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Institute for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, Durham University, 2002

# Identity, Nationalism and the State System: The Case of Iraqi Kurdistan

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Sophia I. Wanche, PhD Thesis, Durham University, 2002

## Abstract

This thesis looks at the internal and external dynamics of the politics of the self-ruling area of Iraqi Kurdistan, arguing that internal forces often carry equal, and sometimes greater weight than do external influences when it concerns Northern Iraq. Following a modern political history of Iraqi Kurdistan, which sets the context for the forthcoming analyses, the origins and development of the state system and its underlying key concepts are examined. The complex political phenomena of nation and nationalism are analysed and the latter classified as evaluations and classifications of Kurdish nationalism later follow. Whether or not the state system is a form of political organisation that is transitional in nature is highly relevant when anticipating the future of the Kurds. The view that globalisation could render the nation-state redundant is not endorsed, but the 'crisis of the state' clearly affects Kurdish aspirations towards statehood - issues that are accounted for when discussing the prospects for the establishment of a Kurdish state in the twenty-first century.

The impact of Iraqi Kurdish socio-political identity on the political development is furthermore subject to analysis. The 'class-divided' society of Kurdistan is considered, as is the major issue of tribalism, together with religion and language as political factors. These components provide the machinery of identity-building, and significantly account for the multiplicity of Kurdish identity, which impacts heavily on the political development. An understanding of these processes is essential when placing Iraqi Kurdistan in regional and international contexts. On the regional level, policies by the major regional powers in order to prevent the Kurds from asserting themselves are set in the context of the previous analyses, as are the policies of powerful international actors such as the European Union, the USA and the United Nations. Finally, the main themes are revisited and future prospects of the Kurds of Northern Iraq discussed, concluding that only a solution to the wider question of Iraq can end the uncertainty currently surrounding the future of Iraqi Kurdistan.

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## List of Abbreviations

ABSP	Arab Baath Socialist Party
AFP	Agence Presse France
AP	Associated Press
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSCE	Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe
CSCM	Conference on Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean
DN	Dagens Nyheter (a Swedish daily)
DT	The Daily Telegraph
EC	European Community
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Office
EPC	European Political Cooperation
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
FT	Financial Times
GP	Göteborgs Posten (a Swedish daily)
HABITAT	United Nations Centre for Human Settlements
IHT	International Herald Tribune
IMK	Islamic Movement of Kurdistan
INC	Iraqi National Congress
KDP	Democratic Party of Kurdistan
KDP-I	Democratic Party of Kurdistan - Iran
MEI	Middle East International
MIT	Turkish National Intelligence Organisation
MKO	Mojahedin-e Khalq Organisation
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OIC	Organisation of the Islamic Conference
PKK	Partia Kakaren Kurdistan (Workers Party of Kurdistan)
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
SvD	Svenska Dagbladet (a Swedish daily)

UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WFP	World Food Program

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**PART A**  
The Historical-Political Context



## Introduction

In the turbulent aftermath of the Kuwait War in the early 1990s, an autonomous Kurdish entity was set up in Northern Iraq through the efforts of the international community. The internal and external dynamics of this self-ruling area and its political development is the heart of this study – a central issue on the political scene of the Middle East on which little has been written. The interaction of internal and external dynamics shaping developments in Iraqi Kurdistan is instrumental in understanding the complexities of Kurdish politics. This thesis will show that internal forces often carry equal, and sometimes greater, weight than do external influences when it concerns the political development of Northern Iraq.

The mode of thought driving this study suggests that the political development of Northern Iraq is propelled by an array of issues, such as class, tribalism, religion and language that all are or have become politicised. A broad aim with the study is to examine why Kurdish statehood (with the focus squarely on Iraqi Kurdistan) is likely to remain elusive, which is the underlying assumption. In order to satisfy that objective one needs to look at the numerous aspects of nationalism, the international state system and the nature of Kurdish nationalism: analyses, which in turn highlight the necessity of addressing and evaluating the impact of the socio-political identity on the political process. The main factors determining the multifaceted Kurdish identity are in turn influenced by forces external to Iraqi Kurdistan, whose behaviour are largely determined by geopolitical interests.

Such an approach poses research questions such as: What is the capacity, if any, of the long-standing international state system to accommodate into its structure a possible Kurdish state? What is the relation between class conflict and national interest in Iraqi Kurdistan and how does it relate to the tribal structure of Kurdish society? Have local and tribal loyalties been replaced by integrative nationalist feelings? Is religion a mobilising force in Iraqi Kurdish politics?

What is the effect on the political discourse in the area of self-rule of the absence of a universal Kurdish language? What impact does the multiplicity of Kurdish identity have on Iraqi Kurdish politics? Which role do internal forces play in determining external behaviour?

The mainstream of political thought does not offer any theories providing the scope for a fuller understanding of Kurdish society and politics, which prompts this thesis to argue for the need of a 'hybrid' and multilevel approach. This will be illustrated through an in-depth survey of the case of Iraqi Kurdistan, incorporating aspects of political anthropology and sociology into its politics/international relations framework. Such an approach will also involve building upon the works of many distinguished scholars; developing ideas into more concrete thoughts, and linking notions and concepts that may not previously have been brought together. The analytical framework encompasses diverse and ambiguous concepts such as nation, nation-state, socio-political identity, among others, with a view to offer an understanding of Kurdish internal dynamics before adding to the equation the influence of external factors. Conclusions will be drawn from past and current trends as well as from the author's own understanding of the intertwining of the concepts of identity, nationalism and the state system, for likely future scenarios.

Throughout the thesis new interpretations of existing data complement new sources of information, and relevant aspects of many different theoretical viewpoints will have been taken into account. As constituting the thesis' main theoretical framework, the discussion on nationalism incorporates work of many prominent scholars, but few theories have been wholly appropriate here, as the current topic in several respects challenges existing theories. Only a range of diverse and contrasting theories are deemed to constitute a good basis from which to examine and describe the specific circumstances characterising Northern Iraq. Such theory-building provides for a 'hybrid theory' to be generated through the process of research.

As already suggested, this subject matter necessitates research into several different disciplines of social science. In addition to the obvious political

scientists, views and theories of sociologists, historians and anthropologists are well represented. However important some of them may be, this study is anchored in the discipline of political science on which basis the research questions will be answered, but it contrasts with conventional approaches that are fixed firmly within a narrow disciplinary focus.

The sources utilised have been various and wide-ranging: the large literature that already exists in the many fields has been heavily consulted. Apart from library services in the UK, extensive specialist library searches have been carried out mainly at the Kurdish library in Stockholm, Sweden,<sup>1</sup> and at the Institute for Political and International Studies in Tehran, Iran.

A second source is interviews, the most appropriate method for this type of research. It has taken the shape of structured, formal interviews as regards individuals in power-positions, whereas the approach to interviewees in lower hierarchy has been that of semi-structured dialogues – often these have been cases where listening has proved to be of greater importance than questioning. Interviews have taken place in many different places and countries, in formal as well as informal settings.

The fieldwork has been carried out in phases and the nature of the topic researched necessitated a considerable degree of flexibility. Due to political restrictions, certain types of fieldwork were made difficult, and research has had to be done in a diplomatic way so as not to create tension. Moreover, literal field familiarisation, i.e. seeing the landscape, the setting of Kurdish politics, provided a better understanding of the region and its people in view of the fact that learning how to interpret certain data proved to be as important as data collection itself. Indeed, personal observations revealed facts that could often be useful for interpreting information gained. A great deal of political observations were also

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<sup>1</sup>. The significance of Stockholm's Kurdish library should not be underestimated. In the 1980s Sweden emerged as one of the leading countries hosting Kurdish literature. The existence of some hundred active Kurdish writers, numerous publishers coupled with a number of Kurdish magazines and journals make Stockholm an important city of Kurdish literature. This national Kurdish library was established in the Swedish capital in the autumn of 1997. Material is found in the major regional languages Arabic, Persian Turkish, as well as English, French, German, Swedish, Russian, but perhaps most importantly, Sorani and Kermanji.

made during a six-month period in Tehran in the spring of 2001 in the capacity of working at the Embassy of Sweden in a multi-national diplomatic environment.

The author has been able to access information and compile data in several languages. Of particular importance has been the use of regional languages for unstructured interviews and consulting conversations. Due attention has been paid to bias inevitably present in opinions of certain interviewees. A cautious position has been adopted towards the political orientation of some sources, so as to minimise any impact on the thesis' impartiality. With such a value-laden topic as the Kurdish question, particular efforts have gone into trying to establish a balanced account that would address information from many different quarters.

At the outset one issue of terminology will be remarked upon. In many accounts of the region, autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan is frequently referred to as an *enclave*. Such terminology is not employed in this thesis, since an enclave is in reality a piece of territory, which belongs to a state or a people, and, crucially, is surrounded by that of another. Iraqi Kurdistan's area of self-rule is admittedly a relatively small territory belonging to the Kurds and Iraq, but another people or state does not fully surround it. In comparison, the area of Nagorno-Karabakh – the hotly disputed territory constituting Armenian people fully inside and surrounded by Azerbaijan – is a 'genuine' enclave. In the context of autonomous Northern Iraq, it is noteworthy that the UN has never employed the word enclave to denote the Kurdish areas under its control. The word enclave has connotations that affect the sovereignty of Iraq, and in the wake of the Kuwait War there were indeed suggestions about the possibility of establishing enclaves on Iraqi territory, discussions that, however, had no lasting influence.

Moreover, it has to be pointed out that throughout the thesis an important distinction will be made between the *Kurdish problem* and the *Kurdish question*. The former refers to 'the domestic challenge' that the Kurdish nationalist movement represents to the regional countries, whereas the latter refers to 'the

trans-state aspects of the Kurdish nationalist movement'.<sup>2</sup>

The thesis has been divided into four parts. Firstly, the context is provided in part *A*, followed by part *B*'s analyses of nation, nationalism and identity. Part *C* deals with Iraqi Kurdistan in the regional and international state system, while the final part *D* contains conclusions and prospects.

Just as it is important to approach the region afresh, it would be a mistake to do so by disregarding the past. A political-historical account has to begin by noting the fact that the centre of the Kurdish national movement has never been permanent but has shifted between mainly Turkey, Iran and Iraq, to where the political climate has appeared most favourable and allowed the greatest degree of pro-Kurdish activity. Following the establishment of the Republic of Iraq by General Qasim's 1958 *coup d'etat*, the Kurdish struggle returned to Iraq after previously residing in Iran with the short-lived Mahabad Republic, created in 1946.<sup>3</sup> The overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy was to be followed by more coups in the 1960s Iraq, and not until 1968, a certain political stability was achieved with the re-entry of the Baath Party as the ruling elite. Marking the beginning of an uneasy relationship, the decisive coming to power by the Baathists is where this political history of Iraqi Kurdistan will commence, after the historical background to the permanently troubled relationship between Baghdad and Iraqi Kurdistan has been briefly outlined. In following the evolution of Baath-Kurdish relations up until the 1990s, and the developments up to the present day, the context is provided for the forthcoming analyses.

The second chapter aims to examine the nature of the concepts of nation and state and the ideology behind them, nationalism - itself a large and complicated topic and the depth of which will be considered only insofar as its direct relevance to the subject studied is unequivocal. The complicated (political) phenomena of nation and nationalism have attracted the interest of a wide variety of scholars, and explanations to the phenomena range from a God-given

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<sup>2</sup>. Olson (1998a), p. 11.

division of society to social-psychological constructs. It will be argued that the *nation* denotes a group of people from the same region of origin who share a common history and culture and often also speak the same language. It is held together with the *state* – the main political authority within a defined territory – by the ideology of *nationalism*, a theory assuming that the citizenry of a *nation-state* all belong to the same nation. Straightforward as it may appear, these notions are far from clear-cut and simple. These political phenomena and constructs will be assessed and the key concepts, generalised and specified theories will then be used to analyse and explain the case of Kurdish nationalism.

A large number of the theories available on the subject are based on the European experience: the relevant ones among those ideas will be outlined and, if needed, edited for application to the Kurdish case. Important to point out is that it was the Europeans who played the leading role in the creation of the international state system, the operative framework for all contemporary (and potential future) states. It is argued here that in order to attempt an analysis of the future shape and form of the state system (and the possible place of a Kurdish state within it), it is necessary to outline that system's earlier history.

The discussion is based on the assumption that the Kurdish modern nation is founded on pre-existing ethnic ties (the emphasis of which is also likely to have served to increase the popular appeal of the nationalist ideology). Much due to the active denial of their nation by surrounding states and dominant nations, Kurdish nationalist intellectuals and politicians gradually realised the need to engage in efforts at nation-building<sup>4</sup> or 'nation-strengthening'. In view of the general history of the Kurds, the task of advanced nation- and potential state-building would appear to be more difficult and complex than in many other parts of the world. The nation-building efforts in Iraq, for instance, have entailed the

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<sup>3</sup>. For an account of this, see Archie Roosevelt Jr. 'The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad' in *The Middle East Journal*, July 1947, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 247-260 and Willim Eagleton (1963), *The Kurdish Republic of 1946*, London: Oxford University Press.

<sup>4</sup>. This term refers to the emergence of a sense of common national sentiments, loyalty to a homeland, as opposed to state-building, denoting the creation of political institutions.

simultaneous 'nation-destroying' of the Kurds.<sup>5</sup> However, from a different perspective the Kurds do not face a central difficulty of nation-building as did many state elites in much of Africa and Asia, namely that of lacking a common history and culture. The shared historical experiences were there in the collective memory and the existence of an ethnic core in no doubt, which could theoretically have provided for a smooth nation-building process, which in practice, however, proved to be unattainable.

Chapter three deals with internal factors and its external manifestations. Religion, language, tribe and class are complex dynamic processes of interrelationship, not to be regarded as irrelevant to nationalism, quite the contrary. One should, however, point out the difference between considering them inherent to nationalism and specifying the elements in these social factors that are useful for the current discussion, in which the phenomenon of nationalism plays a large role. Each of these issues constitute important aspects of Kurdish socio-political identity, and cannot be isolated from each other as they are all theoretically and/or politically related to one another. There is a sense of mutual interconnection between the sections. No particular theory provides an adequate account of the development of contemporary Kurdish class, language, tribal and religious relations and it has been necessary to combine and extend existing theories in order to provide such an account. For instance, religious, ethnic, and linguistic sentiments often coexist with tribal identity in rural areas, just as tribal mentality influences and reinforces ethnic belonging.

Throughout Kurdish history, the national struggle has taken precedence over any class conflict. There are no clear indications that class conflict as such is a prominent feature of Kurdish society, but one may expect that the dramatic changes of the 1990s in the political arena have affected the social fabric of society, possibly facilitating the emergence and consolidation of social groups into classes.

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<sup>5</sup>. The concept of nation-destroying as borrowed from Walker Connor (1972).

When accounting for the dynamics of Kurdish politics in the 1990s and beyond, it would be a mistake to discard the element of tribalism, but equally one should not make the mistake to put the blame for the regional crises and instability squarely on the Kurds and their tribal inclinations. In the late twentieth century a transformation of Kurdish society was under way, the speed of which increased by the infamous *Anfal*-campaign, and, particularly after the events of 1991, it became clear that a significant change had taken place. Kurdish society is in many respects still a tribal society, but the element of tribalism in Kurdish politics has taken on a new dimension, nowadays referred to as *neo-tribalism*, or tribalism 'in a new guise'. This implies that the mentality of traditional tribalism still rules, but not in a strict geographical sense. Territoriality is no longer the only basis for tribalism, as the phenomenon has advanced to areas away from the tribal homeland. As modernisation gains ground in society tribesmen relocate to cities and larger towns but it does not follow that the ties with their local tribal leaders are cut. The changes that have brought about the emergence of *neo-tribalism* are of human and environmental nature, not concerning the geography of tribal divisions.

During the past decade of autonomous Kurdish rule in Northern Iraq, religion does not appear to have been any of the greater divisive sources of the disharmony so evident in the Kurdish socio-political arena. In view of this, it appears legitimate to examine whether any radical Islamist movements, prevalent in most countries of the Middle East, have established a firm presence in Northern Iraq. In order to do that, however, it would be beneficial to provide an investigation of the nature of Kurdish religiosity and how the development of 'Kurdish Islam' has impacted on its politics.

Lastly in chapter three, where the linguistic aspects of Kurdish politics are examined, the focus is placed on the socio-political aspects of language. This regards those matters lying outside the field of linguistics, hence making a 'communicative-symbolic distinction within language', i.e. there will be no regarding of language as a communicative tool, rather 'as an emblem of

groupness, as a symbol, a rallying-point',<sup>6</sup> examining the notion that Kurdish political claims are language-based. In industrial states, the advancements in the fields of technology and communication facilitated linguistic unity and cultural homogeneity.<sup>7</sup> Such development has yet to transform Kurdistan, and the lack of substantial technological progress in many vital areas of Kurdish society appears to be one of the reasons as to why the Kurds remain linguistically and culturally divided.

The assumption that nationhood is based on differences between nations begs the question of what distinguishes someone who identifies him/herself as a Kurd from non-Kurds. In other words, what makes a person Kurdish? As chapter three, in outlining the components of Kurdish socio-political identity, provides the basis for answering that question, the fourth chapter attempts to tie them together in order to show how they produce a variety of sub-identities that together constitute what one may term the Kurdish national identity. Identity formation is a continuously developing process and as such invokes various, occasionally irreconcilable, identities. All of the components dealt with in the third chapter, i.e. class, tribe, religion and language, can all in their own right be regarded as a pillar around which national identities evolve, and each forms and shapes the distinctive characteristics that make up the Kurdish national identity. They also provide different bases on which to form an identity. Subsequently there are perceptions of common interests in terms of class-consciousness, tribal belonging, religious awareness, and language/dialectal differences. The idea of or becoming actively conscious about one's various allegiances is tied to the emergence and development of a national identity, and these sentiments are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

The fifth chapter attempts to clarify the mainstream discussions surrounding the future of the nation-state and assess the Kurdish question in light of the previous theories, leading up to concluding chapter's assessment of whether an independent Kurdistan could be a theoretical and practical viable entity.

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<sup>6</sup>. Edwards (1985), p. 17.

<sup>7</sup>. Linklater (1998), p. 145.

The principle of self-determination will be taken as a starting-point for this discussion followed by a pertinent, although brief, examination of the state system, its origins and development, which provides the conceptual framework for the subsequent focal points of the analysis – the debates on the future of the state. These suggest that the twenty-first century will either witness a general decline of the nation-state or see it cementing its position as the ultimate form of political organisation. Initially outlined on a general level, these two distinct schools of thought will be discussed in relation to the Kurdish question, and an attempt will be made to analyse what bearing these processes might have on the future of Kurdistan and the prospects for Kurdish political sovereignty.

The creation of a new country, an independent state in which their nation-as-people<sup>8</sup> can flourish, is often what advocates of self-determination aspire for. This is, however, amidst some indications that the roughly 190 states already in existence<sup>9</sup> are growing weaker by the day. Taken at face value, one may conclude that we live in a border-less world where states have been reduced to bit actors. Whether or not one supports this conclusion, it has become clear that recent political changes, i.e. those brought about by the end of the Cold War, combined with those that have emerged with the growing interdependence on a global level, have in many instances brought the state and the international community into collision over the sovereign rights of the state and the authority of the latter. This reality calls for a re-evaluation of the nation-state concept, and indeed of the whole system of states as building blocks of the present international order.

The withering away of the state system and the emergence of a borderless world may have positive consequences for the state-less nation of Kurds, but is the nation-state to be viewed as redundant on a global scale? The process of globalisation might help bring down state structures in the fully industrialised part of the world, but whether this has the same effect in the Middle East is less clear. Should the state break down, the Kurds may organise themselves in

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<sup>8</sup>. A related term is nation-as-state. These two concepts are introduced in chapter two.

<sup>9</sup>. There are 189 states admitted as members of the United Nations. (See [www.un.org/Overview/brief.html](http://www.un.org/Overview/brief.html))

entities resembling the Kurdish principalities of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The prospects for the establishment of a Kurdish state, whether in the shape of a microstate confined to Iraqi Kurdistan or a 'Greater Kurdistan' – even the possibility of several Kurdish republics emerging in the new century are examined in the concluding chapter. A more credible alternative, however, seems to be that the present state structure in the Middle East is unlikely to change drastically in the foreseeable future. Consequently the Kurds will have to work their way around the current state system. This highlights the Kurdish case as one where the right to self-determination clashes with the state's territorial integrity.

