

Iraqi Kurds: Hour of Power?

by Ofra Bengio

Since the end of the Iraq war, and for the first time in Iraqi modern history, Kurdish leaders have left their strongholds in Kurdistan and moved to Baghdad to establish a presence there. The two most influential leaders, Mas'ud Barzani and Jalal Talabani, took advantage of the political vacuum that followed the war and occupied buildings in Baghdad, turning them into "headquarters." Uncertainties vastly outnumber certainties in the stages to come. But one thing does seem sure: these Kurdish leaders will play a major role in the dialogue between the Americans and the other political forces, as well as in the establishment of the interim government. This could be the Kurdish hour of power.

With the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, Iraq's Kurds stand on the brink of a new era. Since 1991, they have enjoyed autonomy in northern Iraq. If a federated government is now established, they will not only continue to enjoy their autonomy, but they could well take a major share of the central government in Baghdad.

Yet, looming over the Kurds is the possibility that postwar politics and diplomacy could set them back. The United States could shift its favors to other Iraqis; the Kurds could divide against themselves; or Turkey could intervene to prevent Kurdish aggrandizement. Any assessment of what is likely must begin with an analysis of the past.

THE KURDISH SETTING

The Kurds represent a case of partial and belated nation-formation. The Kurds, living in remote mountains, with their own distinct lan-

guages and customs, have always been divided. What is sometimes called Kurdistan, stretching across northern Iraq, eastern Syria, southeastern Turkey, and northwestern Iran, is really a patchwork of tribes, ethnicities, and languages, reminiscent in many ways of the Caucasus.

The closest the Kurds came to a national center was in the Ottoman vilayet (province) of Mosul, where Kurds formed a majority, and which the British conquered and occupied in 1918. But in the peace settlements that followed World War I, the Kurds did not win adequate

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The deal fell through. Mullah Mustafa Barzani (left) and Saddam Hussein (in suit), in a meeting to negotiate the March 1970 autonomy agreement.

international recognition as a nation worthy of its own independence. Instead, the Mosul vilayet became a bone of contention between British-controlled Iraq and independent Turkey, primarily on account of its oil. Between 1918 and 1925, the Kurds enjoyed a brief autonomy while the powers struggled over their future. But in 1925, Britain put all its weight behind Iraq's annexation of Mosul vilayet. The inclusion of Mosul vilayet in Iraq left Turkey with lingering feelings of historical injustice and shattered the Kurdish dream of autonomy.

The Arab nationalist regime installed by Britain in Baghdad regarded the inclusion of Mosul vilayet in Iraq's borders as an imperative. In 1924 King Faisal I, the British-designated monarch of Iraq, said, "I consider it impossible ... both strategically and economically for a government in Baghdad to live if Mosul is detached."¹ "Mosul is to Iraq as is

the head to the rest of the body."² But even in this statement, Faisal made it clear that Mosul vilayet was important to Iraq firstly for its oil and location, and only secondarily, for its people. The Kurds among them, as non-Arabic speakers, were often a burden to Baghdad, and a community that the central government sought to keep in a state of submission.

But the Kurds were not always prepared to submit. Tribal unrest simmered through the 1920s and 1930s. During World War II, nationalist Kurds under the leadership of the charismatic Mullah Mustafa Barzani rose up against the central government in Baghdad and cooperated with the short-lived, Soviet-backed Kurdish Republic of Mahabad in neighboring Iran where Barzani held the title of field marshal. On the collapse of the Republic of Mahabad at the end of 1946, the Iraqi army suppressed the Kurdish uprising, and Barzani sought refuge in the Soviet Union with some 400 of his supporters. The cause of Kurdish nationalism was eclipsed.

