as having betrayed the state by collaborating with the enemy. This difference may cause collision rather than reconciliation between the parties. In early April 2003, the *peshmergas'* entrance into Kirkuk and Mosul was accompanied by severe looting and street fighting between Arabs and Kurds (reminiscent of the inter-communal fighting in the cities under 'Abd al-Karim Qassim; see Dann 1969, 172–77, 223–24). Another negative result might be that the surrounding states with Kurdish minorities—Turkey, Syria, and Iran—join forces to frustrate the Kurdish enterprise. Turkey, which for a decade was a lifeline for the KRG, might decide to stop this policy and blockade its borders; there are already signs of reduced cooperation on the borders. In such circumstances, will the U.S. forfeit its strategic alliance with Turkey for the sake of its more recent tactical alliance with the Kurds? Will it fight another war to guarantee federal status for the Kurds of Iraq?

In 1924, when the fate of the former Ottoman *wilayet* of Mosul had not yet been decided, King Faisal I, the monarch installed by the British in Baghdad, said this about the province, which was populated by a Kurdish majority: "I consider it impossible . . . both strategically and economically for a government in Baghdad to live if Mosul is detached . . . Mosul is to Iraq as is the head to the rest of the body" (Edmonds 1957, 398, citing League of Nations, "Questions of the Frontier Between Turkey and Iraq," Commission of Inquiry Report, 16 July 1925, 7). In the final analysis, it was Britain that decided among the three alternatives of granting autonomy to Kurdistan, ceding the region to

Turkey, or incorporating it into Iraq. Britain, with its vested interests in this oil-rich region, annexed it to Iraq. Seventy-five years later, Saddam Hussein reverted to the same image of Mosul as the head for Iraq in his ghostwritten novel, *al-Qal'a al-Hasina* (*The Fortified Fortress*) (Saddam 2001). In the novel, Mosul and Kurdistan are the center of the plot, as is the Kurdish heroine Shatrin. The illustration on the front page is that of a woman's head fused with a mountain, the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, and missiles. Whether Saddam was aware specifically of Faisal's simile or not, he was certainly aware of the region's importance and the great similarities between the two periods. In both eras, the vacuum that existed in the region after a war allowed the Kurds to carve out a certain autonomy for themselves. In both cases, Iraq and Turkey were the main forces vying for influence in the area, and in both, an outside power became the main arbiter of the fate of the Kurds. At the end of Saddam's novel, the "ideological" love between the Kurdish woman, Shatrin, and the Ba'athist hero, Sabah, reaches a testing point. Shatrin, who is about to marry Sabah, suggests that the fortress they are about to inhabit be divided into three parts for the sake of promoting "privacy," "democracy," and "independence." One part will be reserved for Sabah's mother, another for Sabah's brother and his wife, and the last for the prospective newlyweds. The idea shocks everybody, but only Sabah's mother Salha is courageous enough to come out against it outright, saying that the fortress should remain united. He who thinks otherwise, she says, "should stand at the doors of the foreigners . . . who will throw him a bone or throw him into the sea" (Saddam 2001, 702–12).

As in the novel, the Kurds of Iraq are now at a crossroads. Once again they stand to be betrothed, by the wishes of others, to the Iraqi state. What sort of fortress will they inhabit? Much of the answer will depend upon regional and international players, especially the United States and Turkey. But it will depend even more upon the Kurds. If they manage to overcome their own problems and act in a cohesive, wise, and prudent manner, they should be able to prevent the return to the catastrophic status of the Ba'ath years. The years of autonomous rule are a *fait accompli*, difficult for the world to disregard.

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