There is a complicated mosaic of antagonistic entanglements characterising the area, evaluated in the sixth and seventh chapters, which look at Iraqi Kurdistan in broader regional and international perspectives. The value of the research lies in that it examines a case crossing 'domestic' and international conflict and in doing so it takes regional as well as global perspectives on the issue of the Kurdish area of self-rule in Northern Iraq. Given the dramatic shifts in the international political environment in the 1990s, it examines the responses of neighbouring countries and global forces alike to developments in Iraqi Kurdistan - responses that are largely characterised by attempts to balance interest and principle against each other.

When examining the role of the neighbouring countries since 1991, the greatest focus is kept on Iranian involvement in Iraqi Kurdistan. One weighty and important reason for concentrating on the Islamic Republic's behaviour stems from the fact that Iran is a regional player whose dealings with the Iraqi Kurds has not been observed in much detail since the Iran-Iraq War. Naturally one cannot exclusively study Iran - also Turkey and the Arab states have to be considered. Nonetheless, the conduct of Turkey with its massive influence in the area, have in many respects been accounted for,<sup>10</sup> whereas very little has been

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<sup>10</sup>. Apart from analysing the internal aspects of the Kurdish problem in Turkey, the following works also deal with Turkey's role in Northern Iraq: Kemal Kirisci and Gareth Winrow (1997), *The Kurdish question and Turkey: an example of a trans-state ethnic conflict*, London: Frank Cass; Michael Gunter (1997), *The Kurds and the future of Turkey*, Basingstoke: Macmillan; Henri Barkey and Graham Fuller (1998), *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, Lanham, Md: Rowman &

written about Iran in this context.

In part *D*, the conclusion revisits the themes of the thesis' main sections. The major arguments put forward in the thesis are advanced, complemented by an analysis of a significant question arising from the study: namely whether a nation needs a state of its own in order to survive and prosper. The theoretical implications of this study for the future of Iraq as a state are, moreover, assessed (from an Iraqi Kurdish perspective), discussing how to merge the 'national principle' with the 'state principle' in a re-modelled, post-Saddam Iraq. The concluding proposition is that the most suitable means to achieve a permanent solution to the perceived problem of Iraq and its Kurds is the establishment of a federation of Kurds and Arabs.

## Chapter 1: A Political History of Iraqi Kurdistan

### 1.1 Geopolitics

Geopolitics is generally perceived as the study of international relations within the subject area of political geography,<sup>1</sup> but it could also suggest a way of examining politics through 'geographical dimensions'.<sup>2</sup> Politics, or rather certain policy decisions, may generate geographical effects and conversely, geography tends to influence politics under particular circumstances. In other words, 'politics and geography are autonomous spheres of life which interact'.<sup>3</sup> That this is reflected in reality is convincingly demonstrated in the Middle East where, in particular, the somewhat awkward geographical position of Kurdistan has not proved beneficial in the nationalist quest to establish an independent Kurdish state.

#### 1.1.1 Kurdistan in a geopolitical perspective

The geopolitical position of Kurdistan is indeed widely recognised as one major reason why the Kurdish people still constitute a non-state nation. The strategically important land of the Kurds has been the seat of war for centuries between rivalling regional powers and the Ottoman-Safavid struggle over the area in the sixteenth/seventeenth century has to all intents and purposes continued to the present day. In the course of time the actors have crystallised into Turks, Persians and Arabs, but the vital geopolitical importance of Kurdistan has steadily increased.

An area roughly the size of France (cf. Figure 1.1.1: *The Comparative Size of Western Europe, Eastern United States, and Contiguous Kurdistan*), situated in the mountainous northern borders of the Middle East, Kurdistan is a territory of

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<sup>1</sup>. Painter (1995), p. 139.

<sup>2</sup>. Ó Tuathail (1996), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup>. Painter (1995), p. 20.

about 200,000 square miles.<sup>4</sup> It can be regarded as a 'shatterbelt' , a phenomenon Saul Cohen terms as being

A large, strategically located region that is occupied by a number of conflicting states and is caught between the conflicting interests of adjoining Great Powers.<sup>5</sup>

Due to physical, environmental, historical, cultural, and political differences the shatterbelt is seemingly unable to achieve political and/or economic unity,<sup>6</sup> which is an appropriate description of Kurdistan. These shatterbelt characteristics of Kurdistan have encouraged neighbouring states to use it indiscriminately as a buffer zone, and its vast areas with large quantities of largely unexploited natural resources have always concerned regional and international policy-makers alike.<sup>7</sup>

In the modern age, Kurdistan has been governed by five sovereign states, three of which came into existence in the aftermath of the First World War - Turkey, Iraq and Syria. The northern part of the Kurdish nation found itself constituting a south-east corner of the new Turkish republic, whereas the second largest portion of Kurdistan ended up within Iranian borders. A considerable amount of Kurdish land, the Mosul district, was firmly placed under the supervision of the British Mandate of Iraq, and neighbouring Syria, the French Mandate, received a small percentage of Kurdistan, as did Armenia (or the former Soviet Union). This geographical division gives rise to the interesting reflection that this ethnic/national group of Kurds is indeed represented in some of the largest geopolitical alliances and formations in the international political arena, namely NATO (Turkey), until the early 1990s the Soviet bloc (Armenia), the Central/Western Asian axis (Iran), as well as the Arab World (Syria and Iraq).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>. Izady (1992), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>. Cohen (1963), p. 83.

<sup>6</sup>. Ibid. p. 85.

<sup>7</sup>. See Maria O'Shea (ed.) (1992), *Kurdistan: Political and Economic Potential*, SOAS: Geopolitics Research Centre.

<sup>8</sup>. Izady (1992), p. 201.

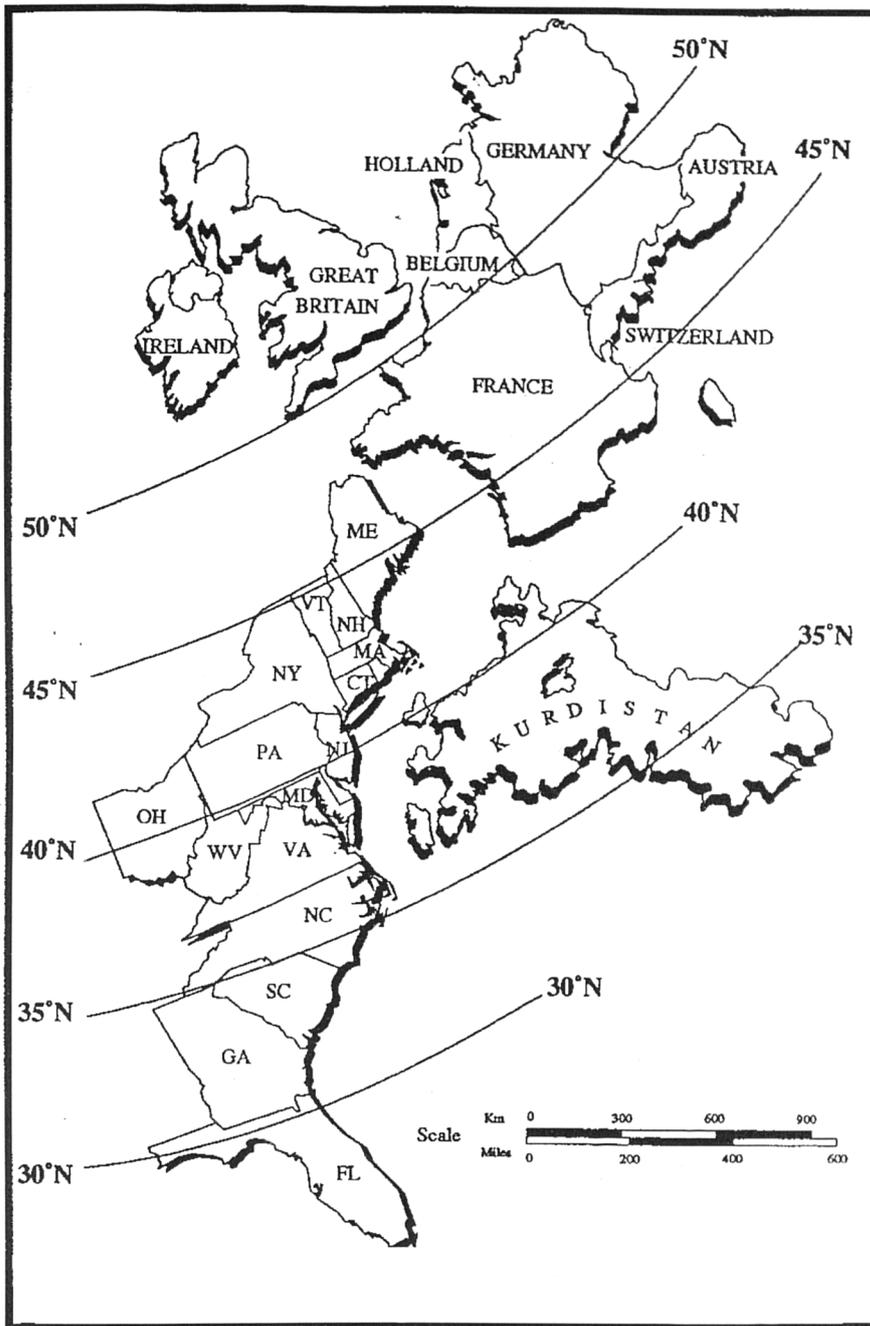


Figure 1.1.1: *The Comparative Size of Western Europe, Eastern United States and Contiguous Kurdistan*<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup>. Izady (1992), p. 2.

An understanding of power politics and how regional as well as international interests swing back and forth is essential when evaluating the role of the Kurds in the twentieth century. This notion is expressed by Mehrdad Izady in that ‘the Kurds are victims of their own strategic location and world geopolitical concerns’.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to this precarious geopolitical position, the existence of two detached Kurdish enclaves of substantial sizes in present-day Iran and Turkey (established in the sixteenth century, essentially a result of deportations and forced resettlements<sup>11</sup>), has further complicated the geopolitical situation of the entire Kurdistan. One of these enclaves is situated in central Anatolia, south of Ankara, and the other one in north-eastern Iran, in the Khorassan province, (cf. Figure 1.1.2: *Kurdistan in the Context of the Middle East*, and Figure 1.1.3: *The Seven Major Internal Subdivisions of Kurdistan*). Although these two major enclaves pose no actual threat to the Iranian and Turkish Republics, they still constitute important factors to take into consideration for the policy-makers respectively when forming the national policies on Kurdish-related matters.

### 1.1.2 Specific geographical features of Iraqi Kurdistan

The Kurdish part of Iraq is mostly referred to as Southern or Central Kurdistan, depending on the source consulted. In the present work the latter definition will be employed, as Iraqi Kurdistan is considered much the centre in geographical terms but also in the sense of being Kurdistan’s political centre (cf. Figure 1.1.3: *The Seven Major Internal Subdivisions of Kurdistan*). What characterises this area in terms of specific geographical features is the transition from the strictly mountainous and somewhat inaccessible domains of the north, into lowlands with fertile plains in the south. The mountainous and riverine terrain of the area represents a critical feature of the military geography, which is intertwined with political activities, considering the paramilitary character of traditional Kurdish politics.

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<sup>10</sup>. Ibid. p. 202.

<sup>11</sup>. Ibid. pp. 1-2.

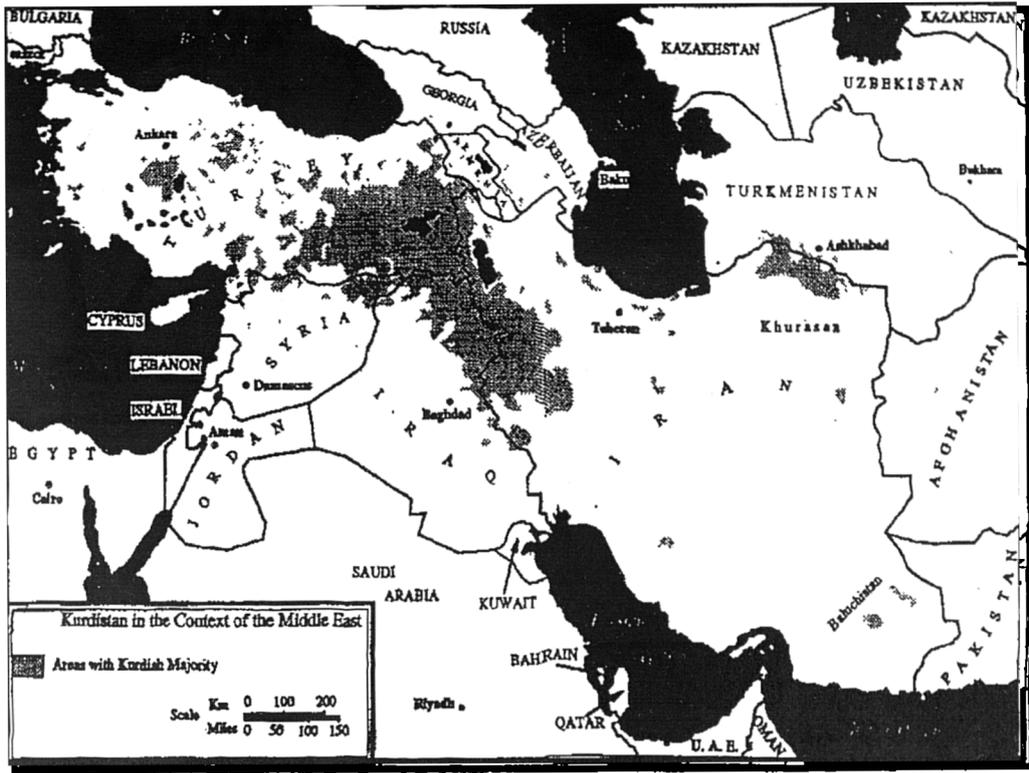


Figure 1.1.2: Kurdistan in the Context of the Middle East<sup>12</sup>

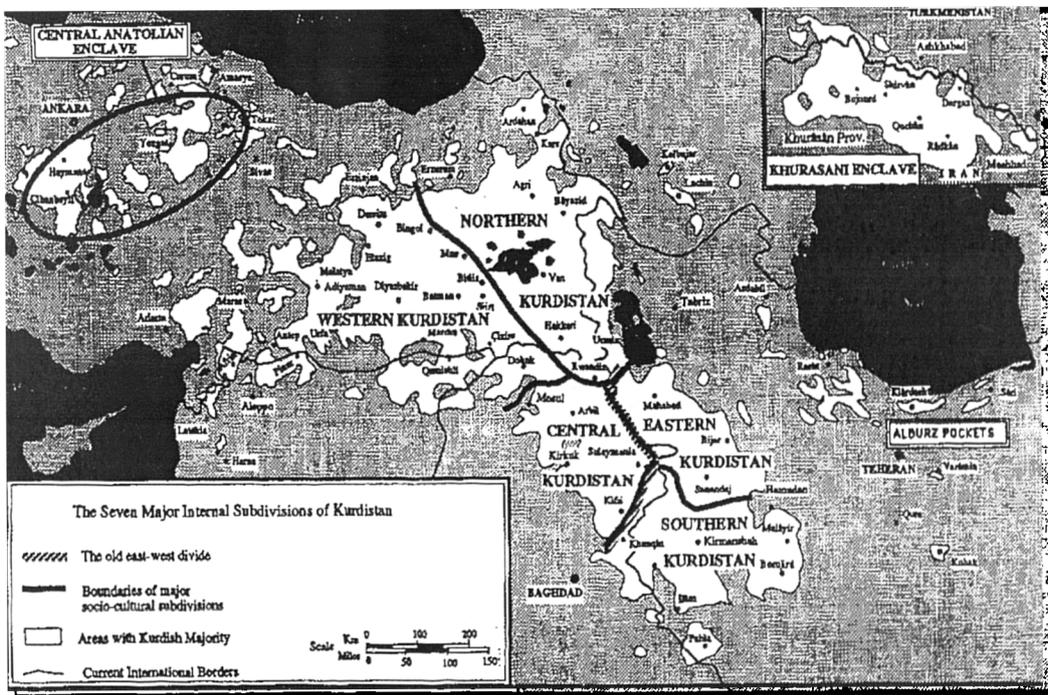


Figure 1.1.3: The Seven Major Internal Subdivisions of Kurdistan<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup>. Ibid. p. 4.

<sup>13</sup>. Ibid.

The agriculturally rich land in the south of Central Kurdistan has for long harboured an active peasantry, a settled non-nomadic faction of Kurds with a different lifestyle usually not associated with the tribal Kurdish people. This different geographic setting of Central Kurdistan may have facilitated the development towards a more modern society.

## 1.2 The origins of problems between Iraqi Kurdistan and Baghdad

The problems between Baghdad and the Iraqi Kurds have deep roots and essentially stem from the time of the creation of the Middle Eastern state system, gradually reinforced through the growth of regional nationalisms. The noticeably sharp differences along ethnic, sectarian and tribal lines in Iraq reveal the complex nature of the challenges confronting Baghdad, with particular regard to its Kurdish north, since the establishment of the Iraqi state in 1921.

### 1.2.1 The post-World War I settlements

At the end of the First World War the Allies were considering the establishment of an Armenian state, alongside an Arab state, out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire. The Kurds chose to co-operate with the Armenians, which resulted in a joint memorandum put forward at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. The Treaty of Sèvres two years later recognised the two peoples' rights to form sovereign states.<sup>14</sup> This Treaty was a clear Kurdish victory, but it was viewed as a humiliation for the Turkish people. At this time Mustafa Kemal Atatürk emerged and salvaged what he could of the Ottoman Empire creating the Republic of Turkey, in the process rejecting the Treaty of Sèvres.<sup>15</sup>

The success of the Kemalists prompted the setting up of a new peace conference, which, unlike Sèvres two years earlier, had no Kurdish, Armenian or even Arab participation. This conference resulted in the Treaty of Lausanne being signed in 1923, a treaty that made no mention whatsoever of the Kurds, granted them no national rights and its few stipulations for minorities applied only to non-Muslims. To all intents and purposes the Lausanne Treaty put an end to Kurdish ambitions for independence – a development that may not have been unrelated

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<sup>14</sup> Vanly (1993), p. 145.

<sup>15</sup> About the Treaty of Sèvres Vanly writes '[it] may have been a just treaty in that it guaranteed rights of independence and self-determination to the non-Turkish nationalities of the Empire but [it] was also grossly unfair towards Turkish Turkey, which it effectively reduced to the rank of a protectorate under joint British, French, Italian and Greek military occupation'. Ibid. p. 146.

to Britain's political needs in the region. As Othman Ali writes, Britain felt an urgent need to improve its relations with Turkey in order to prevent Bolshevik Russia from advancing southward towards the Persian Gulf and threaten British interests there. At the Lausanne Conference Turkey had to be appeased in order to preserve London's interests in the Middle East and by dropping its insistence on Kurdish independence as it had pressed for in the Treaty of Sevres, Britain secured the co-operation of Turkey against Bolshevik Russia. In other words, 'the fate of the Kurds was subordinate at Lausanne to the Anglo-Russian struggle for influence in the Middle East'.<sup>16</sup>

The independent Kurdish state as envisaged in the Sèvres treaty concerned only a small part of Kurdistan and excluded the important Mosul province as well as Iranian Kurdistan.<sup>17</sup> At Lausanne the dispute over Mosul was not resolved but referred to the Council of the League of Nations, which eventually ruled the province should be included within the recently established Iraq.

### 1.2.2 The formation of the state of Iraq

The newly independent Iraqi state, in the words of Ghareeb, 'inherited the legacy of the Ottoman regime as well as the problems resulting from the rise of nationalist sentiment among Arabs and Kurds, internal dissention, social and economic unrest and foreign pressures and interventions'.<sup>18</sup> The near over-emphasis on Arab nationalist sentiments in the aftermath of the First World War, as engaged in since the very inception of the state of Iraq, did little to promote the sort of climate needed for confidence-building efforts with regard to Iraqi Arab-Kurdish relations.

Britain occupied central and southern Iraq, i.e. the provinces of Baghdad and Basra, already in 1914 for the purpose of protecting the route to India as well as British interests in the Gulf region. Four years later the Mosul province with its

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<sup>16</sup>. Othman Ali (1997), p. 524.

<sup>17</sup>. Kendal (1993a), p. 35.