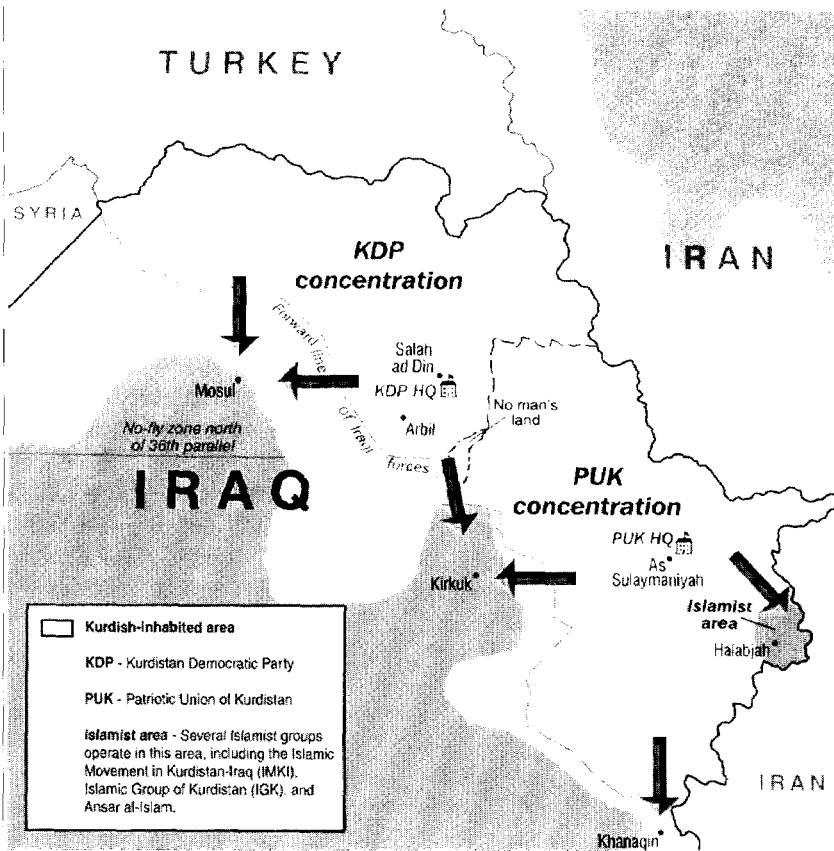
This forced exile lasted until the 1958 coup of 'Abd al-Karim Qasim, who summoned Barzani and his followers back to Iraq with the goal of achieving national reconciliation. But this honeymoon ended in 1961 when the Kurds initiated a new round of insurrections that continued until the fall of Qasim in 1963 and from then on intermittently until 1970.

The 1960s decade of Kurdish insurrection brought about surprising results. In 1970, the Baath regime, at the initiative of its strong man, Saddam Hussein, agreed to autonomy for the Kurds for the first time in Iraq's history. The government recognized the existence of a Kurdish nation, as one of two nations constituting Iraq. A Kurdish region was to be formed in the north; Kurds were to enjoy proportional representation in parliament; and there was to be a Kurdish vice president.³

1 League of Nations, "Question of the Frontier between Turkey and Iraq," Commission of Inquiry Report, July 16, 1925, p. 7. (Thanks to Fred Wehrey for this reference.)

2 Quoted by C.J. Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 398.

3 For this short-lived autonomy, see Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurds of Iraq* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), pp. 14-9.



Northern front. Map shows the disposition of the two major Kurdish parties on the eve of the war and their major military moves during the conflict. The Islamist enclave fell to PUK and U.S. forces in a campaign that culminated on March 29, 2003. Khanaqin was liberated by the PUK on April 10, and both the PUK and the KDP liberated Kirkuk the same day. KDP forces liberated Mosul on April 11.

But the agreement turned out to be a tactical maneuver, aimed at gaining time for the government. The autonomy was never fully implemented, and in 1974 the Kurds took up arms yet again. This time, Iran offered support to the Kurdish uprising, which lasted for a year until the shah of Iran abruptly reached an agreement with Saddam over disputed borders. Iran then withdrew its support, the rebellion collapsed, and Mustafa Barzani fled into exile again, this time never to return. Many Kurds fled into Iran and

other countries. The experiment in autonomy ended in catastrophe.