<sup>18</sup>. Ghareeb (1981), p. 1.

vast oil reserves was firmly placed under British control, and in 1920 Britain was officially assigned the mandate over Iraq consisting of these three ancient velayets ruled by the British-appointed Arab King Emir Faisal.<sup>19</sup> In 1926 a treaty was signed between Iraq, Britain and Turkey, attaching Mosul to the Iraqi state, on the condition that certain cultural rights were to be granted the province's Kurdish population.<sup>20</sup>

As regarded the Mosul province, London aimed to set up autonomous or semi-autonomous Kurdish regions that were to be loosely attached to the central Iraqi administration. Britain was, however, not in full control of the Kurdish areas as Shaikh Mahmoud, a British-appointed governor of Sulaymaniya province and subsequently self-proclaimed but nonetheless popular 'King of Kurdistan', revolted repeatedly and attempting to declare the establishment of a Kurdish state in the north of Iraq.<sup>21</sup>

At the time of the termination of the British mandate over Iraq in 1930, relations between the Iraqi Kurds and the Iraqi government grew progressively worse as Baghdad gained increased powers to the detriment of the Kurds in the north. Shaikh Mahmoud Barzinji led yet another rebellion demanding a Kurdish state, while other Kurdish leaders ventured to Geneva seeking League of Nations supervision for a Kurdish administration.<sup>22</sup> The troubles in the 1930s eventually lead to the first Iraqi military coup, which in part was inspired by irritation over the policy concerning Iraqi Kurdistan. It became clear with the departure of the British that the Iraqi government had no intentions of honouring the recommendations made by the League of Nations in 1926 with regard to the Kurdish north of the country, and the strong sentiments of nationalist character such conduct stirred among the affected Kurds proved enduring in nature.

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<sup>19</sup>. Vanly (1993), pp. 144-45.

<sup>20</sup>. Kendal (1993b), pp. 50-51.

<sup>21</sup>. Ghareeb (1981), pp. 29-30.

<sup>22</sup>. Ibid. pp. 30-31.

### 1.3 The eventful 1970s

The Kurdish national movement was in 1970 at the summit of its power and ability. It was more or less unified under the authority of Mullah Mustafa Barzani, leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), and had through rather successful guerrilla warfare forced the Iraqi government to the negotiation table, where Kurdish demands were to be addressed. Despite the relative strength of the Kurdish movement and its impact on the forming of state policies, Central Kurdistan was in the 1970s characterised by a wave of Arabisation campaigns carried out in large parts of its territories. This was a policy introduced by the Iraqis in order to change the demographic status of the most strategically important Kurdish areas. Initiated on a rather small scale following the March 11 agreement in 1970, it eventually developed into one of the most important and sustainable non-military Iraqi measures aimed at the Kurds.

#### 1.3.1 Baath rule and Kurdish national aspirations

The fall of General Qasim was brought about by a group of army officers in early 1963.<sup>23</sup> The Baathist advocates among the new rulers were, however, brushed aside and not until five years later, in the bloodless coup of July 1968, did they emerge as the undisputed rulers and established a firm Baath rule over Iraq.<sup>24</sup>

In order to better understand the Iraqi position in its dealings with the Kurds, the basic ideology of the Arab Baath Socialist Party (henceforth referred to as ABSP),<sup>25</sup> will be touched upon. Just as Jasim Abdulghani asserts, the very core

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<sup>23</sup>. Vanly (1993), p. 153.

<sup>24</sup>. Kutschera (1979), p. 264.

<sup>25</sup>. This is the name of a movement founded in the early 1940s by the Syrian intellectuals Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Din Baitar, the former Orthodox Christian and the latter the Sunni Muslim, under the name of *Harakat al-Baath al-Arabi* [*The Arab Resurrection Movement*], whose ideas gradually spread to Iraq, mainly by students. (Ghareeb (1981), p. 45) An ideological and political struggle came later to develop between Syrian and Iraqi Baathists.

of Baathist ideology is the pursuit of Arab nationalism and unity.<sup>26</sup> Clearly this strikes a discordant note with the interests and purposes of the Kurdish struggle, since advocates for Arab unity possess no deeper sympathy towards politically conscious and ambitious regional minorities in the midst of Arab territory. In fact, 'the Arab homeland [is viewed] as constituting an indivisible ... political unit'.<sup>27</sup>

That a considerable part of Iraqi Kurdistan, as perceived by the Kurds, is not acknowledged by Baghdad as Kurdish but Arab land has been the source of irreconcilable views on behalf of Kurdish and Arab nationalists alike - views that cannot easily be brought into harmony with each other. Moreover, the radical pan-Arabist ideology on which the party was founded was hostile to the non-Arab Kurds, who are linguistically, but also to a certain extent culturally related to the Persians.

However, the contradiction between theory and practice of the Iraqi Baath Party is striking, and this will be touched upon briefly as it is deemed relevant for the discussion. As Saddam Hussein moved up in the ranks, and manoeuvred himself into the highest and most prominent of positions, certain basic ideas in the ideology of the ABSP gradually acquired different meanings. One example is the concept of equality, much emphasised in early Baathist doctrine, which soon lost its original meaning. Zuhair al-Jaza'iri explains:

there is no absolute equality between Ba'thists, because there is in fact a single mountain peak that is Saddam Hussein; the rest are slopes. Equality is possible on the slopes, but not between them and the mountain peak.<sup>28</sup>

This clearly illustrates that 'ideology is subordinated to the style of leadership',<sup>29</sup> and indeed, as soon became apparent, Saddam Hussein, who was a political giant already in the late 1960s, came to develop a notable style of his own. Before consolidating new policies on the ideological base of the Baath party, on

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<sup>26</sup>. Abdulghani (1984), p. 30.

<sup>27</sup>. Ibid. p. 32.

<sup>28</sup>. al-Jaza'iri. (1994), p. 42.

<sup>29</sup>. Morad (1992), p. 125.

which he legitimised, and continues to legitimise his rule, Ba’thist ideology was adjusted to suit Saddam Hussein’s rule.

The political reasoning of the ABSP appeared early on as somewhat incoherent. One example is how one chose to define ‘the people’, an important issue since authority stems from the people. Saddam Hussein’s concept ‘the whole Iraqi people’, voiced in 1973, included Kurds and Arabs alike, but only as long as they rallied under his particular leadership. Should they oppose him and subject themselves to another political figure, they no longer remained part of the Iraqi people.<sup>30</sup> Such were the criteria of belonging to Saddam Hussein’s ‘*ummah*’ in Baathist Iraq.

These were the political and ideological structures of the new Administration in Baghdad with whom the Kurds were to conform. The new rulers and the Kurds viewed each other on an equal level of mistrust and scepticism. The Baath, who had had their party members killed by Barzani’s forces in assisting Qasim to do away with enemies after the 1958 coup, distrusted the Kurdish leader. Mullah Mostafa was correspondingly suspicious about the government in its negotiations with Nasser’s United Arab Republic and how such high level talks would affect the Kurdish aspirations in Northern Iraq.<sup>31</sup> Despite this lack of mutual trust, the Barzani leadership had two representatives appointed to see to Kurdish interests in the new government. However, before long they abandoned their posts in Baghdad,<sup>32</sup> which was not a good sign for future relations between the Kurds and the Baathists.

Barzani’s personal and political antagonist Jalal Talabani and his urban grouping, known as the KDP-Politburo, had a leftist policy similar to that of the Baath-party. These leftists were co-operating with the Baath,<sup>33</sup> which further undermined improvement of relations between Baghdad and the Kurdish leadership *de facto*. Barzani enjoyed a position as the official representative of

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<sup>30</sup>. Makiya (1998), p. 133.

<sup>31</sup>. McDowall (1989), p. 20.

<sup>32</sup>. Ghareeb (1981), p. 74.

<sup>33</sup>. Talabani had a positive attitude towards the Baath, as ‘it was the first ruling Arab political party ... to recognize the legitimate national rights of the Kurdish people’ and who made ‘every effort possible to solve the problem peacefully ... in the spirit of brotherhood’, *Ibid.* p. 75.

the Kurds: apart from his historic appeal (based on his being one of the key figures in the short-lived Mahabad Republic some 25 years earlier) he commanded authority over a numerically strong force much based on tribal loyalty: at that time one of the most important factors in Kurdish politics. Material support from the outside, most notably Iran and the USA, also served to heighten his position as a powerful player.

Despite an initial, pronounced desire by the Baath regime after achieving power in 1968 to resolve the Kurdish problem peacefully, fighting broke out in April 1969,<sup>34</sup> officially between the two Kurdish factions. However, Barzani was in practice fighting the Iraqi government, as the latter supported and fought alongside Talabani forces. The so-called Bazzaz Declaration (a suggested peace plan drafted by a previous Iraqi government in 1966<sup>35</sup>), presented by Baghdad did not appeal to the Kurds, who rejected the proposal. This refusal led to heavier military offensives being launched by Iraqi troops, until approximately a year later, when the parties resumed negotiations that finally resulted in a peace settlement.<sup>36</sup>

Edward Ghareeb points out that an evolution in Baathist thinking regarding the question of minorities appears to have contributed strongly to the political opening in the Kurdish question. The policy towards the Kurds was reviewed throughout the 1960s at the Baathists' annual party congresses and certain changes took place,<sup>37</sup> which might have influenced the measures taken when regaining power 1968. In addition to that, however, it appears likely that the Baath regime, having accomplished few, if any, objectives in its military confrontations with the Kurdish militia felt the need to reach some form of agreement with the rebellious north.<sup>38</sup> Baathist Iraq found itself in an inferior

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<sup>34</sup>. Abdulghani (1984), p. 135.

<sup>35</sup> The main points of this agreement included recognition of Kurdish nationality, making Kurdish an official language alongside Arabic in Iraqi Kurdistan, appointing Kurds as civil servants in the relevant areas and achieve proportionate Kurdish representation in an elected National Council. A general amnesty was also to be proclaimed and the government to undertake a resettlement of those displaced and provide compensation for material losses suffered. Penrose (1978), p. 340.

<sup>36</sup>. O'Ballance (1996), pp. 86-87.

<sup>37</sup>. Ghareeb (1981), p. 80.

<sup>38</sup>. Ibid.

position with regard to regional strategic balance - Iran was at this time the major power in the Gulf region - and experienced an increasing demand for a political breathing-space to restructure its national policies and ponder on its next move.

### 1.3.2 The peace agreement of 1970 and its implementation

The agreement of 11<sup>th</sup> March 1970 provided for Kurdish autonomy within the framework of unity for Iraq to be achieved over a period of four years. The agreement offered more concessions and freedom than any previous governments had ever considered granting the Kurds. It consisted of 15 articles and was settled by Barzani's KDP and Baath's Revolutionary Command Council. This manifesto is regarded as an important milestone in Iraqi Kurdish politics, and the Kurds are always referring to this agreement whenever military conflicts between the north and the central government are to be settled by negotiations. Therefore, in order to form a base for further discussion, a concise outline of the peace accord will be provided.<sup>39</sup>

Article one stated the recognition of the Kurdish language as the official language in areas with Kurdish majority, alongside the Arabic language. The second article called for full participation of Kurds in the central government, including accession to key posts in the cabinet and the national Iraqi army. Kurdish cultural and educational 'backwardness' is discussed in article three, which promotes those two domains in general and the teaching in Kurdish in particular.

Article four stipulates that in areas populated by a Kurdish majority all officials should be Kurdish or Kurdish-speaking, 'provided the required number is available'. In the fifth article, the Kurdish people are guaranteed the right to establish their own student, youth, women and teachers organisations. Article six

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<sup>39</sup>. The following sources have been consulted when accounting for the contents of the agreement: Ghareeb (1981), McDowall (1992), and Vanly (1993). Words and sequences within inverted commas are quotations taken from the original statement, provided by the Iraqi Ministry of Culture and Information, translated and featured in Short and McDermott (1975).

authorises all officials, employers and workers to resume work regardless of involvement in previous insurgencies, whereas the seventh article reveals the allocation of a specific budget for the purpose of economically 'uplifting' the Kurdish areas.

Displaced Arabs and Kurds alike are in article eight entitled to return to 'their former places of habitation', which theoretically meant that Arabs residing in Kurdish areas as a result of the government's Arabisation programme would have to leave for the benefit of the Kurdish returnees.

The ninth article deals with the agrarian reform program and envisages 'speedy measures' to be taken for its implementation in Kurdistan. Moreover, a binational Iraq would be the result of an amendment of the constitution, according to article 10, where equality of Arabs and Kurds would be recognised.<sup>40</sup> Article 11 pledges the Kurds to hand over the broadcasting equipment (required for the clandestine Kurdish radio stations) along with the heavy weapons to the government, while the twelfth article firmly establishes that one of the vice-presidents should be a Kurd.

Article 13 lays down the necessity of amending the provincial law in order to comply with the Manifesto. The 'national riches' of Kurdistan are mentioned in article 14, which concerns the Kurds' 'enjoyment of self-rule,' naturally 'to be achieved within the framework of the Iraqi Republic'. In the fifteenth article, finally, the Kurdish people are promised judicial authority 'in a manner proportionate to its population ration in Iraq.'

After the signing of the agreement, a bipartisan committee with representatives from the Baath Party and the KDP was delegated the task of supervising its implementation. This assignment proved to be difficult, mainly because Baghdad was an untrustworthy partner (although Barzani reportedly maintained contacts with the Shah of Iran as well as keeping American and Israeli channels

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<sup>40</sup>. Saddam Hussein stressed, however, that little importance was to be attached to this as the *Iraqi nationality* was what really mattered: 'each one of us needs to change his angle of vision, that is not to consider himself as a Kurd only or an Arab only, but as an Iraqi'. Hussein (1977), p. 23.

of communication open<sup>41</sup>). In practice the ruling Baathists ignored many clauses in several articles, and with few exceptions only minor changes were executed by the government in the four-year period of transition. One of many violations of the agreement refers to article one: the language of instruction stipulated to be Kurdish in the areas concerned was with Baathist interpretation reduced to a limited number of primary schools, and not at all implemented on secondary school levels.<sup>42</sup>

Throughout the text of the peace accord there were frequent references to 'areas with a Kurdish majority', concerning the regions where the new measures were to be implemented. A definite clarification of these Kurdish majority areas, i.e. which territories the autonomous area would incorporate, was not provided. Thus arose the necessity to carry out a census of the population in certain strategically important areas claimed by both sides, such as the oil-rich Kirkuk. The Baath, however, postponed the holding of the vital referendum as its large-scale resettlement measures were under way. The government's policy of Arabisation of Kurdish areas had during the first few years of the decade changed the demography substantially in favour of the policy-making elite in Baghdad and to the great disadvantage of the Kurds. As a result, it was no longer possible to give a realistic account of Kurdish presence in the oil-rich areas. 'The major drawback of the March Manifesto', as Nader Entessar concludes, 'was its failure to define the precise geographic boundaries of the area to be covered by the autonomy provisions'.<sup>43</sup>

In early 1974 the few Kurdish ministers in the central government left their posts in protest against the Baath Party and the Iraqi government's conduct of Kurdish affairs. The Iraqi authorities responded by replacing the three Barzani-loyalists with political opponents of Mullah Mustafa (who by joining the Baathists had lost legitimacy in the eyes of most Kurds), which accelerated the deterioration in relations between the Kurdish leadership and Baghdad.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>. McDowall (1996), p. 330.

<sup>42</sup>. Vanly (1993), p. 156.

<sup>43</sup>. Entessar (1992), p. 92.

<sup>44</sup>. Ibid. p. 73.

The government proved unable to fully implement the agreement of 1970 within the stipulated period of four years, whereby a new plan for Kurdish autonomy was announced, namely the Autonomy Law of 11 March 1974. This was a slight modification of the previous agreement, but the areas considered for self-rule were the same as before. Baghdad offered the Kurds 15 days to accept the proposal, which, as expected did not include Kirkuk or other oil-rich areas in Kurdistan.<sup>45</sup> Since the plan fell short of Kurdish claims for Kirkuk, not only to be incorporated in the autonomous region but also to function as its capital, the Autonomy Law was rejected. In doing so, the Kurds were accused of invoking history when they claimed that Kurds historically inhabited areas that were excluded from the autonomous region proposed by Baghdad. The opinion of Saddam Hussein was that referring to history was acceptable, however, 'not for the purpose of the demarcation of the autonomy region', for which the following comparison was provided: 'the Arabs cannot ask for Spain just because they were there some time in the past'<sup>46</sup> - a blatant misrepresentation of the reality of the state-sanctioned mass relocation of people executed by the government.

### 1.3.3 Resumption of fighting leading to the Algiers Accords of 1975

In late spring of 1974 open warfare broke out between the Kurds and the government. Mullah Mustafa received overt military assistance from the Iranians, who, as David McDowall points out, might have held hopes for the ousting of the Baath Party from power, as had happened in 1963.<sup>47</sup> As the Iranian support continued in a steady flow across the border the Iraqi position weakened considerably. Unless Iran could be persuaded to cease its military operations alongside Kurdish *peshmerga*<sup>48</sup> forces in Northern Iraq, the Iraqi army had little if any chance of winning the war – rather, the hostilities were likely to escalate into a full-scale conflict with Iran.

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<sup>45</sup> McDowall (1996), pp. 335-336.

<sup>46</sup> Hussein (1977), p. 31.

<sup>47</sup> McDowall (1996), pp. 337-338.

<sup>48</sup> The Kurdish term for guerrilla fighter, literally 'the one who faces death'.

American aid to the Iraqi Kurds was a prominent factor behind Iran's support of the same, and such US action may have begun secretly already in 1969 (or even earlier). It was, however, not until three years later that the documented phase started as the CIA, entrusted with carrying out the program, over a three-year period channelled some \$16 million worth of arms and cash to the insurgents in Northern Iraq. American guarantees had previously been sought by the Kurds, distrustful as they were of Tehran, but even the political heavyweight Washington in its economically largely symbolic role (US aid reportedly constituted only a fraction of what Barzani received from the Shah) proved to be a poor sponsor of the Kurds. The CIA abandoned the operation when the Shah no longer found the Iraqi Kurds useful a tool to be used against Baghdad.<sup>49</sup> It is possible that the Americans simply desired a continuation of status quo, i.e. that the Kurds went on fighting indefinitely, gaining no victory. Indeed, a CIA-document from 1974, made official in 1976, stated that

Iran and the USA hope to benefit from an unresolvable situation in which Iraq is intrinsically weakened by the Kurds' refusal to give up their semi-autonomy. Neither Iran nor the US would like to see the situation resolved either way.<sup>50</sup>

On March 6, 1975, Saddam Hussein and Reza Pahlavi met in Algiers (resulting from mediation by Jordan's King Hussein and Egypt's President Nasser), to settle their differences. Iraq accepted Iranian demands of gaining half control over the boundary river Shatt al-Arab, on the condition that the Shah immediately withdrew all his support for the Iraqi Kurds.<sup>51</sup> And indeed, the Shah's reasons for concluding a deal with Iraq – to prevent the emergence of an autonomous Kurdistan, a desire to halt the progress in relations between Iraq and the Soviet Union and for Iran to assume the role of the major power in the Gulf<sup>52</sup> - appear to have been synonymous with those of the United States at the time. Hence the CIA was a key actor in the swift change of fortune for the Kurds.

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<sup>49</sup> Ghareeb (1981), 138-140.

<sup>50</sup> Hermansson *Arbetet*, 10 February, 1991, originating from the Pike Commission Report to the House of Representatives (19 January 1976), also quoted by McDowall (1996), p. 331.

<sup>51</sup> Ghareeb (1981), p. 171.

<sup>52</sup> Vanly (1993), p. 171.

Soon after the Algiers Accords the Kurdish national movement collapsed and Mullah Mustafa disappeared from the scene of Kurdish politics. His sons Idris and Masoud (the latter later emerged as the new KDP-leader) took over the leadership of the party, which came to experience a certain disintegration, as smaller groupings broke away and formed separate political entities. Jalal Talabani and his associates, who had taken refuge in Syria, came to form the most important of these break-away groups. Under his authority a new political party was established in mid-1975, named the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).<sup>53</sup>

The support base of the PUK was quite different from that of the KDP. The different social bases of Kurdish identity<sup>54</sup> largely determined which of the two major groupings one supported. While the KDP is characterised by a traditional outlook, with the leading Barzani-family having strong tribal and religious affiliations, the PUK gained followers from the upper strata in society, placing less emphasis on tribal and religious factors. The differences in policy between the two hence reflected the make up of their respective support bases.

The agreement reached in Algiers between Tehran and Baghdad was a severe blow to the Kurdish national movement, but it cannot be regarded as the sole reason for Mullah Mustafa's defeat. The Baathist regime had made some political and military achievements: politically, the long-standing enmity between the Barzanis and other tribes was skilfully managed by the Iraqi government, as was its lobbying of the leftist intellectual faction among the Kurds, who disliked the traditional leadership.

After the collapse of the Kurdish movement, the Iraqi government reinforced its policies of Arabisation alongside the policy of deportation and resettlement of Kurds. Meanwhile, a non-military process of reconstructing the Kurdish areas socially and economically was undertaken by the Baathist leadership,<sup>55</sup> presumably to rally Kurdish mass support for the government. However, one

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<sup>53</sup> McDowall (1996), p. 343.

<sup>54</sup> This will be dealt with in much detail in chapter four.

<sup>55</sup> Ghareeb (1981), p. 189.

assumes that this intended social and political integration of the Kurds into the Iraqi *'ummah* was not high on Baghdad's agenda of policy-making on its Kurdish region.

In August 1977 an amnesty was proclaimed by the central government to Kurdish militants in exile. This resulted in many Kurds returning to Iraq, where in the autumn of 1979, six distinguished Kurdish leading figures took up political positions in Baghdad, counselling on Kurdish affairs.<sup>56</sup> It would appear rather unlikely that the opinion of these counsellors carried any weight in Kurdish-related matters - their presence was merely symbolic, but nonetheless important for Saddam Hussein, who could display Kurdish representatives in his government, as the decade in which he successfully consolidated his rule came to an end.

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<sup>56</sup>. Ibid. pp. 190-191.

## 1.4 The decade of major regional unrest

In September 1980 the newly-established Islamic Republic with its pan-Islamic ambitions was invaded by neighbouring Iraq. The secular Baathist regime, which fiercely opposed the politicisation of Islam, felt threatened by the prospect of Khomeini's revolutionary ideas gaining a firm foothold among the Iraqi Shiites. The hegemonic aspirations of Saddam Hussein to dominate the Gulf and annex the oil-rich and largely by Arabs inhabited Khuzestan-province of south-western Iran (in Iran referred to as Arabestan) should, however, be regarded as the more likely motives for the Iraqi aggression, which threw the Kurds into a new chaotic decade of broken promises and alliances.

During the Iran-Iraq war the Iranians were fairly successful in 'exploiting their Kurdish assets'.<sup>57</sup> By way of example, they succeeded in playing the KDP and the KDP-I (the Kurdish Democratic Party - Iran) off against each other, resulting in the Iraqi Kurds fighting the Iranian Kurds on behalf of Tehran. In the meantime the Kurds of Iraq were subjected to intensified repression from Baghdad, which culminated in the *Anfal* campaign, aimed at an eradication of the Kurdish population of Iraq.

### 1.4.1 Iraqi-Kurdish activities during the Iran-Iraq war

Throughout the eight-year long war Iran was the regional player whom the Iraqi Kurds mainly had their dealings with and were exploited by. Just as the mullahs incited the Kurdish population in Northern Iraq, the Baathists seized every opportunity to weaken the revolutionary Iranian regime by playing its Kurdish card. That this was the case later confirmed by the exiled Iranian president Abol Hassan Bani Sadr, stating that the Kurdish uprising and the subsequent war in Iranian Kurdistan was linked to the Iraqi assault.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>. Entessar (1992) p. 151.

<sup>58</sup>. See his *My Turn to Speak: Iran, the Revolution and Secret Deals with the U.S.* (1991), London: Brassey's.

The withdrawal of a substantial number of Iraqi troops from Northern Iraq in the early 1980s, caused by an increased demand of military presence on the Iranian front, enabled the Kurds to intensify their armed struggle against Saddam Hussein's regime. This was further strengthened by the return of a great number of *peshmerga* fighters from the exile inflicted upon them by the defeat in 1975. They were joined by hordes of vindictive villagers, who had been forced by the government to abandon their land and placed in so-called 'new villages' created as part of the Baathists scheme of Arabisation and depopulation for Kurdistan.<sup>59</sup>

The prospects thus appeared good for a strong Kurdish offensive against the Iraqis, had it not been for the clear divisions within the Kurdish movement. The PUK controlled the southern and eastern parts of Iraqi Kurdistan, Sooran, whereas the KDP was in charge of Badinan, the north and west. This power struggle appeared to ease off a little following the formation of the National Democratic Front, an umbrella organisation for Iraqi opposition groups, consisting of nineteen Iraqi parties and movements. However, the agreement, reached in Tripoli in February 1983, promoting unity against the Baathists in Baghdad were soon violated by the dissenting partners, who, apart from the Kurdish parties, consisted of Arab nationalists, Shiites and communists. This breakdown for the Iraqi opposition movement had a spillover effect on political activity in Kurdistan, where fighting resumed between the two main adversaries in the spring of 1983.<sup>60</sup>

Notwithstanding the inter-Kurdish fighting, the pressure on the Iraqi army tightened as the *perhmergas* scrupulously guarded and defended the borders of Kurdistan. This they did rather successfully and to such an extent that their respective areas could be rightfully described as 'liberated zones'. However, at this time, the PUK appeared to have been the more pressurised group, facing attacks from the two regional powers at war as well as the KDP. The need for a military breathing-space was acute for the PUK leadership and it embarked upon

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<sup>59</sup>. Karadaghi (1993), p. 220.

<sup>60</sup>. Ibid. pp. 220-221.

clandestine negotiations with the Iraqi government, with whom it reached an understanding in December 1983.<sup>61</sup>

The PUK put forth demands, which, *inter alia*, called for the suggested Kurdish autonomous region to be extended in order to include, most importantly, the oil-rich city of Kirkuk. Moreover, an allocation of 30 percent of its oil revenues was further claimed for the purpose of developing Kurdistan. The Iraqi authorities were also to end the Arabisation and depopulation of Kurdish areas, and grant the Kurds certain autonomous powers as well as accepting the *peshmerga* militia as the national defence force of the autonomous entity.<sup>62</sup>

However, in retrospect, everything indicated that this provisional agreement was in reality merely regarded as a means to gain valuable time and restructure their own organisation, particularly considering that the treaty was never publicly reported.<sup>63</sup> Before long the negotiation partners were at loggerheads, engaging in military action towards the autumn of 1984.

Negotiating directly with Saddam Hussein had discredited Jalal Talabani substantially among the Kurds and this popular discontent with the PUK was clearly in favour of the KDP, which rapidly gained influence in areas traditionally controlled by the former. The Kurdish Democratic Party under Masoud Barzani had in the mid-1980s allied itself with the Islamic Republic and the two even co-ordinated their military activities against Iraq. The KDP also developed close ties with the radical Turkey-based Kurdistan's Workers Party, the PKK, a coalition, which represented 'an interesting alliance of traditionalist and hard-line leftist ideology'.<sup>64</sup>

This and other political and military co-operation among Kurdish groups and organisations was however made difficult by the existence of *jash*,<sup>65</sup> denoting a specific kind of mercenary serving the government, normally tribal Kurds with

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<sup>61</sup>. Ibid. p. 202.

<sup>62</sup>. McDowall (1992), p. 104.

<sup>63</sup>. Entessar (1992), p. 132.

<sup>64</sup>. McDowall (1989), p. 25.

<sup>65</sup>. Aka *forsan*, the former Kurdish for donkey, the latter Arabic for knight.

no political motivation. These had been operating in Kurdish areas prior to the 1980s, although in smaller numbers, and were during the war with Iran recruited en masse by the Iraqi regime. They were assigned to track down *peshmergas* operating in the mountains, an undertaking which earned them a great deal of money, privileges and arms.<sup>66</sup> These paramilitary *jash* were regarded by the *peshmergas* as a dangerous element, since they, unlike regular army troops, were familiar with the mountainous terrain and guerrilla warfare.

In May 1987, the establishment of the Kurdistan Front was announced.<sup>67</sup> This new formation consisted of six Iraqi Kurdish parties, and was strongly supported by Tehran, hoping that unity among the Kurds would demand a greater Iraqi military presence in the north and thus reduce the intensity of warfare at the fronts. And indeed, to the satisfaction of Iran, 'during 1987, two out of Iraq's seven armies were tied down in dealing with the Kurdish threat',<sup>68</sup> accordingly easing the military tensions on the Iranian border.

Following the Iran-Iraq cease-fire in August 1988, Saddam Hussein decided to increase the use of his extensive arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. He launched massive offensives that brought the Kurds to their knees, and rendered further Kurdish resistance well-nigh impossible. This new type of warfare revealed that even their sole friends, the mountains, could no longer give them protected shelter from the aggressor.<sup>69</sup>

#### 1.4.2 Depopulation and genocide in Iraqi Kurdistan

The term genocide<sup>70</sup> was coined in 1944, when the extermination of the European Jews could not be described by any existing vocabulary. As Yves Ternon remarks, the word genocide is, historically and etymologically, closely

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<sup>66</sup>. Karadaghi (1993), p. 222.

<sup>67</sup>. Ibid. p. 224.

<sup>68</sup>. McDowall (1989), p. 27.

<sup>69</sup>. This refers to the frequently cited Kurdish proverb 'the Kurds have no friends but the mountains'.

<sup>70</sup>. It is a combination of the Greek word *genos*, meaning race or tribe, and the Latin *cide*, killing. Kuper (1982), p. 2.

associated with Nazi ideology and its theories of racial hatred,<sup>71</sup> but even so, the Holocaust is regrettably not the only deliberate killing of a nation or race of people throughout history. Genocide has become known as

an elaborate, complex programme, a co-ordinated aggression against every feature of a national group to render it vulnerable, annihilate it and impose on the survivors the national pattern of the oppressor.<sup>72</sup>

Article two of the UN Genocide Convention singles out acts committed 'with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such'.<sup>73</sup> Such atrocious deeds are to be regarded as crimes under international law to be condemned and punished by an international penal tribunal. However, the exclusion of political groups in the convention is notable, and makes it possible for the Iraqi regime to evade allegations of genocide on its Kurdish population from the international community, allegations based on the UN convention, in maintaining that the Kurds constitute a non-conformist political and social grouping. The Kurds are not a 'biological problem', as were the Jews under the Nazis, but purely a political one, and constitute an alien element to the Iraqi Baathists attempts to create a sound Iraqi national identity.

Zygmunt Bauman considers 'modern' genocide, (that is within the framework of the territorial state) to be 'an element of social engineering',<sup>74</sup> and this is presumably how the Baathists perceive their strategy of transforming the Iraqi state. In implementing its Arabisation policy, which had begun on a small-scale as early as 1963,<sup>75</sup> the Iraqi government has acted in ways similar to the old colonial powers. The Kurdish people have been uprooted from their territories and repopulated elsewhere, such as in the southern deserts, just as settlers of Arab origin were installed on Kurdish land. The objective of the Iraqi government was to confine the Kurdish population to the large cities in the north or to place them in the new towns created under army supervision. This was

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<sup>71</sup>. Ternon (1989), p. 132.

<sup>72</sup>. Ibid. p. 129.

<sup>73</sup>. Kuper (1982), p. 2.

<sup>74</sup>. Bauman (1989), p. 91.

<sup>75</sup>. Human Rights Watch/Middle East (1995), p. 24.

Baghdad's idea of how the Kurds ought to be controlled - in reality the Baathists had created a dangerously explosive situation.

Depopulating Kurdish areas was no insignificant project for the Baghdad regime, as displayed in many reports on the subject, which reported approximately 4,000 Kurdish towns and villages to have been levelled with the ground.<sup>76</sup> The human tragedy aside, in the perspective of political economy, this policy strikes the observer as being completely irrational. At enormous costs the country destroyed its own major source of foodstuffs, resulting in the previously self-sufficient Iraq being forced to import large amounts of food.<sup>77</sup>

The depopulation of Kurdistan was apparently the backbone of Baath's policy on the Kurdish question, a policy later supplemented with chemical weapons in violation of the 1925 Geneva Protocol, which outlawed the use of all poison gases.<sup>78</sup> Kurdish sources claim that substantial chemical attacks by Iraqi authorities began as early as 1984,<sup>79</sup> statements endorsed by the UN investigators, who reported use of mustard and nerve gas in the same year.<sup>80</sup>

Rural Kurdistan was being destroyed both demographically and ecologically, a human and environmental destruction, which took place in many parts of Northern Iraq. The Iraqi authorities did not restrict the mopping-up operations to its proclaimed 10-km wide safety corridor on the Iranian border, but also attacked other Kurdish areas (cf. Figure 1.4.1, *The Triangle of Death*).

As the atrocities carried out in Iraqi Kurdistan in the 1980s clearly were a state crime, as committed by the government, it appears appropriate to define Iraq as an ethnocratic genocidal state, using Leo Kuper's terminology. In such a state the victimised group has become an active player as they try to free themselves from discriminatory measures imposed on them, claim political rights and even

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<sup>76</sup>. Forsström *DN*, 23 March, 1990, (This specific article named 3,968 ruined villages, with other sources providing similar numbers, i.e. between 3,900 and 4,000.).

<sup>77</sup>. David McDowall notes that the Kurdish parts of Iraq 'produced approximately half Iraq's wheat crop and one third of its barley', (1996), p. 390.

<sup>78</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 361.

<sup>79</sup>. *The Kurdish Program*, March 1989.

<sup>80</sup>. Simons (1996), p. 316.

demand a degree of autonomy.<sup>81</sup> Saddam Hussein's genocidal state is characterised by *Anfal*, a highly organised and comprehensive extermination campaign directed towards the country's Kurds, which was thoroughly planned for several years before implementation. Despite it being such a well-planned administrative process, which involved implementing systematic administrative measures in successive steps, the Iraqis must have wrestled with an 'efficiency problem', as expressed by Raul Hilberg:

There are not many ways in which a modern society can, in short order, kill a large number of people living in its midst. This is an efficiency problem of the greatest dimensions, which poses uncounted difficulties and innumerable obstacles.<sup>82</sup>

The three major criteria to determine a case of genocide, put forward by Kurt Jonassohn, are certainly met with regard to Baghdad's *Anfal*-campaign, namely

1. There must be evidence ... of the intent of the perpetrator.
2. There must be a group whose victimisation threatens its survival as a group.
3. The victimisation must be one-sided.<sup>83</sup>

The second and third criteria have been dealt with in detail above, but perhaps the issue of evidence and intent needs further elaboration. The obvious physical evidence resulting from gas attacks visible on survivors - the thousands of Kurds taking refuge in Turkey, bringing their chemically-injured animals with them across the border<sup>84</sup> - left nobody questioning what kind of warfare had been used against the Iraqi Kurds by the government in Baghdad. In addition to this highly convincing evidence, authentic written data originating from the special governmental *Anfal*-committee was seized during the Kurdish revolt in March 1991, when the insurgents unexpectedly got their hands on large quantities of secret Iraqi documents regarding the campaign - 18 million lbs of documents or 4.5 million pages, which were never meant to see the light of day. This detailed

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<sup>81</sup>. Kuper (1990), p. 33.

<sup>82</sup>. Hilberg (1961), p. 4.

<sup>83</sup>. Jonassohn (1992), p. 19.

<sup>84</sup>. McDowall (1992), p. 128.

first-hand material proved beyond any doubt the horrific intentions of Saddam Hussein's regime in dealing with its Kurdish problem.<sup>85</sup> The very bottomline is that the Kurdish people were targeted for being just Kurds, and their struggle for survival as a distinct ethnic group, appeared to be without parallel when the objectives of *Anfal* became clear: Saddam Hussein had decided to deal with the Kurds - a quarter of Iraq's population, en masse, as a people.

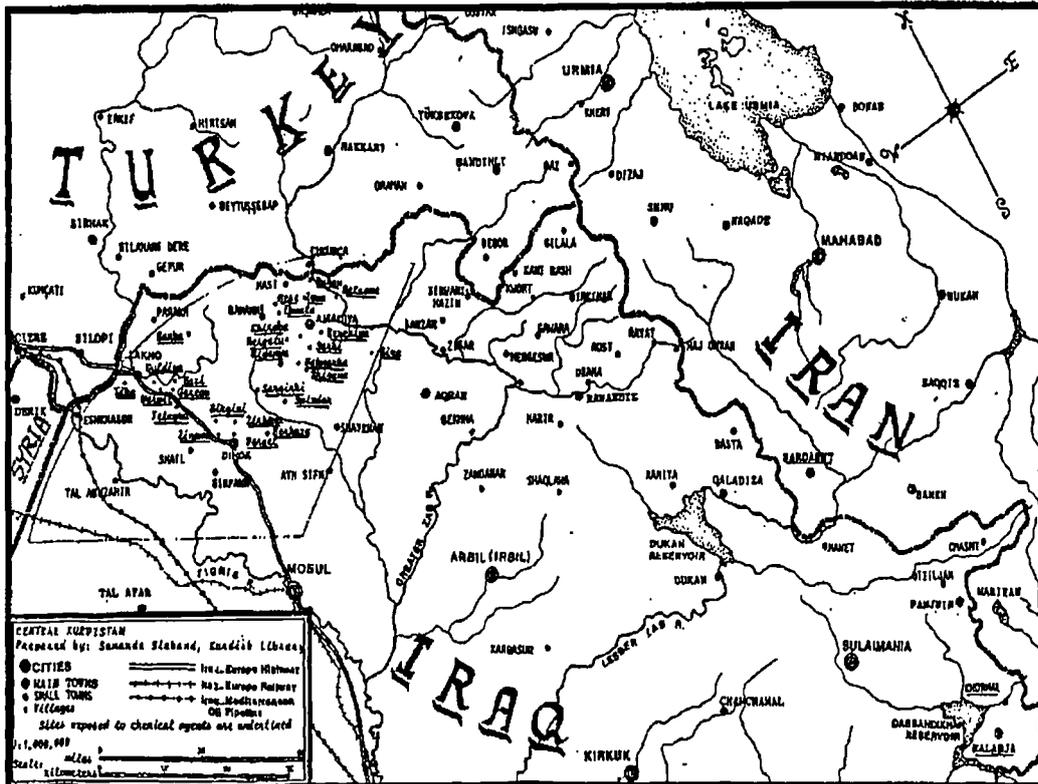


Figure 1.4.1: *The Triangle of Death*

Map identifying the sites of the Iraqi chemical attacks against Kurdish civilians in the third and fourth phases of the Anfal-campaign, i.e. August 1988: the triangle Dohuk, Zakho and Amadiya. Noteworthy is that the area in question is in the immediate vicinity of the major highway and railway connecting Iraq with Europe via Turkey and the vital Iraqi-Turkish oil-pipeline.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Human Rights Watch/Middle East, (1995), pp. xix-xx.

<sup>86</sup> *The Kurdish Program*, March 1989.

This military campaign was named after the eighth sura (chapter) of the Quran, *al-Anfal*, meaning 'spoils', as in the spoils of battle. This has generally been regarded as 'a blasphemous abuse of Quranic injunctions',<sup>87</sup> since the Baathist regime is secular in nature and hardly renowned for its religious piety. Important to point out nonetheless, is that the genocide became legitimised by using the religious language, an ever so important tool in the war propaganda. Portrayed as a counterinsurgency to the revolting Kurds, *Anfal* was implemented in four stages, each having a distinct beginning and an end. They ran from February to September 1988 and 'took the form of mass, indiscriminate air raids, followed by ground assaults'.<sup>88</sup> However, this extermination campaign is believed to have lasted much longer, as the state-sanctioned and highly organised savagery was not limited to the seven-month period in 1988. Human Rights Watch, the organisation, which was entrusted with the huge amounts of evidence, claims that the operation lasted from March 1987 to April 1989.<sup>89</sup>

The first phase included the infamous massive attack on Halabja. On 16 March 1988, Iraqi Mirage F1 planes dropped substantial amounts of chemical bombs, including lethal cyanide, nerve and mustard gas on the lively city of 70,000, a strike that claimed up to 5,000 dead, an overwhelming number of the victims being civilians.<sup>90</sup> The gassing of Halabja was primarily retaliation for the role of the Kurds in a series of Iranian conquests in Iraqi Kurdistan. 'Islamic fighters', i.e. Iranian troops, were the previous day reported to have 'liberated the religious people of Halabja from the domination and tyranny of the Baathist oppressors'.<sup>91</sup> The horrific attack appears to essentially have been a display of military power: Saddam Hussein evidently wanted to make it clear that the Kurds' only choices were submission or annihilation. Following the bombing, Iranian authorities invited foreign journalists to the scene of crime, to witness and report the atrocities carried out by the Iraqis, and had it not been for Iranian propaganda

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<sup>87</sup>. McDowall (1996), p. 357.