There was yet greater catastrophe to come as Iraq and Iran waged a bitter war between 1980 and 1988. The Kurds were drawn willy-nilly into the war, and some of them sided with Iran against Baghdad. The regime exacted a cruel price in return when it launched the infamous Anfal campaign against them in the summer of 1988. Iraqi forces used chemical weapons against the Kurdish town of Halabja and other places, de-

stroyed hundreds of Kurdish villages, and killed 50,000 people. Many thousands more became refugees.⁴

The Kurds had not recovered from this blow when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, followed by the U.S.-led coalition's defeat of Iraqi forces in Kuwait in the winter of 1991. In response, the Kurds (and also the Shi'ites) rose in rebellion against the central government. Once again, however, the Kurdish population paid a heavy price: the Iraqi army drove perhaps a million Kurds to the Turkish and Iranian borders.

Yet unlike previous disasters that had befallen the Kurds, this one had positive consequences, being "on America's watch." In the past, the

Kurds had often relied for support on Iran, which gave it and withdrew it in ways that left the Kurds even more vulnerable. But in 1991, the United States embarked on a sustained effort to wear down and remove the Baath regime. As part of the U.S. effort, it established a safety zone in northern Iraq, compelled the pullout of the Iraqi army, and encouraged the formation of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG).

When Saddam decided to withdraw the Iraqi army from Iraqi Kurdistan at the end of 1991, he thought it would be only a temporary departure, for two reasons.⁵ First, he believed that the Kurds would not be able to function without the central government and so would rush quickly back into his arms. Second, he thought that the world would grow indifferent to the fate of the Kurds, as had been the case after the chemical attacks

against them in 1988. Saddam thus expected to return to Iraqi Kurdistan at the invitation of the Kurds themselves.

He was wrong. As a result of Saddam's own actions, the Kurds won something that had eluded them throughout their history: international awareness and recognition. Admittedly, it came at a cost. The United States and international human rights groups gave the Kurds their sympathy only after witnessing the genocide in Halabja and the poignant flight of perhaps a million Kurds after the 1991 *intifada*. But these catastrophes effectively internationalized the Kurdish cause and made it a magnet for enlightened world sympathy. The concrete result was the U.S. creation of an effective no-fly zone in the north (in contrast to the ineffective one in the south) — an internationally enforced barrier behind which the Kurds were free to chart their own course.

During the 1990s, then, the Kurds enjoyed and maintained effective autonomy for the first time in this century. What did they make of it?

KURDISH ACHIEVEMENTS

For the Kurds of Iraq, the last decade has been their longest period of autonomy in the twentieth century. The informal autonomy that prevailed after World War I lasted for some seven years, and the truncated autonomy of the 1970s lasted only four years. There is hardly room for a comparison between the 1990s and those past instances. The early 1920s contributed very little to Kurdish identity or to the creation of autonomous socioeconomic and political infrastructures. The autonomy of the 1970-4 period, negotiated with the central government, was partial and too short to leave any trace. Also, during that short interregnum, the Kurdish autonomous authority was in constant conflict with the Baath. No less important, the Kurds' previous experiences of autonomy did not evolve under an international umbrella. To the contrary, in the 1920s, Britain used its air force to subdue the Kurds and defend the central government against them.⁶

The most important achievement of the last decade has been the forging of a stronger Kurdish identity.

4 Middle East Watch, *Genocide in Iraq: The Anfal Campaign against the Kurds* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1993), p. 13.

5 *Ath-Thawra* (Baghdad), Mar. 12, 1992.

During the exceptional decade of the 1990s, the most important achievement has been the forging of a stronger Kurdish identity. This has been made possible through a combination of Kurdish maturity, born of bitter experience; vital support from the outside world; and the complete disappearance of the Iraqi central government from Kurdistan. Growing Kurdish self-identity has taken many real and symbolic forms. First, there has been the development and usage of the Kurdish language in the public sphere, including schools, universities, the administration, and the media. Second, there has been widespread use of national symbols, such as Kurdish flags (alongside or instead of the Iraqi flags), a Kurdish hymn, and even public statuary of Kurdish heroes such as Mustafa Barzani. (The Kurds even experimented for a while with a new calendar, with the year 2001 paralleled to the year 2700 of the Kurdish calendar).