<sup>88</sup>. Karadaghi (1993), p. 225.

<sup>89</sup>. Human Rights Watch\Middle East, (1995), p. 1.

<sup>90</sup>. Ibid. pp. 70-71.

<sup>91</sup>. Quoted from page three in the Teheran War Information Headquarters propaganda-style leaflet *The Bloody Friday: Chemical Massacre of the People of Halabja by the Iraqi Regime*, (1988 Teheran). Also other, somewhat more independent sources confirm that the Iranian army seized Halabja in the days preceding the Iraqi gas attacks: e.g. McDowall (1996), p. 357.

purposes, the Halabja tragedy - the Kurds' Hiroshima - may never have come to international attention.

Amnesty International and the Iranian government joined forces 'to prompt a wide-spread outcry against Iraq's use of poison gas'.<sup>92</sup> This created international indignation which, however, failed to transform into anything but hollow rhetoric. Naturally this was a consequence of *realpolitik*. As the end of the Iran-Iraq war seemed to be drawing nearer, Western governments began competing for the lucrative deals bound to arise concerning post-war reconstruction of particularly the Iraqi infrastructure.<sup>93</sup> In that situation, a condemnation of Baghdad's treatment of the Kurds would clearly jeopardise future financial dealings with the economically so important Iraq and consequently the regime's use of chemical weapons was overlooked.

Following the UN-brokered cease-fire in mid-July 1988, military operations in Northern Iraq were intensified as *Anfal* went into its third and fourth phases, in a decisive attempt by Saddam Hussein to retaliate against the Kurds who had opposed him during the war. These attacks were so severe in nature, that the Kurdish leadership could no longer maintain their resistance against the Iraqi troops, but were forced into exile for the remaining two years of the decade.<sup>94</sup> Facing the merciless Iraqi attacks, the Kurdish leaders teamed up and established a coalition, the United Kurdish Front. According to the KDP-leader, Masoud Barzani, in an interview dating from 1989, this was 'an ideal time for unification to be practically achieved'.<sup>95</sup>

The chemical warfare of Iraq forced more than 100,000 civilians, (an estimate by the Kurdistan Medical Association in Sweden, who reported on the issue) in the Northern parts of Central Kurdistan to leave their homes and approach Turkey for more secure future prospects. However, on Turkish territory the civilian men, women and children were all collectively referred to as *peshmergas*. Despite the fact that these people fell into a genuine refugee

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<sup>92</sup> Ezell (1992), p. 97.

<sup>93</sup> McDowall (1996), p. 362.

<sup>94</sup> Karadaghi (1993), p. 226.

<sup>95</sup> Laizer (1991), p. 132.

category, they were not given refugee status by Turkish government.<sup>96</sup> The authorities in Ankara considered them only as ‘temporary guests in Turkey’,<sup>97</sup> guests who were kept in strictly guarded military camps, and provided with insufficient quantities of food, tents and clothing. This was the hopeless situation, which prevailed when the decade of major regional unrest was about to give way to a new era in Kurdish politics.

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<sup>96</sup>. Notable is that Turkey in the aftermath of World War II when signing international conventions granting political refuge to asylum seekers, specifically excluded refugees coming from countries on its southern and eastern borders. Randal (1998), p. 65.

<sup>97</sup>. Ahmad (1989), p. 4.

## 1.5 A turning-point in Kurdish history

During the second half of the twentieth century it gradually became clear that the repression against the Kurds constitutes a substantial threat to security and stability in the entire region.<sup>98</sup> This reality has perhaps never been more pronounced than in the early 1990s, when the aggressive anti-Kurdish measures taken by Baghdad in the wake of its defeat in Kuwait, created a major regional crisis. At a heavy cost, the anonymous Kurds and their sufferings under the reign of Saddam Hussein were brought to light. Rather suddenly, the oppressed people found itself in the focus of the world's attention, being presented with 'the offer of a lifetime': an internationally sanctioned and supported Kurdish autonomous entity in Central Kurdistan.

### 1.5.1 The Kurdish uprising and the establishment of 'Free Kurdistan'<sup>99</sup>

The defeat of the Iraqi army in Kuwait in February 1991 by the UN-sanctioned forces generated outbreaks of armed rebellion in the south as well as north of Iraq. The people of the Kurdish provinces followed the example set by the Shiite population of Basra and Karbala, revolts strongly favoured and openly encouraged by, above all, the Americans. President Bush repeatedly called upon the Iraqi people 'to take matters into their own hands, to force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside'.<sup>100</sup> Contrary to general belief and high expectations among the insurgents, no military intervention from the multinational forces was provided in support of their efforts to bring about the downfall of the Iraqi president. The Security Council mandate, under which the USA-led coalition operated, applied only to the liberation of Kuwait, and did not relate to how the Iraq was to be governed.<sup>101</sup> This was the official explanation as to why Baghdad

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<sup>98</sup>. Sami Zubaida elaborates on why this is the case. See his 'Introduction' in Stefan Sperl and Philip Kreyenbroek (eds.) (1992), *The Kurds. A Contemporary Overview*, London: Routledge, pp. 1-9.

<sup>99</sup>. Cf. Figure 1.5.1 – *The De Facto Autonomous Kurdish Region* - for the area specifically designated as the Kurdish safe haven.

<sup>100</sup>. Bulloch and Morris (1992), pp. 11-12.

<sup>101</sup>. Cf. UN Resolution 678, November 1990. For the full text of all UNSC Resolutions, see the UN Documentation Centre at <http://www.un.org/documents/>.

was given free hands to deal with its insubordinate people as deemed appropriate by the Baathists. These events, however, came to give much impetus to the discussion on whether massive violations of human rights are to be treated as a matter of internal affairs.

After crushing the revolt in the South, the troops loyal to Baghdad moved up north in order to restore governmental control in the Kurdish areas. By that time, in late March, the insurgents in the north had gained control of virtually all of Iraqi Kurdistan, including the strategically important Kirkuk and its oil installations.<sup>102</sup> The long-term objective of the insurrection appears to have been a revival and full implementation of the autonomy agreement of 1970. The establishment of an independent Kurdish state was not advocated, knowing that such a proposition would meet fierce opposition from Turkey and Iran. However, leaders of other Iraqi groups opposed to the regime in Baghdad were contacted, and a discussion about the formation of an anti-government movement was initiated. As a result of this, in mid-March, the Kurdish United Front of Iraq together with other Iraqi opposition groups consisting of Shiites, communists and various others, gathered in Beirut for a conference, in which great emphasis was put on the importance of unity and solidarity within the opposition. It was agreed to establish a democratic and federal state of Iraq, to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein, and in doing so, abolish the Arab Baath Socialist Party.<sup>103</sup>

Early on it became clear that the Kurdish rebellion lacked sufficient organisation to succeed. Initiated by the people themselves rather than any of the political groupings, the latter were faced with the difficult task of trying to organise a spontaneous public revolt already under way. Confronted with the refusal of the Kuwait-deployed multinational forces to provide any form of military assistance for the uprising, the Kurds were unable to keep their liberated areas for longer than approximately three weeks. There was another dimension in the 1991 uprising. The insurgency of 1991 was initially supported by those who previously had been loyal to the system. Soldiers of all ranks as well as civilian

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<sup>102</sup> Laizer (1996), pp. 4-5.

<sup>103</sup> Gestrin, *Huvudstadsbladet*, 6 April 1991.

administrators joined the revolt, but as the Kurds avenged the former Saddam-followers, the rebellion was doomed to failure. Defections from the Iraqi army ceased which gave Saddam Hussein the opportunity to restructure his forces and silence the rebels with severe brutality.

The Iraqi armed forces had in early April recaptured Kirkuk, Arbil, Dohok and Zakho in offensives, which reportedly had tens of thousands of Kurds killed, guerrillas as well as civilians.<sup>104</sup> Just as the *Anfal*-campaign had been deployed three years earlier at the end of the Iran-Iraq war in order to punish and eliminate disobedient Kurds, Baghdad made clear that such measures were still on the agenda.<sup>105</sup> So great was the fear of a renewed genocide based on previous experience that the majority of Kurds living in Iraq fled before the Iraqi army across the mountains into Iran and Turkey.

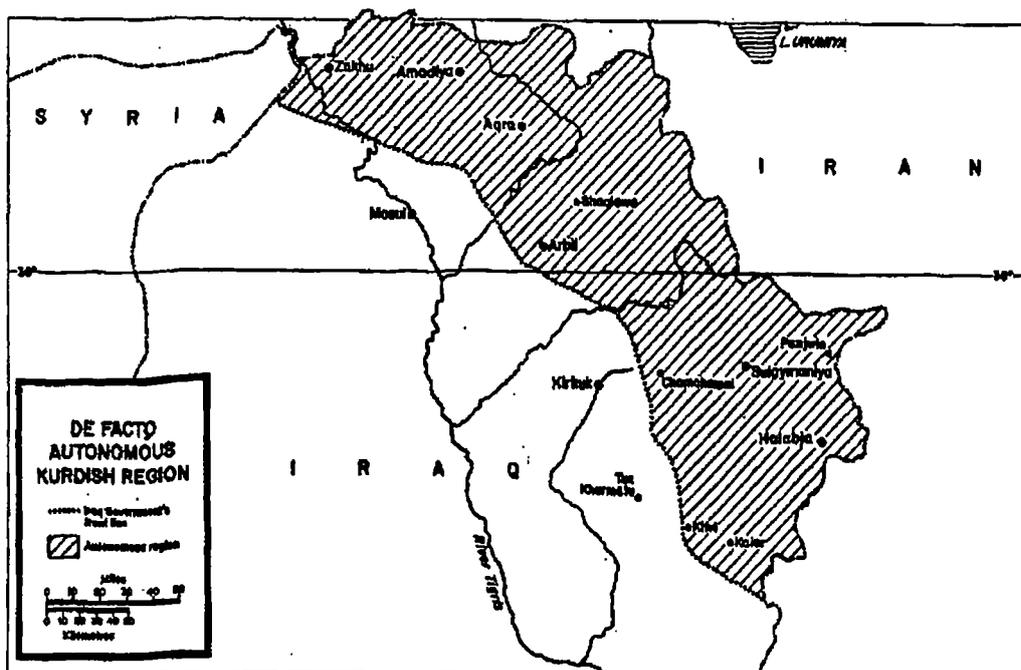


Figure 1.5.1: *The De Facto Autonomous Region*<sup>106</sup>

<sup>104</sup>. Ibid. p. 373.

<sup>105</sup>. In late autumn of 1990, during the Western build-up in the Gulf, Saddam sent a senior aide from Baghdad with the message, 'If you have forgotten Halabja, I would like to remind you that we are ready to repeat the operation.' Bulloch and Morris (1992), p. 9.

<sup>106</sup>. McDowall (1996), p. 374.

This enormous refugee problem and horrendous human tragedy created almost over-night, found no parallels elsewhere. As the UNHCR noted, never before had the world experienced such large numbers of people leaving their homeland in such a short time. It was reported that the number of Iraqi Kurds in Iran between the seventh and eighth of April increased from 563,000 to incredible 771,000, in less than 24-hours.<sup>107</sup> Pressurised by the destabilising situation on their borders, Ankara and Tehran sought international assistance and urged the United Nations to find a solution to the humanitarian crisis.

On 5 April, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 688, which condemned the repression of Iraqi civilians, and demanded of Baghdad to ensure the international humanitarian organisations full access to people in need of aid. Shortly afterwards relief operations were set up,<sup>108</sup> enabling the Kurdish refugees to safely return to Iraq, being protected against further onslaught by the Iraqi army. The general amnesty offered by Saddam Hussein to all Kurds was not taken seriously - after all, how could anyone determine who was to be regarded as a 'criminal element', and as such exempted from the amnesty proclaimed by the Iraqi president?<sup>109</sup>

The horrifying living conditions of over a million Kurds, representing every strata of society, all of whom overnight turned into panic-stricken refugees, created a strong public opinion reaction in the Western world, particularly in Europe, which called for resolute international action to be taken in favour of the displaced people. The role of the media was crucial in this regard and in particular massive television coverage was instrumental in creating and sustaining the pressure that came to be exerted on European and American politicians and decision-makers. As Jonathan Randal puts it, 'the Kurds owed their salvation first and foremost to television, that blunt instrument which quickly won over public opinion'.<sup>110</sup> It was indeed the force of popular opinion that made US Secretary of State James Baker on a courtesy visit to Turkey following the end of the war go to see a refugee camp in the border area. In spite

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<sup>107</sup>. von Hall, *SyD*, 1 April 1991.

<sup>108</sup>. Frelick (1993). p. 235.

<sup>109</sup>. Chua-Eoan, *Time*, 15 April 1991.

<sup>110</sup>. Randal (1998), p. 59.

of it being the briefest of visits, the exposure made a deep impression on Baker, who seemed to have realised that substantial and concerted international efforts were needed in order to solve the crisis.<sup>111</sup> Meanwhile, the Europeans were entertaining the idea of safe havens for the Kurds. On an extra summit meeting in early April 1991, Britain under Prime Minister John Major, presented a proposal to the European Community (EC), suggesting the establishment of an UN-supervised region for the Kurdish refugees in Northern Iraq, an idea, which was originally that of the Turkish president, Turgut Özal.<sup>112</sup>

The EC member states endorsed the British proposal of a Kurdish safe haven in Northern Iraq and urged the UN to sanction the European initiative.<sup>113</sup> A week later Washington followed Europe's lead and committed troops to protect the Kurds. In an immediate reaction to the EC announcement, Iraq strongly rejected what it labelled a conspiracy, and condemned it for being interference in the country's internal affairs. The Iraqi Prime Minister Saadoun Hammadi alleged that 'creating and inflating this problem is deliberate and is part of the chain of plots against Iraq's sovereignty'.<sup>114</sup> A more positive response to the EC plan came from Masoud Barzani, who described it as 'a great humanitarian gesture' and 'a big step forward,' although cautioned that a safe haven could only serve as a temporary measure until Saddam Hussein was ousted from power.<sup>115</sup>

As the Kurdish crisis had unfolded, the Gulf War allies had committed troops to establish and maintain refugee camps in Northern Iraq for those Kurds who had sought refuge across the Iranian and Turkish borders.<sup>116</sup> Baghdad was subsequently warned that military retaliation was to be expected if the Iraqis in any way interfered in relief operations undertaken north of the 36<sup>th</sup> parallel, and by the end of April Kurdish refugees were returning to Iraq in large numbers. By then, several non-governmental organisations along with some UN-agencies had taken the responsibility for the provision of essential services in the area.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>. Ibid. p. 67-68.

<sup>112</sup>. Entessar (1992), p. 153.

<sup>113</sup>. Petzell, *SvD*, 9 April 1991.

<sup>114</sup>. Ibrahim, *IHT*, 10 April 1991 (quoted by INA – the official Iraqi press agency).

<sup>115</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>116</sup>. Ullenius, *SvD*, 18 April 1991.

<sup>117</sup>. McDowall (1996), pp. 375-376.

In order for the international community to effectively supervise the area, including the provision of humanitarian aid, and enforce the Iraqi air exclusion zone north of the 36<sup>th</sup> parallel, a surveillance system was established. Within the framework of NATO, French, British, Turkish and US aircraft operated from a military base in southern Turkey, Incirlik, with a military co-ordination centre located in the northwestern city of Zahko, under a mandate which came to be reviewed every six months in the Turkish parliament.<sup>118</sup>

During the discussions in the UN as how to create and maintain secure conditions for the Kurds within Iraq, Saddam Hussein was reported to have invited a Kurdish delegation to Baghdad for negotiations on the future status of Iraqi Kurdistan.<sup>119</sup> The KDP and the PUK differed in their views on the central issue: whether to sign a limited autonomy agreement with Saddam Hussein, which was advocated by Barzani, or to demand more territory and more political concessions from Baghdad, as Talabani promoted,<sup>120</sup> and eventually these talks failed to produce any result.

### 1.5.2 The first free Kurdish elections

Since the establishment of the security zone, the divided leadership of the Kurdistan Front administered Northern Iraq. Due to constant political infighting and veto power of each of the eight parties constituting the Front,<sup>121</sup> a much-needed central authority was all but non-existent. With the announcement of general Kurdish elections to be held in May 1992, people anticipated an end to this economic and political chaos, resulting from the absence of a negotiated autonomy agreement with the Iraqi government. A 105-member National Assembly, (with five seats reserved for Christian Assyrians), were to be appointed as well as a supreme Kurdish leader for the area.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>. Kutschera, *The Middle East*, November 1995.

<sup>119</sup>. Mallet, *FT*, 26 April 1991.

<sup>120</sup>. Hitchens (1992).

<sup>121</sup>. McDowall (1996), p. 380.

<sup>122</sup>. *SvD*, 5 June 1992, (author unknown).

All eight parties constituting the Kurdish Front participated in the electoral process, although none of the smaller groups managed to gain any seats in the Assembly, due to failure to obtain the seven per cent quota of votes needed to be represented in the parliament. The KDP and the PUK hence dominated completely in the elections, with Barzani and Talabani contending for the presidency alongside two more symbolic candidates, the leader for the socialist party, and a leading religious political figure.<sup>123</sup>

Baghdad reacted with fury to the proposed parliamentary elections in the north, and threatened with reprisals to what the Baathists perceived as being illegal activities. Also Turkey felt a certain apprehension about the forthcoming elections, as did Syria and Iran, but the Iraqi Kurds strongly denied any suggestions that it would be stepping-stone on the path to Kurdish independence and proclamation of statehood. Instead, the Kurds stressed how the elections would serve the great need to fill the administrative vacuum in the north, caused by the Gulf War and subsequent withdrawal of the Iraqi civil services. It also appears quite likely that there was a real fear among Kurdish leaders to proclaim an independent state as that might have prompted Iran and Turkey to close their borders – the virtual lifeline for the Iraqi Kurds.<sup>124</sup>

On Election Day, 19 May 1992 (postponed 48 hours due to an administrative failure), a group of international observers, consisting of West European parliamentarians, human rights activists and journalists were present at the polling stations. They had been invited by the Kurds in order to supervise the first Kurdish steps towards democracy.<sup>125</sup> The elections were reported to have been fair, and they were far more substantial than previous ones held in September 1989. The then local Kurdish parliament, established in 1980 in Arbil, with its 50 elected MPs, assigned the task of running the internal affairs of the Kurdish province, was in reality under the strict control of Baghdad.<sup>126</sup> In 1992, however, there was no such Iraqi interference and the Kurdish elections

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<sup>123</sup>. Boström, *DN*, 15 May 1992.

<sup>124</sup>. Hedges, *IHT*, 7 February 1992.

<sup>125</sup>. Mårtensson, *GP*, 6 June 1992.

<sup>126</sup>. Lundegård, *DN*, 11 September 1989.

were conducted in a satisfying manner, according to the independent observers present.

Being the first free election ever in Kurdish history, virtually everyone was eager to register his or her vote, resulting in just about the whole electorate turning up at the polling stations. None of the smaller Kurdish parties were particularly successful, as only the KDP and the PUK achieved representation in the Assembly. (See Figure 1.5.2 *Results of the May 1992 Parliamentary Elections*.) The two political adversaries received an almost equal number of seats, but the 50/50 power share between the two created tensions, which came to prove untenable. The concurrent election for a paramount leader was also a close run.

Reportedly 48 per cent of the voters favoured Masoud Barzani in the top position, whereas Jalal Talabani received the lower figure of 45 per cent.<sup>127</sup> (See Figure 1.5.3 *Results of the May 1992 Head of the National Liberation Movement Election*.) A run-off election to produce a clear victory for one of the two candidates was outlined, but that plan was never materialised.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> McDowall, (1996), p. 381.

<sup>128</sup> Kakai (1994), p. 127.

Figure 1.5.2: Results of the May 1992 Parliamentary Elections

Participating Parties	Votes received (in numbers)	Votes received (in per cent)
The Democratic Party of Kurdistan (KDP)	437,879	45.27
The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)	423,833	43.81
The Islamic Election Alliance (IBR)	49,108	5.1
The Socialist Alliance (KSP+PASOK)	24,882	2.54
The Iraqi Communist Party - Kurdistan Section (IKP-KS)	21,123	2.18
The Kurdistan Popular Democratic Party (KPDP)	9,903	1
Independent Democrats	501	0.1

The total number of votes were 971,953 of whom 4,724 were declared invalid.