Another important boost for Kurdish identity and self-rule has been the development of the socioeconomic infrastructure. Under Baghdad's control, the region's infrastructure had been entirely dependent on the central government, and much of it was later destroyed in war. The fact that the Kurds have managed to build this infrastructure almost from scratch, albeit with outside support, speaks well of their aptitude for self-government.

Last, but not least, the Kurdish region created a political framework that functioned independently of the Baath regime. This framework has included the management of local government in different parts of Kurdistan by Kurdish officials, the open and free activities of Kurdish political parties, and the institutionalization of a Kurdish parliament, whose delegates were chosen in the more-or-less free elections of May



Ladies first. *Women peshmerga fighters roll into Kirkuk, April 10, 2003.*

1992.⁷ These elements have come together to constitute a kind of Kurdish government. This authority, notwithstanding its many mistakes and weaknesses, has given the Kurds the sense that they are masters of their fate for the first time since the establishment of Iraq. And in fact, a new political language has emerged, referring to these institutions in the terminology of statehood: Kurds speak of the "government of Kurdistan," the president, the cabinet, etc.

This "government" also came to enjoy a remarkable degree of de facto recognition for the first time in history. Before the 1990s, no Western government openly accepted Kurdish delegations from Iraq. The Iraqi government was far too influential, and it used that influence to block Western-Kurdish contacts. Such contacts, when they existed, took place under cloaks of secrecy. For example, when Mullah Mustafa Barzani came to Washington for treatment of his fatal cancer in 1979, he was treated under total anonymity.⁸

But over the last decade, Iraq's Kurds have had quasi-official representation in Turkey, Iran, France, Britain, and most importantly, the United States — this, at a time when Baghdad itself had

7. Agence France Presse, May 22, 1992; *Le Monde*, May 24, 25, 1992.

8. David Korn, "The Last Years of Mustafa Barzani," *Middle East Quarterly*, June 1994, pp. 13-27.

6. Stephen H. Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900 to 1950* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1968), pp. 144, 146, 152, 194.

no ambassador or other representative in Washington. It is true that the Kurdish representatives abroad lacked formal diplomatic status. Nevertheless, they managed to advance the Kurdish cause in key capitals and influenced major policy decisions before and during the most recent war. The fact that so many world capitals welcomed Kurdish delegations reflected the centrality of the Kurds in the long-term struggle to remove Saddam: Kurdish good will was crucial to keeping the pressure on Baghdad from the north. The Kurds succeeded in translating their geopolitical centrality into an unprecedented degree of international recognition.

KURDISH WEAKNESSES

The last decade also has had its share of crises. The Kurdish national movement has always suffered from a lack of cohesiveness; tribal and sectional interests at times overshadow national ones. The fault line of Kurdish politics runs between Mas'ud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Jalal Talabani's Patriotic

Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The KDP tends toward a conservative nationalism, whereas the PUK once drew upon Marxist ideas of liberation struggle. The KDP is strong in the north of Iraqi Kurdistan; the PUK is strong in the south. Different forms of Kurdish are spoken in northern and southern

Iraqi Kurdistan. The KDP and the PUK also had different foreign alliances, the KDP relying on Turkey, the PUK seeking support from Iran and Syria.

Long historical enmities between the two groups came to a head over sharing power in the new parliament and cabinet and in disagreements over oil revenues. The latent power struggle erupted in May 1994 when fighting broke out between the two factions. It lasted until October

1996. The fighting resulted in a high number of Kurdish casualties.⁹ In August 1996, the KDP called for help from the Iraqi army—the same army that was responsible for the Anfal campaign eight years earlier—while the PUK looked for support from the United States. The autonomous region became divided into two rival zones, informally known as “Barzanistan” and “Talabanistan.” There were two administrative units, two cabinets, two paramilitary organizations (the *peshmergas*), and two flags. The opportunity for a unified autonomous region seemed to have been lost, this time because of Kurdish infighting.

Restoring peace between the two groups required the mediation of the United States, Britain, Turkey, Iran, and several Arab countries. The trend since then has been toward reconciliation and even cooperation, and both parties participated in the opening of the legislative council in October 2002. Some might even argue that the rivalry between the KDP and the PUK has enabled the development of a nascent democratic and pluralistic system, as opposed to the one-party model of the Baath. But the two groups are militias as much as they are parties, and their differences, ostensibly over politics, have an element of blood feud.

The freewheeling atmosphere that has prevailed in the Kurdish autonomous region has also allowed the rise of new political forces that could hamper Kurdish unity in the future. These elements include the Turkey-based Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), various radical Islamist groups, Turkmen factions, and other smaller groupings.

The PKK poses a special problem, given that its activities could provoke Turkish intervention. Clashes between the KDP and the PKK erupted in 1992, shortly after the establishment of the regional

9 The PUK claimed that in that summer alone, 15,000 PUK members lost their lives; *L'Unità*, Sept. 3, 1996. This figure seems to be highly exaggerated. Another source quoted eyewitnesses who spoke about 1,000-2,000 dead in Irbil; *International Herald Tribune*, Sept. 4, 1996.

If the past decade has a lesson for the Kurds, it is the paramount importance of close coordination with the U.S.

government, and continued intermittently for the greater part of the 1990s. These clashes helped the KDP to establish a working relationship with Ankara, which looked to the KDP to prevent the PKK from establishing bases in Iraq. The PUK, which was initially sympathetic to the PKK, also moved against it towards the end of the 1990s, mainly with a view to improving its relations with Turkey.

Iraqi Kurdish Islamist groups are a new development, and one of particular concern to the United States, which fears that they might prove to be a channel for al-Qa'ida infiltration into Iraq. The radical group Ansar al-Islam, which operates from PUK-controlled territory, has been the main threat. Since 1993, Ansar al-Islam and the PUK have waged a war of attrition. Similar tension and latent power struggles developed between the Kurds and the Iraqi Turkmen. The latter were supported or even instigated by Turkey.¹⁰

Needless to say, this mushrooming of rival groups and interests invites outside intervention and threatens Kurdish self-rule.

So the experience of Kurdish autonomy has not been without its crises and problems. But overall, the balance sheet has been a positive one. Indeed, the Kurdish autonomous experiment 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.



Friends in need. *A Kurdish man welcomes an American soldier with a kiss, As-Sulaymaniya, April 9, 2003.*

KURDS AT CROSSROADS

With the removal of Saddam Hussein, the Kurds have an opportunity to build on the achievements of the past decade. But the war's aftermath could also turn into another disappointment.

In the war itself, the Kurds played a unique and important role. It was the first time in the modern history of Iraq that they fought alongside a non-Muslim power, and for a purpose beyond their own autonomy. Moreover, the Kurds made their contribution not in secret but in broad daylight. And it was not a trifling contribution, either. Without Kurdish help, the United States could not have opened a northern front simultaneously with the coalition's opening of the southern front. Because of Turkey's last-minute decision not to allow the passage of U.S. troops through its territory, the coalition had to launch the war without troops in Iraq's north. This put the burden of the ground fighting on the Kurdish *peshmergas*. In most cases, Kurds played the major role in the battles while the United States provided air support and intelli-

¹⁰ The number of Turkmen is inflated by Turkey, which claims 2,500,000. In reality they number about 500,000. In 1947, the Turks represented 2 percent of the Iraqi population. Hanna Batatu. *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 40.



Another one down. Joyous Kurds prepare to topple Saddam's statue in Kirkuk, April 10, 2003.

gence. The Kurds also departed from their habitual mode of fighting close to their strongholds in the mountains. They moved into the plain and occupied the two major northern cities of Mosul and Kirkuk.