Figure 1.5.3 Results of the May 1992 Head of the National Liberation Movement Election

Leader-candidates	Votes received (in numbers)	Votes received (in per cent)
Masoud Barzani (KDP)	466,819	48.5
Jalal Talabani (PUK)	441,057	45.5
Othman Abdul-Aziz (IBR)	38,865	2.5
Mahmoud Othman	23,309	2.5

The total number of votes was 982,649 of which 12,599 were declared invalid.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>129</sup> . Statistics for the two tables found in Institut Kurde de Paris' *Information and liaison bulletin*, No 86, May 1992, pp. 2-3.

At the beginning of October 1992, the Iraqi Kurds announced the formation of a Kurdish federal state, with the aim to become incorporated as a member of a future Iraqi federation. This proclamation was fully recognised by the Iraqi National Congress (INC) in December the same year.<sup>130</sup> The Kurdish view on federalism in Iraq, as spelt out in the October-announcement, significantly stressed ‘essentially a territorial view ... [which] envisages rights for Kurds that are constitutionally enshrined’,<sup>131</sup> that is, the territorial integrity of Iraq would not be endangered. Despite repeated assurances from the Kurdish leaders in Northern Iraq that an independent Kurdish state was not contemplated or sought after, neighbouring Turkey, Iran and Syria became visibly nervous by the developments.<sup>132</sup>

### 1.5.3 The outbreak of civil war

An armed conflict broke out in late December 1993 between the PUK and the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan, IMK, as the latter tried to increase its influence in traditional PUK-territory. Talabani was successful against the militarily weaker IMK, but accepted mediation offered by the KDP, which brought the warring parties to the negotiating table to sign a peace accord.<sup>133</sup> ‘Free Kurdistan’ was, however, to experience far more serious friction, as hostilities between the KDP and the PUK erupted in May 1994, effectively dividing the region into two zones. A trivial conflict over land-ownership developed into an all out war, for which the long-standing divide between the parties and the failure to resolve it, was the underlying cause.<sup>134</sup> The major source of discontent had for long been the control of the customs duties levied on all traffic crossing the northern border to Turkey. Situated in traditionally KDP-controlled territory, and administered by the same, Barzani was criticised for not fairly allocating the funds. These revenues were allegedly spent on financing their own party organisation rather than the common Kurdish Administration. This border

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<sup>130</sup> Sheikhmous (1993).

<sup>131</sup> Allawi (1994), p. 214.

<sup>132</sup> The preventive action taken by these regional countries are examined in chapter six.

<sup>133</sup> McDowall (1996), p. 387.

<sup>134</sup> Hirst, *The Guardian*, 14 May 1994.

crossing in the north is far more lucrative than in the south-eastern parts of the area of self-rule, where the PUK controls the less profitable cross-border trade with Iran. Talabani's organisation was, on the other hand, accused of embezzling large sums from the joint Kurdish ministry of finance and collaborating with the government in Baghdad.<sup>135</sup>

Thus, despite the promising development following the Kurdish uprising and exodus of the spring of 1991, the situation in the autonomous Kurdish region came to deteriorate severely after approximately two years of democratically elected institutions. Despite repeated attempts throughout 1994 by the INC to put an end to the infighting, a hopeless state of affairs prevailed, whereby the region increasingly came to be seen as being 'ruled by the people with the most impressive weapons'.<sup>136</sup>

In late February 1995, a massive car bomb exploded in the KDP-controlled town of Zakho killing some 80 people. Barzani instantly proclaimed that the PUK planted the bomb, an accusation strongly rejected by Talabani.<sup>137</sup> However, it would not be far-fetched to suspect a foreign agent on a mission from Tehran, Baghdad or Ankara to have been responsible for the terrorist action, in an attempt to further destabilise the Kurdish area of self-rule. Despite the PUK denying all responsibility for the attack, the relations between the two antagonists suffered as a result of it.

The internecine fighting between the PUK and the KDP enabled the Kurdistan's Workers' Party to increase its presence significantly on the Iraqi side of the Turkish border. This prompted Turkey to make a massive invasion into Northern Iraq in the spring of 1995 in an effort to hunt down PKK-fighters and destroy their bases. Largely unsuccessful (the Turkish army came to return several times in the following years), it did nothing to stem the Kurdish infighting that increased in scope and intensity. As the PUK and KDP resumed their armed conflict in late summer of 1995, it was now Iran's turn to offer its Islamic

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<sup>135</sup> Waller, *Time*, 27 March 1995.

<sup>136</sup> Kutschera, *The Middle East*, November 1995.

<sup>137</sup> *Iran News*, 1 April 1995 (author unknown).

government's services for mediation between the parties. This attempt by the eastern neighbour to broker peace between the warring factions prompted American diplomats to intervene, as Iranian influence in the area was not felt to serve the interests of the international community in the wider region.<sup>138</sup> One of the most urgent issues to resolve was how to deal with the PKK, i.e. to find a common approach to the Kurdish Workers' Party, with whom the KDP had clashed militarily, and whom the PUK supported. Moreover, the allocation of the vital customs duties levied on all traffic crossing the Turkish border needed much discussion, as did the issue of demilitarisation of the capital Arbil, which was under several months of occupation by Talabani's forces.<sup>139</sup>

Accordingly, Washington took the initiative and organised a peace conference on Ireland in August 1995, with a second round of meetings in September. However, the US-sponsored peace negotiations made negligible progress on these important questions. Apart from a new cease-fire, which had a short life expectancy, no general agreement was reached in the September talks.<sup>140</sup> There seemed to be a general awareness of the importance of enlarging the Assembly, to incorporate independent observers as well as representatives from other Kurdish parties in the parliamentary organisation, who could be assigned the task of working out a plan to break the deadlock in the peace negotiations, but how to deal with this issue seemed to be beyond the capacity of both parties.

Meanwhile, Barzani continued to receive support from Turkey for the purpose of fighting the PKK operating from KDP-controlled territory, and in its pursuit of Turkish-Kurdish guerrillas, fierce clashes between the two Kurdish parties occurred. In the meantime, the PUK approached Iran and received similar support from Tehran as did the KDP from Ankara, the only difference being that with the Iranians came the revolutionary Islamic dimension, which was not part of the Turkish parcel.

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<sup>138</sup> Such regional issues are dealt with in part C of the thesis.

<sup>139</sup> Jarrah, *MEI*, No 506, 4 August 1995.

<sup>140</sup> *Id.* 22 September 1995.

Following a brief Iranian incursion into Northern Iraq in the summer of 1996, the US made yet another effort to reconcile the rival groups. A peace conference in London was organised, but broke down due to the Iraqi invasion on 31 August into the area of Kurdish self-rule.<sup>141</sup> In response to a formal request from Barzani,<sup>142</sup> who felt pressurised by the military threat from Tehran, to which the limited military capacity of KDP was unable to respond forcefully, Saddam Hussein was pleased to offer the services of his armed forces.<sup>143</sup> Seizing the golden opportunity, the Iraqi government also declared its wish to reassert Iraqi sovereignty over the Kurdish autonomous region, which would also involve the restoration of trade links with the northern parts of the country. Arbil was quickly captured and the troops, estimated to around 40 000 – the largest Iraqi military operation since the Gulf War – advanced to Sulaymania. As Baghdad was forced by international pressure to withdraw its forces on 2 September, control of the recaptured areas was entrusted to the KDP.<sup>144</sup>

With the departure of the Iraqi army from the Kurdish security zone, fierce fighting broke out between the PUK and the KDP. As the latter managed to seize control of Sulaymania, a massive flow of refugees was created, and tens of thousands of Kurds fled to Iran. However, the power balance in the autonomous region was soon back to the previous status quo, as the PUK had regained much of its lost territory by mid-October, but fears of repeated intervention by Baghdad kept Talabani from attacking Arbil.<sup>145</sup>

At the end of October, the PUK and KDP were once again called upon to attend peace negotiations in Ankara, as arranged by the US. Reportedly, the two opponents agreed to refrain from seeking the help of external actors and work decisively towards a permanent cease-fire. They were also reported to have accepted the deployment of an internationally sanctioned peace monitoring force, including northern Iraqi Turkmens and Assyrians, and the re-

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<sup>141</sup>. This event contributed strongly to the OPC being brought to an end. See chapter seven, section 7.2.1.

<sup>142</sup>. See for instance Hugh Pope, *MEI*, No 533, 6 September 1996.

<sup>143</sup>. Lundegård, *SvD*, 22 September 1996.

<sup>144</sup>. *Id.* 3 September 1996.

<sup>145</sup>. Nuttall, *The Guardian*, 15 October 1996.

establishment of a common Kurdish Administration.<sup>146</sup> Since then, each side has persistently accused the other of violating previously reached agreements, while secretly making attempts to establish contact with Iran as well as Turkey and Iraq. This state of affairs continued, more or less, until a sustainable agreement was reached in September 1998 in Washington D.C.

#### 1.5.4 Developments after 1998

In September 1998 the KDP and the PUK with American direction agreed to a settlement of their armed conflict. Known as the Washington Agreement, it was cautiously and wearily reported as yet another agreement in the long run of tentative peace treaties signed by the warring parties.<sup>147</sup> Defying most predictions, however, the mutual decision to end the devastating inter-Kurdish war agreed upon in the Washington talks of September 1998 has not been seriously challenged since, even though the practical implementation of the actual agreement has not been forthcoming. As Michael Gunter writes,

the accord was really just an ambitious agreement to agree. It set forth a timetable for re-establishing a unified regional administration, contained provisions for regional elections by the summer of 1999 and for revenue sharing based on the needs of the population, and, in a gesture toward Turkish fears concerning the PKK, provided for the security of the Iraqi Kurdish borders.<sup>148</sup>

A notable element recently has been the growing Islamist dimension in Iraqi Kurdish politics. As noted in the Figure 1.4.2, the results of the May 1992 parliamentary elections showed that the Islamic party, the IMK, were the third largest political grouping in Northern Iraq. Based in the southern-eastern part of the Kurdish self-ruling region, this group has clashed repeatedly with the PUK.

In September 2001, a militant Islamic group was established in the autonomous region. Resulting from a merger between several extremist splinter groups of the

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<sup>146</sup>. Cockburn, *The Independent*, 2 November 1996.

<sup>147</sup>. Dabrowska, *MEI*, No 584, 2 October 1998.

<sup>148</sup>. Gunter (1999), p. 108.

IMK, who had been outlawed through a collective PUK-KDP effort, *Jund al-Islam* ('The Army of Islam'), with alleged ties to the Taliban in Afghanistan and Osama bin Laden's *al-Qaida* organisation made Halabja its area of control.<sup>149</sup>

In the early days of the coalition-building effort following the World Trade Centre bombing, the Iraqi Kurds began promoting international intervention against Iraq,<sup>150</sup> and amidst the subsequent activities of *Jund al-Islam* in their area, both parties have been clamping down heavily on the radical Islamists. It is, however, the PUK that has taken the heaviest blow due to its direct involvement in fighting the Islamists. There have also been reports of Saddam Hussein supporting and promoting groups such as *Jund al-Islam*.<sup>151</sup>

This issue of the growing Islamic dimension in Iraqi Kurdish politics will be revisited in the fourth chapter. Against this background of the quest of the Kurdish political movement and the area in which it operates, the discussion will now move on to examining the concepts of nation and state and theories of nationalism.

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<sup>149</sup> Hiwa Osman, *BBC*, 2 October 2001.

<sup>150</sup> Pope, N., *MEI*, No 660, 12 October 2001.

<sup>151</sup> E.g. Michael Rubin, 'The Islamist Threat in Iraqi Kurdistan', *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, December 2001.

## **PART B**

### Nation, Nationalism, Identity and the Kurds

## Chapter 2: Notions of Nation, State and Nationalism

### 2.1 Nation, state, nation-state?

[a nation] links individual and community, past and present; it gives to cold, impersonal structures an aura of warm, intimate togetherness. In other words, nationhood is hard to define not because it is confused and nonsensical, but because it is extremely subtle, and, moreover, because ... an element of myth is essential to it.<sup>1</sup>

#### 2.1.1 The nation: a multifaceted phenomenon

The term nation can be understood in two interrelated ways since it carries the meaning of nation-state as well as that of the people living within the state. The linkage between these two meanings exposes the general ideology of nationalism, which is based on the widely held principle that ‘any ‘nation-as-people’ should have their ‘nation-as-state’’.<sup>2</sup> This principle assumes the existence of units such as national peoples, or nations. A quick look at the vast literature on the subject makes it abundantly clear that it is unattainable an aim attempting to find a scientific precise definition of the nation, let alone one that leading experts agree upon.

A national people or nation is, according to Anthony Smith, ‘*a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members*’.<sup>3</sup> Admittedly reasonably all-inclusive, it shares the self-differentiating aspect of a definition offered by Walker Connor who regards self-consciousness as being the nation’s defining attribute: the ‘essence of the nation’, he says, ‘is a matter of attitude, the tangible manifestations of cultural

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<sup>1</sup>. Canovan (1996b), p. 76.

<sup>2</sup>. Billig (1995), p. 24.

<sup>3</sup>. Smith (1991), p. 14 (*italics original*).

distinctiveness are significant only to the degree that they contribute to the sense of uniqueness'.<sup>4</sup> Such idealistic possibilities are not dominant in other definitions of the term. Deutsch, for example, identifies the nation with a people constituted as a state. His proposal of the nation being 'a people who have hold of a state',<sup>5</sup> is supplemented by Giddens, who suggests that a nation 'only exists when a state has a unified administrative reach over territory over which its sovereignty is claimed'.<sup>6</sup> Reducing the nation to merely the institutional form of social organisation and omitting the notion of nation-as-people appears far too restrictive, particularly in a context where a nation(-as-people) clearly exists, but has not been endowed with a state.

The possible ways of interpreting this term seem endless and the definition of the nation certainly presents far greater difficulties than those encountered when defining the clear-cut concept of the state. Instead of settling for what is likely to be an inadequate definition of the nation, it may be a wiser to employ, as Margaret Canovan does, a more dialectical method, trying to acquire an understanding of the phenomenon by approaching it from five different angles.<sup>7</sup>

Firstly, as Deutsch and Giddens asserted, nations may take the form of states. However, their definitions suffer a marked lack of nuance as one concept is equated with the other. As Seton-Watson points out, 'there were states long before there were nations, and there are some nations that are much older than most states that exist today'.<sup>8</sup> In other words, far from all existing states are nation-states and similarly, many nations exist without a corresponding state. That a political dimension is somehow part of the concept, however, is succinctly expressed by Anthony Smith in saying that 'Whatever else it may be, what we mean by "national" identity involves some sense of political community, however tenuous'.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>. Connor (1994), p.43.

<sup>5</sup>. Deutsch (1969), p. 19.

<sup>6</sup>. Giddens (1985), p. 119.

<sup>7</sup>. Canovan (1996a), p. 51-60.

<sup>8</sup>. Seton-Watson (1977), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup>. Smith (1991), p. 9. For more on 'national identity' see forthcoming chapter four: Kurdish Identity Formation.

Secondly, the view of nations as cultural communities is epitomised in Fichte's statement that 'Wherever a separate language is found, there a separate nation exists'.<sup>10</sup> However, the assumption of such close connection between language and the spirit of a people does not explain why nationalists in places as diverse as Ireland and India are using English as their preferred form of verbal communication. This contradiction prompts the application of a looser definition of culture, a conception that takes on an anthropological perspective.<sup>11</sup>

Thirdly, nations can be conceived of in terms of the subjective identities of individuals. Accordingly, it may be consciousness, or 'willed adherence',<sup>12</sup> rather than the seemingly objective characteristics laid out in Anthony Smith's definition above that makes a people a nation. Then, clearly, the claiming of nationhood raises many issues of subjective and objective definition. Nationalist ideologies for logical reasons devise objective characteristics of their nations, but their definitions do not hold 'since none of these characteristics is essential for national unity, and they all play different parts at different times'.<sup>13</sup> Nations appear unlikely ever to be 'objective communities' since they are not and cannot be constructed around clear, objective criteria adhered to by all national members. More appropriately, they may be considered 'imagined communities', in the anthropological spirit of Benedict Anderson, whose influential book treats the nation as an imaginary identity-construct. It is an imagined political community 'because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of the communion'.<sup>14</sup> Basically the same sentiment can be found in a preceding standard work on nations and nationalism. Hugh Seton-Watson wrote in 1977 that 'a nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they

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<sup>10</sup>. Fichte (1922), *Addresses to the German Nation*, Chicago: Open Court, p. 215, as quoted in Canovan (1996a), p. 52.

<sup>11</sup>. As to why an anthropological perspective is essential for a full understanding of nationalism and its underlying concepts, see ch. 6 of Thomas Hylland Eriksen's *Ethnicity and Nationalism. Anthropological Perspectives*, London: Pluto Press (1993).

<sup>12</sup>. Gellner (1983a), p. 53.

<sup>13</sup>. Vogler (1985), p. 62.

<sup>14</sup>. Anderson (1991), p. 6.

formed one',<sup>15</sup> in which 'consider themselves' may be translated into 'imagine themselves'.

For Anderson the nation is imagined as *limited* 'because even the largest of them has finite, if elastic boundaries beyond which lie other nations'. It is moreover imagined as *sovereign* in that it challenges the legitimacy of both religion and monarchy. It is finally imagined as a *community* because 'regardless of actual inequality, the nation is conceived of as a deep horizontal comradeship'.<sup>16</sup> This imagined community that embraces the inhabitants of a particular territory stretches through time with its uniquely own past and future, a dimension that ensures the nation to maintain a sense of its own history, separate from everybody else's.

This sort of imaginary nature of the notion might have been taken a step too far by Walker Connor in the quoted passage above, singling out attitude as *the* essence of a nation. After all, as Canovan excels in conveying,

although a nation would cease to exist if all its individual members ceased to think in national terms, its existence confronts any particular member as part of objective reality. The nation I belong to may be all in the mind, but it is not all in *my* mind and I cannot alter the situation by an act of will.<sup>17</sup>

Fourthly, nations can also be seen as ethnic groups or extensions of such groupings. Anthony Smith has to be singled out as *the* most ardent proponent of the idea of nations having ethnic origins, contending that an ethnic core provides the nation with the historical depth necessary for its proper functioning in modern politics. The *ethnie*, as Smith terms the ethnic community, is then the ancient social formation from which the modern nation has developed. That the origins of a national community are to be found in pre-modern ethnic sentiments can be linked to the primordialist view, which maintains that the political modernisation of nation building often stimulates the solidification of

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<sup>15</sup>. Seton-Watson (1977) p. 5.

<sup>16</sup>. Anderson (1991), p. 7 (italics added).

<sup>17</sup>. Canovan (1996a), p. 55.

presupposed cultural ties and strengthens 'primordial attachments'.<sup>18</sup> The resilience of this type of consciousness should not be underestimated argues Smith, and cautions against the belief that nations are modern products.<sup>19</sup> Later developing these thoughts, it is noted that this is not to say that 'every modern nation must be founded on some antecedent ethnic ties ... but many such nations ... are based on such ties, including the first nations in the West ... and they acted as models and pioneers of the idea of 'nation' for others'.<sup>20</sup> This approach for understanding the growth of nations is termed 'ethno-symbolic'.<sup>21</sup>

Fifthly, nations are by some viewed as being products of modernisation. Ernest Gellner is unquestionably the leading authority among the modernists, and his influential analyses are based on the assumption that nations are invented rather than being authentic formations.<sup>22</sup>

Worth noting in passing is an unusual approach to the nation provided by Bauer, who questions the widely held assumption that the nation is a unit that is cultural and political in nature. Instead he analyses it in a historical and materialist light and argues that the cultural character of the nation develops historically, resulting from the sharing of common conditions of material life. As the conditions of material life vary, the national character is also subject to changes – hence it is not appropriate to define the nation as a fixed or static entity.<sup>23</sup> While not contesting its dynamic nature, there is no wish to settle for any particular interpretation of the concept, since it is recognised that the shape and structure of the nation is always open to interpretation.

Of the five approaches considered here, each contains 'some truth but leads

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<sup>18</sup>. A concept most often identified with Clifford Geertz and his primordial model of ethnicity. See for example *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (1973), New York: Basic Books. (This is also discussed, although briefly, in forthcoming chapter four: Kurdish Identity formation.)

<sup>19</sup>. Smith (1986a): argument introduced and outlined in the first chapter.

<sup>20</sup>. Id. (1999), p. 40.

<sup>21</sup>. A. D. Smith provides more insight into 'ethno-symbolism' in chapter eight of his *Nationalism and Modernism. A critical survey of recent theories of nations and nationalism*, London: Routledge (2000) [1998].

<sup>22</sup>. See in particular his *Thought and Change* (1964).

<sup>23</sup>. Bauer (1978), pp. 106-17.

ultimately into blind alley',<sup>24</sup> which highlights the mediating role of the nation. Indeed, it would appear that the key to its complex nature lies in its 'ability to mediate between different aspects of social and political life'.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, instead of attempting to carve a fixed definition out of these conflicting interpretations of a phenomenon that indeed 'links individual and community, past and present',<sup>26</sup> the assumption is that it is the convergence of these five different elements that forms the basis of the nation.

### 2.1.2 To develop a nation into a state - the idea of the nation-state

Considering the major difficulties encountered when attempting to find a definition for 'nation', defining the state is rather unproblematic an exercise. The predominant definition of the state - defined mainly in institutional terms but containing a clear functional element, is one originally put forward by Max Weber. It holds that the state is a distinguishable set of institutions and people that advocate centralism insofar as the centre exercises control over a territorially demarcated area over which it has a monopoly of authoritative binding rule-making. Another defining characteristic of the state, as emphasised by Weber, is that it also has a monopoly over the legitimate use of physical force.<sup>27</sup> As summarised by a Weberian scholar, the generic definition of the state reads as a political body comprising 'a set of differentiated, autonomous and public institutions, which are territorially centralised and claim jurisdiction over a given territory, including the monopoly over coercion and extraction'.<sup>28</sup>

- The difficulties absent from the definition of the state, however, begin to arise when 'nation' and 'state' are put together creating the concept of the nation-state - considered 'naturally' to combine the two terms. This often creates complications. As 'the specialisation and concentration of order maintenance',<sup>29</sup> the state is bounded but often weakly rooted whereas the nation may often be

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<sup>24</sup>. Canovan (1996a), p. 50.

<sup>25</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>. Id. (1996b), p. 76.

<sup>27</sup>. Weber (1968), p. 64.

<sup>28</sup>. Smith (1986b), p. 235.

<sup>29</sup>. Gellner (1983a), p. 4.

poorly demarcated but vibrant.<sup>30</sup> Together they would ideally transform into a bounded vibrant nation-state.

This idea that the state should serve the nation was first brought up for discussion at the Congress of Vienna in 1815,<sup>31</sup> and as Giddens has emphasised, war came to be central to the emergence and development of this new type of political body.<sup>32</sup> The basic idea of the nation-state is thus one that indicates a tight correspondence between nation and state: that each sovereign state should be a nation-state of people who share all the characteristics of a nation. What this notion stipulates, i.e. for the state and the nation to stand for one organic whole, has, however, proved difficult to uphold in practice. There is a wide gap between ideal and reality. In reality most states are polyethnic in composition and the term nation-state is therefore not wholly suitable. As Walker Connor has shown, less than ten percent of all contemporary states can be described as being homogeneous, one-nation states, where the boundaries of the state coincide with the boundaries of the ethnic community.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, very few nations are coterminous with existing states. When this situation occurs, the nation is said to be *state-reinforcing*. In large empires, however, such as the Ottoman or Russian, nations were much smaller than state boundaries, so they become *state-subverting*. A third condition arises when the nation is bigger than any existing state, as was the case in the seventeenth century German and Italian parts of Europe. The role of the nation would then be *state-creating*.<sup>34</sup>

- The nation-state evidently combines the cultural and political ideas of the nation and this political-territorial construct may be 'the product of a common consciousness which was derived far more from living in common and sharing

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<sup>30</sup>. Mann (1995), p. 46.

<sup>31</sup>. Navari (1981), p. 14.

<sup>32</sup>. Cf. Giddens (1985).

<sup>33</sup>. Connor (1972), p. 320. Even though Connor's estimates were done in the early 1970s (the number of states was at that time 132, out of which only 12 were considered genuine nation-states) the general trend is not thought to have changed substantially.

<sup>34</sup>. Mann (1995), p. 46.

common ideals than from any racial, linguistic or cultural inheritance'.<sup>35</sup> History shows that such nation-building, leading to the creation of a nation-state, is not a harmonious process, in which the nation-as-people naturally matures and gradually grows into its new role of nation-as-state. On the contrary, nation-states were often created out of older loyalties. As expressed by Billig, 'the peoples whom nation-states were claiming to represent often had nurtured a sense of peoplehood before the age of nationhood, even if this was not co-extensive with the peoplehood, claimed by the state'.<sup>36</sup> It was this nurtured sense of peoplehood expressed through the people's ethnic characteristics (those of language, traditions and customs but also religion) that gave unity to the nation. When the sense of peoplehood was not very pronounced or even non-existent, self-awareness, as argued earlier an important element in the process of building a 'self-sustainable' nation, increased in significance. Tivey explains: 'many difficulties – such as lack of a common language, or a short history – may be overcome if people in a particular place become convinced of their nationhood'.<sup>37</sup> Since this type of nationhood seen in many multinational states would often prove to be a constructed one, as a major measure to facilitate the transfer of primary allegiance from the various sub-state nations to the state, 'the *sine qua non* of successful integration' as Walker Connor puts it, 'the true goal is not "nation-building" but "nation-destroying"'.<sup>38</sup>

A widely debated issue is which of the two was first to appear: the nation-as-people or the nation-as-state. While Gellner acknowledges that throughout history both states and nations have emerged without the support of the other, he argues that 'it is more debatable whether the normative idea of the nation, in its modern sense, did not presuppose the prior existence of the state'.<sup>39</sup> Following this line, one would go from the political to the cultural, assuming the nation-as-state arrived first on the scene. Some nation-states have certainly created their desired national communities, but it is equally true that national identities have been created long before there was any nation-state to politically enforce them.

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<sup>35</sup>. Cobban (1969), pp. 121-22.

<sup>36</sup>. Billig (1995), p. 26.

<sup>37</sup>. Tivey (1981a), p. 6.

<sup>38</sup>. Connor (1972), p. 336.

<sup>39</sup>. Gellner (1983a), p. 6.

Many of the current states of the Middle East would be placed in the first category. Perhaps with a lesser degree of consciousness, but essentially in the same spirit as the famous Italian nationalist Massimo d'Azeglio, who after Risorgimento declared: 'We have made Italy, now we have to make Italians',<sup>40</sup> as Iraq was being formed, massive social engineering is required because its national identity had to be invented. This situation implies that the nation-state is an ideological construction, that it 'represents a concentration of authority within territorial boundaries and the imposition of common values on the society'.<sup>41</sup> A not so authentic nation-state may moreover find it difficult to carry out one of the essential tasks of the state, namely its integration function, i.e. to 'bind together its various social and territorial segments into an effective whole', a horizontal exercise for territorial groups.<sup>42</sup>

While an analysis of nationalism is to follow below, one aspect of the general use of the term is of great relevance here and will be examined accordingly. Nationalism can be found under different guises, and in certain cases it has lost its original meaning, i.e. that it represents loyalty to the state, and not, properly conceived, to the nation. It is this use of the term nationalism that causes conceptual confusion between nation and state. The origin of this confusion, as suggested by Yael Tamir, is that 'it is part of a deliberate attempt to obscure the difference between the claim that every nation *ought* to have a state – or rather, that every state ought to derive its legitimacy from a nation – and the claim that a nation *is* a state'.<sup>43</sup> Tempting as it may be to develop that hypothesis further, we will instead turn to the issue of disentangling the two concepts used.

The state is to be fundamentally distinguished from the nation because it is a political unit that is an independent power externally and a supreme authority internally. As Seton-Watson properly emphasised, a state is 'a legal and political organisation with the power to require obedience and loyalty from its citizens,' while the nation is 'a community of people, whose members are bound together

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<sup>40</sup>. As quoted in Hobsbawm (1992), p. 44.

<sup>41</sup>. Keating (1988), p. 23.

<sup>42</sup>. Taylor (1985), p. 113.

<sup>43</sup>. Tamir (1993), p. 60.

by a sense of solidarity, a common culture, a national consciousness'.<sup>44</sup> In other words, the state is a political and territorial entity, whereas the nation includes a wide range of subjective components, such as being an 'imagined community'. It is generally not possible to identify one with the other (with the exception of a few cases, as Walker Connor has shown), but if doing so it is important to note, as Keating rightly does, that 'in so far as the nation is identified with the state, then any weakening of the latter entails a weakening of the former'.<sup>45</sup> Loyalty to the nation may well coincide with loyalty to the state, but that only occurs when the entity in question is a nation-state. Hence confusion is bound to arise when considering the correlation between nation and state.

It is in terms of common territory and citizenship that state and nation conceptually overlap, but as Anthony Smith notes, 'the nation is a political community only in so far as it embodies a common culture and a common social will'.<sup>46</sup> The belief that while 'the term *state* can be defined independently of the term *nation*, the term *nation* cannot be defined independently of the term *state*'<sup>47</sup> suggests that for a people to think of their community as constituting a united nation is to think of it as a potential state. Such thinking is encouraged and facilitated by the political ideology of nationalism, a subject that is now to be examined.

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<sup>44</sup> Seton-Watson (1977), p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Keating (1988), p. 24.

<sup>46</sup> A. D. Smith, (1992) p. 62.

<sup>47</sup> Tamir (1996), p. 86.

## 2.2 Nationalism

Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent though long-delayed political destiny, are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures: *that is a reality*<sup>48</sup>

### 2.2.1 The nationalist doctrine

Myth and reality are much debated in the study of nationalism, which serves as the tool for constructing the modern, political form of the nation. Nationalism is hence a doctrine in essence based on the idea that every nation should have its own state. This idea emerged in the eighteenth century, grew into a major political force in the nineteenth century and became the dominating factor in politics of the twentieth century. The long-established political and cultural entities of France and England had long been in existence at the time of the emergence of the idea and they may be taken as prototypes for the type of political entity envisaged by the new doctrine. This belief of nations being the natural political units, the base on which states and governments were to rest became an ideal, and were to be fulfilled in the twentieth century throughout the world. It stipulated that sovereignty lay with the people, rejecting the personal authority of the monarch over the state's sovereignty. These ideas of popular sovereignty were brought into existence by the French Revolution, and essentially carry the meaning that if political reality were a reflection of the nationalist image of the world, 'the map would consist of states based on culturally distinctive groups occupying homogenous, compact and mutually exclusive national territories'.<sup>49</sup>

Accepting the doctrine of nationalism to have emerged with Europe's modern age, it would be appropriate to take the French Enlightenment and the German Romanticism as parallel starting points. The Enlightenment believed that the

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<sup>48</sup>. Gellner (1983a), pp. 48-49.

<sup>49</sup>. Orridge (1981), p. 45.

state created the nation, whereas the Romantics argued that the nation, its people, created the state. The type of nationalism represented by the French was characterised by individual liberty, equality and a perspective of cosmopolitanism. This emerged alongside the French nation-state, formed in 1789. The German nation-state, established in 1870, was based on an ideology that had emerged in the first decade of the nineteenth century and its Romantic principles, ethnic and cultural in character, was in stark contrast with the French ideas.

The core doctrine of nationalism, which is regarded as general to all nationalisms, argues that a great many different individual nations constitute the world. This mosaic of nations should be organised in a system of nation-states so as to secure world order and peace. Moreover, nations are portrayed as the natural units of society, having particular characteristics and displaying a cultural homogeneity based upon shared interests and shared experiences. In order to genuinely express its culture, each of these nations needs its own sovereign state, a claim consolidated by the fact that all nations have an indisputable right to the territory constituting its homeland. The nation is moreover the source of all political power, and loyalty to it takes priority over all other loyalties. The doctrine further holds that every individual must belong to a nation, in which his or her primary loyalty lies, as it is only through the nation that the individual can find and express true freedom.<sup>50</sup> Hence the central element of 'general' nationalism is 'the notion that there is or should be some intimate connection between broad cultural similarities and political organisation'.<sup>51</sup> In other words, there is a need for nations and states to coincide: the *causa sine qua non* for individual and collective freedom and peace is the strengthening of the nation-state.

In addition to this general, basic notion that has a very broad application despite its shortcomings, every nationalism has its particularities, its own character, termed *special secondary theories*.<sup>52</sup> These will be examined below and referred

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<sup>50</sup>. Tivey (1981a), pp. 5-6 and A. D. Smith (1973), p. 10.

<sup>51</sup>. Orridge (1981), pp. 39-40.

<sup>52</sup>. Smith (1982), p. 150.

to as classification of nationalisms.

The roots of the complex political phenomenon of nationalism may indeed be found long before it reached its present form. The 'ideological' idea of nations to have existed since ancient times may be termed 'retrospective nationalism' or, from a different perspective, simply 'patriotism'.<sup>53</sup> Its characteristic modern form, the *ideology*, was conceived in the early nineteenth century, as Elie Kedourie asserts: 'Nationalism is a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century'.<sup>54</sup> Also Anthony Smith (who holds a perennialist view and derives modern nations from fundamental ethnic ties) agrees and states that 'nationalism, *as ideology and movement*, is a wholly modern phenomenon'.<sup>55</sup> Any pre-nineteenth century nations could then be said to have been waiting to come to life, as ethnic groups possessing the relevant characteristics but lacking its, from the outside, most important feature. These may be regarded as *pre-national* groups or *potential* nations.<sup>56</sup> 'A nation must be an idea as well as a fact before it can become a dynamic force' Barker claimed,<sup>57</sup> but perhaps these potential nations develop into nations rather than first lacking, then acquiring this consciousness. It would therefore not be proper to speak of nations as dramatically materialising overnight. Transforming from an ethnic group into a nation requires a self-conscious desire for autonomy.

Ernest Gellner, however, argues that 'nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist',<sup>58</sup> and discards the idea that the nationalist doctrine signifies the awakening of nations to self-consciousness. On the contrary, he says, nationalism is 'the crystallization of new units, suitable for the conditions now prevailing, though admittedly using as their raw material the cultural, historical and other inheritances from the pre-

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<sup>53</sup>. A. D. Smith coined the former (1999, p. 38) whereas Ernest Gellner would confess to the latter. Gellner in fact views nationalism as 'a perennial part of human life ... which becomes pervasive and dominant only under certain social conditions, which in fact prevail in the modern world, and nowhere else' (1983a), p. 138.

<sup>54</sup>. Kedourie (1960), p. 9.

<sup>55</sup>. Smith, A. D. (1986a), p. 18 (italics added).

<sup>56</sup>. Connor (1978), p. 385.

<sup>57</sup>. Barker (1927) p. 173.

<sup>58</sup>. Gellner (1964), p. 168.

nationalist world'.<sup>59</sup> Gellner links the progress of nationalism to the processes of modernisation and industrialisation and the subsequent emergence of a national bourgeoisie. An increasingly modernised and industrialised society supposedly required a united, standardised culture and a common language for the majority of the population. Hence, according to Gellner, in a theory centring on the way in which the role of culture in society changed with modernisation, nationalism is a product of industrialisation. However, if nationalism were indeed an unquestionable result of industrialism, it may have been expected to have gradually decreased in strength and relinquished its position as a major political force in an age of highly advanced industrialism. The fact that nationalism in this new millennium appears to be stronger than ever before calls for some modifications of Gellner's theory.

Just as difficult as capturing the essence of nation, is finding a 'right' approach to its political ideology, and the huge range of explanatory and definitive attempts made differ substantially. A classical definition of nationalism is that of Kenneth Minogue, who in 1967 characterised the idea as 'a political movement, which seeks to attain and defend an objective we may call national integrity'.<sup>60</sup> He put great emphasis on nationalism as political programme, a programme for political action. Gellner's theory, as we have seen, puts the greatest emphasis on material conditions in forming political thought and social change, and suggests an essentially economic reason for the rise of nationalism. Moreover, he maintains that nationalism was successful largely because it met the needs of the time. Michael Mann has a similar approach and argues that nationalism developed in response to the development of the modern state.<sup>61</sup> Whereas the modernists believe in the modernity of nationalism, Anthony Smith, from his perennialist perspective, centres on ethnicity as its foundation, arguing that the essence of the novel thoughts leading to the creation of national consciousness and nationalism were present in pre-national communities.

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<sup>59</sup>. Id. (1983), pp. 48-49.

<sup>60</sup>. Minogue (1967), p. 25.

<sup>61</sup>. Mann (1995).

Unlike Gellner, Benedict Anderson emphasises the emotional appeal of nationalism, as does Hans Kohn, considering nationalism to be 'an act of consciousness'.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, to adopt an entirely functional approach, such as that of Gellners, to explain nationalism, would leave the substantial emotions it engenders unaccounted for. Also Anthony Giddens adheres to this thought. In contrast to his strictly institutional definition of a nation, he regards nationalism to be 'in substantial part a psychological phenomenon', which, he continues, 'feeds upon, or represents an attenuated form of those 'primordial sentiments' of which Geertz speaks in tribal societies or village communities'.<sup>63</sup> Because of the imaginary nature of the nation, (a notion Giddens, however, would not seem to be naturally supporting) nationalism is endowed with this psychological component, which makes it a largely non-rational phenomenon. Such a characteristic may, however, not be exclusive to nationalism as an expression of 'groupness'. Hayes suggests that as 'social animals', it is natural for human beings to live in and be loyal to groups. Such entities do not necessarily have to be nationalities, on the contrary, during much of recorded history, these groups have taken the shape of tribes, clans, cities, provinces, or associations of various kinds. Accordingly, Giddens' nationalism is 'but one expression of human instinct', and as such not 'more natural or more "latent" than tribalism' (as one fitting example).<sup>64</sup>

James Mayall identifies three great ages of nationalism: first, the early nineteenth century establishment of new Latin American states, second, the enlargement resulting from Versailles, and third, the great expansion following decolonisation.<sup>65</sup> To this John Hall has added a fourth era, namely what the collapse of the Russian empire has brought about, in terms of the creation of new nation-states and nationalist revival.<sup>66</sup>

In the general development of the ideology, three main phases can be distinguished. The first phase, referred to as 'intellectual', sees the development

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<sup>62</sup>. Kohn (1944), p. 10.

<sup>63</sup>. Giddens (1981b), p. 193.

<sup>64</sup>. Hayes (1949), p. 292.

<sup>65</sup>. Mayall (1990), p. 64.

<sup>66</sup>. Hall (1993), p. 4.

of a cultural basis: concerning language, common history and traditions, initiated by the intellectual middle class. What follows on this is the 'agitary' phase, when politicisation and mass mobilisation occur, resulting in the third phase of political mass movement.<sup>67</sup> The 'masses' would then not be directly responsible for the rise of nationalism. It would first get under way in the 'intellectual ranks' and to have received decisive impetus from the support of the middle classes before reaching the 'masses'. Important to note is that in order to achieve popular effects, not only does the seed have to be good, it also has to fall on fertile ground. In other words, for the idea (preferably crafted by individuals influential with the people) to take root people need to have a basic consciousness of nationality, a basic sense of belonging to the group – 'peoplehood'.

Nationalism has, in its four classic types, evolved from a humanitarian prototype through the periods of Jacobinism, Traditionalism and Liberalism into an integral form that can take on many different expressions. As an essential part of the Enlightenment, humanitarianism served as the basis of Jacobin nationalism, which aimed at protecting and extending the liberty, equality and fraternity established during the period of the humanitarian democratic nationalism. This was largely based on the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau and came to develop into a supreme sort of nationalism relying greatly on force and militarism, marked by fanatical religiousness and intolerance of internal dissent. Mainly associated with the extreme actions and sentiments of the French Revolution, Jacobinism also featured some remarkable achievements, such as the new educational institutions used for patriotic purposes. 'An abiding legacy of Jacobin nationalism', as expressed by Hayes, is its secularisation of Christianity, which has contributed a great deal to the strength of nationalism during the following centuries.<sup>68</sup> The basis of the revolutionary Jacobinism, reason and revolution, was countered by history and tradition of its 'counter-nationalism', the evolutionary Traditionalism, which 'sought to reconcile loyalty to the

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<sup>67</sup>. P. 121 in Miroslav Hroch (1968), *Die Vorkämpfer der nationalen Bewegung bei den kleinen Völkern Europas. Eine vergleichende Analyse zur gesellschaftlichen Schichtung der patriotischen Gruppen* [*The Champions for the national movements of Europe's smaller nations. A comparative analysis of the social strata in patriotic groups*], Praha, quoted in Tägil (1995b), p. 25.