The PUK (and to a certain extent also the KDP) have proven their usefulness to Washington in another way as well, namely by fighting their common enemy, the Islamist Kurdish group Ansar al-Islam, which the United States believes to have ties with al-Qa'ida and maybe even the Baath. In battles that followed the main war against Iraqi forces, U.S. forces and PUK *peshmergas* launched a combined air-and-ground assault to eject Ansar al-Islam from their village bases.

Indeed, the uniqueness of the Kurdish role lies precisely in the fact that Kurds fought. The United States and Britain did not invite other Iraqi opposition groups to do so. Thus, the Iraqi National Congress (INC) and the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SAIRI), which Washington and London also contacted before the war, were not given any actual fighting missions.

The Kurdish performance during the war is an important Kurdish asset vis-à-vis Turkey. Kurds proved to Washington their mettle and their loyalty, two characteristics magnified by Turkey's policy, which left the United States in the lurch. The U.S. stance toward the Kurds of

Iraq has always been influenced by consideration for Turkish sensitivities. But given the wartime record of the Kurds as compared to Turkey, it now seems very unlikely that the United States would forsake the Kurds to satisfy Ankara.

Still the Kurds' situation now is more paradoxical than ever. First: only if the Kurds are united can they face internal and external challenges, but it is exactly

this unity that frightens the surrounding countries and provokes their intervention. Second: in order to mobilize the Kurdish population, the leadership has to set clear-cut goals, but once such goals are declared, the situation immediately unites the Kurds' enemies against them.

The way around these paradoxes has been Kurdish adherence to the idea of a democratic and unified Iraq. Only if they unite for that purpose can the Kurds defuse the fears of their enemies and find necessary allies in Iraq and abroad. The Kurds have accepted this idea, with the caveat that Iraq should become a federal state. The Kurds raised this goal as early as October 1992, after long deliberations between the KDP and the PUK. At that time, the Kurdistan National Assembly stated the unanimous commitment of Iraqi Kurdistan "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-fidrali*) within a democratic parliamentary Iraq."¹¹ The Kurds, having enjoyed effective and autonomous self-government for a decade, are not willing to give it up. And because Kurdish independence is not fea-

¹¹ Voice of the People of Kurdistan Radio, Oct. 5, 1992.

sible, they would like a self-governing unit within an Iraqi federation.

The problem is that a federation requires two or more units, and Iraq at present has only the embryo of one, in the form of the Kurdish Regional Government. The north is the only part of Iraq that does not require U.S. or British military administration. Elsewhere, an immense amount of political reconstruction is required to create the other constituent units of a federation. Nor is it clear what would be the guiding principle behind the formation of such units. Turkey actively opposes federation, for fear that northern Iraq would become a Kurdish state to all intents and purposes. For these and other reasons, the United States has refrained from supporting the idea of federation.

The danger now facing the Kurds is the one that has led to their defeat more than once in the past: the temptation to overplay their hand. For example, the Kurds have raised the stakes by demanding the inclusion of oil-rich Kirkuk in the Kurdish-governed areas.¹² It is not only the oil that the Kurds value. They assume that since the removal of Saddam, the strategic value of northern Iraq to the United States has diminished. Since oil has been the main incentive behind U.S. support for other small states in the gulf region, the Kurds hope to lay their hands on an important oil-producing region. But looting followed the entrance of the *peshmergas* in early April to Kirkuk, and street fighting between Arab tribes and Kurds has plagued the city. So far, U.S. forces have contained the clashes. But a major Kurdish-Arab or Kurdish-Turkmen conflagration, or expulsions of Arabs in the name of restoring lands and homes to dispossessed Kurds, could undercut the Kurdish demand for federation. By setting off a flood of Arab refugees toward Baghdad, or Turkmen to the Turkish border, the Kurds could quickly lose the sympathy they have acquired over the last decade.

That in turn would serve as an invitation to the surrounding countries with Kurdish minorities—Turkey, Syria, and Iran—to join forces to frustrate the Kurdish enterprise in Iraq. Turkey, which has been a lifeline for the Kurdish autonomy for a decade, might decide to cut that line. In such circumstances, would the United States endanger its strategic alliance with Turkey for the sake of its tactical one with the Kurds? Would it fight another war on behalf of a federation that only the Kurds desire? If there is a lesson the Kurds must learn from the past decade, it is the paramount importance of close coordination with the United States. Were the Kurds to act outside Washington's framework, they would make themselves vulnerable once again.

Despite the removal of Saddam, the Kurds still have immense value to the United States as a counterweight to the Shi'ites of the south. In 1924, when King Faisal I insisted on including Mosul vilayet within the borders of the Iraqi state, one of his objectives was to balance the Shi'ite south. In the new realities of postwar Iraq with the emergence of strong Shi'ite Islamism, coupled with sentiments of anti-Americanism—the U.S. might revert to the Kurds in the fine balancing game between Iraq's different communities. Until Iraq is reconstituted on a new basis, the Kurds are the best buffer against the demands of some Shi'ites for an Islamic state, which could easily combine anti-Americanism and despotism. As Jalal Talabani has said, "The psychological state of the Iraqi people will not accept replacing Sunni rule with Shi'ite rule—which is in effect what having Islamists in power would mean."¹³ If the

Would the U.S. fight another war on behalf of a federation that only the Kurds desire?

12. *Christian Science Monitor*, Mar. 14, 2003.

13. Interview with Jalal Talabani, "No Grounds for Relations with Baghdad," *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2002, p. 20.

Kurds are wise, they can parley this American dependence on them into a share of the central government itself when it is reconstituted.

The Kurds, after a decade of separation from the Iraqi state, are about to join it once more. What sort of relationship will they forge with it? Much of the answer will depend upon regional and international players, especially the United States. But it will depend even more upon the Kurds themselves. If the Kurds manage to act in a cohesive, wise, and prudent

manner, they stand a good chance of avoiding the kind of catastrophe that has always befallen them during or after wars. But they must remember that there is no such thing as a *fait accompli* in Iraq and that a sharp sense of geopolitics is the best guarantee of survival. The reward is within reach: a new order, in which the Kurds gain international and Iraqi recognition as masters of their own fate.

Iraqi Underground

KARADA, Iraq—It took just over a week for Jawad Amir Sayyid to mastermind his own disappearance from the world he had known for twenty-four years. He buried all his books in a flour sack in the ground, burnt his identity card and built a tunnel leading to the slimmest of cells beneath the family kitchen.

Jawad did not know it then, but the three-foot-wide and five-foot-high room that he entered on December 2, 1981, was to become his home for the next twenty-one years.

Jawad was a young soldier when he deserted from the army during the Iran-Iraq war. That alone was enough to see him hanged. But the economics scholar was also a follower of a leading Shi'ite Muslim theologian, and Saddam's secret agents were told that he had to be caught at all costs.

So with his mother, he hatched a plan to build the cell. His mother was to send him food through the trap door entrance and to talk of his whereabouts to no one except his four siblings.

By day he had access to a well three inches in diameter dug into the floor on the left and a book-sized toilet on the right. By night the floor became his bed, the sealed well his pillow, the toilet his footrest.

His only glimpse of sunlight in more than two decades came from a tiny hole in the top left-hand corner of the cell.

Aside from the Qur'an that accompanied him through hours of daily prayer, Jawad proudly shows off his headphones and radio, which is still tuned to the Arabic service of the BBC. The sign for which he had been looking for years came shortly after the September 11 attacks on the United States. "Mr. Bush gave a speech in which he said the terrorists of the world would be hunted down. The next time my mother brought me food I told her of my conviction that he would not last."

On April 9 this year, it was reported that Saddam had fallen. Jawad waited until the following day when he heard of U.S. troops helping to pull down a statue of the dictator in Baghdad before daring to leave his prison.

"I believe that Allah worked through Mr. Bush to make this happen," he says.

"If I met Mr. Bush, I would say 'thank you, thank you, you are a good human, you returned me from the dead.'"

The Daily Telegraph (London), May 21, 2003