<sup>68</sup>. Hayes (1949), see chap 3 on Jacobin nationalism and pp. 75-76 for quote.

national state with continuing loyalty to ... locality and ... traditional Christianity'.<sup>69</sup>

Liberal nationalism is, as Hayes puts it, 'midway between Jacobin and traditional nationalism'.<sup>70</sup> With its origins in eighteenth century England, it endeavoured to combine national and liberal characteristics with democratic ones. National self-determination of peoples was promoted unconditionally: indeed, every nationality was to have its own independent state, which called for a total redrawing of the political map of the world. This would in effect mean 'the dissolution of each imperial domain into its constituent national elements and at the same time the unification of disjointed parts of a nationality into a new commonwealth'.<sup>71</sup> Such a development was viewed to be serving the true interests of all of humanity.

Integral nationalism has often been termed 'the last classic type of nationalism' and 'a reaction to Versailles'.<sup>72</sup> It is the opposite of liberalism and is to all intents and purposes based on ethnicity, epitomised in early twentieth century German nationalism. Contrary to humanitarianism, Jacobinism in its initial form, and liberal nationalism - all concerned with exploited or subjugated nationalities - integral nationalism deals with politically independent and united nationalities and places individual interests as well as those of humanity as a whole firmly underneath national interests.<sup>73</sup> Of these four forms, liberal nationalism is potentially the most interesting one for the purpose of outlining a positive development of nationalism alongside the rather certain survival of the more destructive forms of the ideology, and as such it will reappear further down under the classification of nationalisms.

Nationalism is not a phenomenon in passing. Within established nations the ideological habits are constantly reproduced, and the nation is daily 'flagged' for

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<sup>69</sup>. Ibid. p. 111.

<sup>70</sup>. Ibid. p. 120.

<sup>71</sup>. Ibid. p. 135.

<sup>72</sup>. Hall (1993), p. 12.

<sup>73</sup>. Hayes (1949), pp. 165-166.

its people<sup>74</sup> – in other words, nationalism is an endemic condition. The modern state may be on the decline (an issue examined in the following chapter) but there is no corresponding decline on the horizon for the force of nationalism. Rather, the fact that post-modern nationalism seems to have simultaneously emerged with the devaluation of the nation-state concept indicates that this phenomenon is not restricted to the narrow framework of the modern nation-state. Neither is it restricted to one easily distinguishable shape, but appears in a great many versions and under different names.

### 2.2.2 Classification of nationalisms

Nationalism unified Germany and France, consolidated France and restored political independence to Greece, Finland and Norway, to name a few. The same force was also responsible for breaking up large empires such as the Ottoman and Russian. Historical events such as these give a face to the different forms of nationalism, and also point at the ‘political power of nationalisms’ that Benedict Anderson contrasts with ‘their philosophical poverty and even incoherence’,<sup>75</sup> as the foregoing discussion indicated.

Neither clearly definable an ideology nor one that in its entirety is transferable from one place to another, nationalism is *adopted* as well as *adapted*<sup>76</sup> in the widest range of situations by political leaders who choose very different elements of the loosely defined original models. The ideas of nationalism are therefore in a constant state of being modified, deconstructed as conditions dictate and reconstructed to suit new circumstances in different environments. A general type of nationalism does not encompass the multitude of situations in which the notions of nation, nationality and state and the relationship between them gain importance.

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<sup>74</sup>. An expression borrowed from Billig: (1995), p. 6.

<sup>75</sup>. Anderson (1991), p. 5.

<sup>76</sup>. Orridge (1981), p. 53 (italics added).

Hence it must be acknowledged that the full spectrum of nationalist possibilities is unlikely to be encapsulated in any one definition or explanation of nationalism offered to the form it takes in society. Those analysts who have typologised nationalisms seem to have distinguished between nationalism in general and specific nationalist movements in history. By classifying and distinguishing the different forms of nationalism one can get a picture of how the concepts of nation, state and the ideology of nationalism have been applied in practice.

For the purposes of the current study, several different forms of nationalism have been distinguished in an attempt to evaluate the wide range of feasible nationalist expressions. The ones identified are state nationalism, unification nationalism, separation nationalism, liberation/anti-colonial/anti-imperialist nationalism, renewal nationalism, ethnic nationalism, civic nationalism, liberal nationalism and minority nationalism.

#### 2.2.2.1 State nationalism

The key examples of state nationalism are England and France, where *state* preceded *nation* or even produced nation. This would be regarded as the first and certainly most influential kind of nationalism and resulted in what Orridge terms prototype nation-states.<sup>77</sup> Such states could be identified with particular cultures, and the state and the culture carried the same name. 'The state itself does not merely reflect the qualities of nations: it fashions them', as Tivey expresses the circumstances.<sup>78</sup> At this point in history nationalism as an ideology was not fully developed, hence it would be fair to say that, in this case, nation preceded nationalism. In these states the primary political loyalty of the majority of the populations was to the state and this internal unity at the core prevented any large-scale rebellions and separatist tendencies. Modern nationalism argues that all states should develop along the same lines as these prototype nation-states, portrayed as the ultimate model for successful state-formation efforts.

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<sup>77</sup>. Ibid. pp. 42-43.

<sup>78</sup>. Tivey (1981a), p. 5.

### 2.2.2.2 Unification nationalism

Unification nationalism traces its roots from pre-Napoleonic wars Europe where Germany and Italy were mosaics of small independent states, established by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1649. After 1800, nationalism became the justification for uniting most of the German autonomous entities under Prussian leadership creating an all-encompassing German nation-state, a development that also saw the transformation of the Italian units into an Italian nation-state.<sup>79</sup> These examples have all the typical qualities of unification nationalist ideology, and the German and Italian experiences remain its central most important models.

### 2.2.2.3 Separation nationalism

The overwhelming majority of successful nationalisms have involved the disintegration of existing sovereign states. Particularly the Ottoman, Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires fell victim to separation nationalisms when a large number of new states emerged during the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>80</sup> Considering various recent developments around the world, it becomes clear that this type of nationalism is not a phenomenon of the past. There are serious separation nationalist movements in 'core countries' like Britain (Scotland) and Spain (Basque country), 'new' or modern-day nationalist movements that are substantially different from those of the nineteenth century. Tom Nairn argues that the loss of the empire and with that, the loss of prestige and economic advantage, was an important reason as to why peripheral regions in the United Kingdom felt less committed to the central state.<sup>81</sup> Neither the Scottish nor the Basque have been successful in their bid for independence, but have nonetheless been granted political concessions within the framework of the existing states.

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<sup>79</sup>. Orridge (1981), p. 44.

<sup>80</sup>. Ibid. pp. 45-46.

<sup>81</sup>. Tom Nairn (1977), *The Break-up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-nationalism*, London: New Left Books.

#### 2.2.2.4 Liberation/Anti-colonial/Anti-imperialist nationalism

The probably most common form of nationalism is the one representing the break-up of European overseas empires. Virtually all such movements for independence have emerged as national liberation movements in protest of the colonial powers.<sup>82</sup> This type of nationalism is one of the main forms taken by the ideology. It has indeed as Breuille states 'developed in a vast range of societies and its successes have transformed the political map of the world'.<sup>83</sup> In liberation, anti-colonial or anti-imperialist nationalism, aspects of both cosmopolitan French nationalism and anti-enlightenment German nationalism can be detected, as both models have influenced the character of national movements and emerging nation-states everywhere. Chatterjee views that as profoundly contradictory since

It is both imitative and hostile to the models it imitates... It is imitative in that it accepts the value of the standards set by the alien culture. But it also involves a rejection ... of ancestral ways which are seen as obstacles to progress and yet also cherished as marks of identity.<sup>84</sup>

Original liberation/anti-colonial/anti-imperialism nationalism was largely based on opposition to suppression by an alien power, which meant that the nationalists were united only in their desire to shake off colonial rule. The state that was created as result of this was often found to precede nationalism in that there existed no other common identity for its citizens than anti-colonialism.<sup>85</sup> This sort of nationalism would then after independence from the colonial power be likely to transform into state nationalism. Hence it would be appropriate to conclude that liberation/anti-colonial nationalism is a temporary form of nationalist expression, not genuine nationalist movements since 'their potential is exhausted with the achievements of their goal of independence from the colonial power'.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>. Orridge (1981), pp. 48-49.

<sup>83</sup>. Breuille (1993), p. 156.

<sup>84</sup>. Chatterjee (1998), p. 2.

<sup>85</sup>. Cf. views of Hans Kohn (1944).

<sup>86</sup>. Smith, A. D. (1991), p. 108.

#### 2.2.2.5 Renewal nationalism

Peripheral areas possessing ancient cultures that were never seized by a European empire often went about imitating state nationalism of the core using methods similar to unification nationalism. Such countries had a long history as ethnic communities, old cultures that made it easy to build a new or renewed nationalism.<sup>87</sup> Past greatness was seized upon for this nationalism of renewal, exemplified by Iran - once a supreme political and military nation long before Western great powers came into existence - rediscovering its Persian heritage.

#### 2.2.2.6 Ethnic nationalism

In the twentieth century, as modernisation and industrialisation got under way and the theory of individualism gained ground in society, it would have been reasonable to believe that the importance of ethnicity in combination with nationalist thought would decrease radically. This, however, would be an incorrect assumption. On the contrary, politically expressed ethnicity has grown in significance throughout the world, particularly in the second half of the century. Such a development may not have been completely unexpected since nationalism could easily be understood as an expansion of ethnic sentiment to include desires for political autonomy, to make the boundaries of the ethnic group coincide with those of its self-government. As an extension of ethnicity, it essentially attaches the desire for political autonomy to the shared characteristics. As argued by Edwards, 'both notions rest upon a sense of community which can have many different tangible manifestations'.<sup>88</sup>

Ethno-nationalism, a term launched by Connor,<sup>89</sup> is a dynamic concept that 'focuses on the self-determination of the historically given ... community of

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<sup>87</sup>. Orridge (1981), pp. 49-50.

<sup>88</sup>. Edwards (1985), p. 15.

<sup>89</sup>. Walker Connor (1973), 'The politics of Ethno-Nationalism', *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 27, pp. 1-21.

culture and of ancestral belonging'.<sup>90</sup> It appeals to people on the basis of ethnicity and, interlinked, language and in certain cases also religion. It is about turning an ethnic community into a political nation.<sup>91</sup> A person's deepest attachments are, according to the doctrine of ethnic nationalism, inherited and not chosen (as civic nationalism holds – see below). The individual is, moreover, defined by the national community, not the reverse, which creates a situation where force rather than consent form the basis of communal unity by a nationalist regime that easily becomes more authoritarian than democratic in nature.<sup>92</sup>

An ethno-nationalist movement would almost certainly be territorially based, and making such a clear distinction between 'ethnic nationalism' and 'territorial nationalism' as Anthony Smith does, appears rather debatable.<sup>93</sup> To a greater or lesser extent, all nationalisms contain elements of ethnicity, whereby it may be more precise to 'distinguish between nationalisms which claim territory on the basis of putative common ethnicity and those which attempt to construct ethnic commonality within an already-occupied territory'.<sup>94</sup>

Ethnic nationalism is the type of nationalism that is most under scrutiny for being likely to take on malign nationalistic expressions. It may be categorised as vicious in nature and entirely destructive, but, seen from a different perspective, the ethno-nationalists could also be regarded as representing David against Goliath. It is not unusual for ethnic nationalism to feature in a minority nationalist movement.

#### 2.2.2.7 Civic nationalism

Civic or territorial nationalism, also termed 'constitutional patriotism' and 'post-

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<sup>90</sup>. MacCormick (1999), p. 126.

<sup>91</sup>. Smith, A. D. (1999), p. 41.

<sup>92</sup>. Ignatieff (1994), p. 5.

<sup>93</sup>. As evident in his *Theories of Nationalism* (1971).

<sup>94</sup>. Jenkins (1997), p. 146.

nationalism',<sup>95</sup> promotes a sense of common belonging among the citizens of a society and regards the nation as 'open to all who come under and accept the jurisdiction of the civic institutions'.<sup>96</sup>

A nation's composition in terms of ethnicity, language, race and religion is irrelevant in this form of nationalism, which maintains that the unity of the nation comes from the patriotic attachment of its equal rights-bearing citizens to a shared set of political practices and values. It is a 'nationalism of order and control'.<sup>97</sup> Sovereign state nationalism, as outlined above, could be interpreted as promoting every sovereign state to actively inspire in its citizens a one-nation civic nationalism.

#### 2.2.2.8 Liberal nationalism

Considered a successor to Herder's cultural pluralism, liberal nationalism refers to the post-sovereignty politics of a new nation-state when the need arises to 'neutralise' the particularism of its nationalism, to redefine the nationalist principle in an acceptably universalistic manner: that is, 'to pursue a national vision while remaining faithful to a set of liberal beliefs'.<sup>98</sup> As was the case with the liberal nationalism that emerged two centuries ago, emphasis remains on the absolute sovereignty of the national state, but the implications of the principle are to be regulated by an equally strong emphasis on individual liberties within each national state. However, the utopia of the eighteenth century liberal nationalists in promoting that each and every nationality should transform into a political independent entity with its own constitutional government finds little or no support in contemporary scholarship.

Modern liberal nationalists seek to incorporate the thoughts of liberalism, which calls for a widely acknowledged view of the rights individuals are entitled to, with those of nationalism that retains particular rights for its people, in other

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<sup>95</sup>. Fine (1999), p. 149.

<sup>96</sup>. MacCormick (1999), p. 126.

<sup>97</sup>. Smith, A. D. (1999), p. 41.

<sup>98</sup>. Tamir (1993), p. 5.

words 'to define the content of a nationalist principle or principles in a satisfactorily universalistic way'.<sup>99</sup> Since liberal nationalism holds that as culture and belonging to a nation are communal features, their full value can only be adequately recognised and enjoyed to the fullest together with those feeling the same attachments and making the same choices. Therefore, as liberals recognise these significant features held sacred by nationalists, the latter could be expected to acknowledge the importance of individual rights and personal autonomy.<sup>100</sup>

#### 2.2.2.9 Minority nationalism

Minority nationalism is a wide notion and has, like any other nationalism, certain structural characteristics. Specified by Colin Williams, the generalisable features of minority nationalist movements number about ten, the first one naturally being defence of the homeland, the unique territory over which a continuous struggle persists between the minority political movement and the hegemonic state. Intimately connected to that is defending the specific culture and identity of the minority: language and religion being the most common diacritical markers of the nationality, indicating their separateness from the majority of the state.

A minority nationalist movement fiercely resists any centralist trends aimed at integration of the national homeland into the core state, and it is relatively powerless concerning decision-making. It moreover holds a perception of systematic exploitation and underdevelopment - what Williams terms *structural discrimination*. Another characteristic feature is the sometimes aggressive resistance to outsiders in the shape of immigrants, settlers or colonisers, often seen as representing hegemonic ambitions of the state in its wish to spread and consolidate its dominant culture. Concomitant with such resistance is the fear of losing the dominance and influence held locally, a loss that may be induced through cultural attrition.

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<sup>99</sup>. McCormick (1999), p. 130.

<sup>100</sup>. Tamir (1993), pp. 6-8.

Minority nationalism is further characterised by ethnic dissent, which may take violent as well as non-violent forms. The persistence of inequalities between the minority nation and the majority nation(s) constituting the state shapes the minority's nationalist ideology and defines its contemporary identity. The questioning of the political legitimacy of the regime in power often constitute the political rationale for minority nationalist movements to emerge and prosper, targeting their political action at forming a new basis for legitimacy.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Williams (1994), pp. 234-8.

### 2.3 The paradoxical force of nationalism: benign or malign?

Just as a classification of nationalisms was deemed to be constructive, so it appears appropriate to distinguish between various aspects of nationalism, as it has shown itself to be a phenomenon with more than one face. Nationalism could be an integrative force but it also has very divisive potentialities. This political doctrine is responsible for the creation of cohesive national communities and legitimate nation-states, but it also represents a darker side to humanity, i.e. that of aggressive antagonism, prejudicial behaviour and belligerence. Such different expressions to the same phenomenon should not astonish considering that it was the same process that created the nation-state and its dialectical opposite, the concept of statelessness.

If accepting Benedict Anderson's theory of the nation as an imaginary identity-construct, nationalism could be seen as a method to represent history. If history is being reinterpreted to suit the current collective needs of the community, nationalism becomes a very selective and distortive ideology, and as such, a malign force. With an imaginary identity-construct constituting its base, nationalism becomes 'a mode of representation of history, a history that itself is being continually reinterpreted in the light of the constructs of nationalism'.<sup>102</sup> This approach emphasises the 'mythic' quality of the idea of the nation, at the root of which lie ideas associated with German Romanticism. In this 'ethnic shape', nationalism by definition establishes a distance to other people. It encourages an 'us-and-them' thinking that entertains the idea of superiority of the own group over all other nationalities. To refer to oneself as Kurdish, for instance, draws a psychological boundary around oneself and those claiming the same Kurdish identity. This practice of shutting others out is one of the less desirable features of the doctrine. These elements of inclusion and exclusion are inherent in nationalism, since the ideology has such a strong element of group identification.

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<sup>102</sup> Smith, A. D. (1986b), pp. 240-241.

The disastrous potential of nationalism can be seen in many places, perhaps most notably in the modern history of Europe.<sup>103</sup> The imperialistic nationalism of powerful states has often harassed internal minorities, 'defining enmity so as to justify territorial aggrandisement and enhanced state power'.<sup>104</sup> It is the inward- and backward-looking perspective of nationalism that has been the focus of criticism: its inherent disdain of other groups. Its emphasis on groupness (in the meaning of allegiance) can interfere with the rights of the individual to full recognition and liberation and in this sense nationalism is 'a danger to the integrity of individuals' rather than 'an element of their individuality'.<sup>105</sup> As nationalism elevates the nation over individual members it in the process curtails the freedom of the individual. A staunch nationalist's devotion to his/her cause virtually abolishes the division between individual and group and this easily causes mistreatment of individual members. This tendency of the doctrine to de-emphasise the rights and interests of the individual may be summed up as follows: 'the nation may do whatever it will; the individual may do only what the national state determines'.<sup>106</sup> In addition, in some nationalist thought, the interest of the nation is put before those of humanity as a whole, making it a potentially very dangerous ideology.

The creation of a nation-state – 'the triumph of a particular nationalism'<sup>107</sup> - signifies acquiring the monopoly of the means of violence, which in the process is used aplenty in defeating alternative nationalisms. Hence violence is intricately bound up with the active practice of nationalism. Such an interpretation of the ideology was not contemplated by the nineteenth century intellectual Ernest Renan, who put forward a 'sensible' type of nationalism. His very balanced view of this political phenomenon was that the different perspectives of a large variety of nations provided for the emergence of an overall humanity. This was to be the ultimate contribution of nations.<sup>108</sup> Such a global outlook is not adhered to by the majority of nationalists, but it represents

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<sup>103</sup> As convincingly argued by Keduorie (1961), pp. 138-139.

<sup>104</sup> MacCormick (1996), p. 47.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. p. 34.

<sup>106</sup> Hayes (1949), p. 69.

<sup>107</sup> Billig (1995), p. 28.

<sup>108</sup> See H. Psichari (ed.) (1947 org. 1882), *Oeuvres complètes de Ernest Renan*, Paris: Calmann-Lévy.

one form of nationalism which could be good for humanity.

In a similar positive vein, Smith contemplates the ‘advantages and blessings’ of nationalism, which he sees as inspiration to all kinds of cultural activities, having produced cultural manifestations of great significance. Thus, he concludes, it would be wrong to consider only the negative features possessed by nationalism.<sup>109</sup> Indeed, to conceptually limit nationalism to a purely political movement as does John Breuilly,<sup>110</sup> is unjustifiably restrictive, since features with indisputable and direct relevance to the concept, such as culture and identity that substantially add to its power, remain unaccounted for. A vocal critic of such an approach is John Hutchinson, who emphasises the significance of cultural forms of the doctrine and offers an important insight into ‘a cultural nationalism that seeks a moral regeneration of the community’.<sup>111</sup> Cultural nationalism (as set forth in Herder’s writings) is indeed a force in its own right and one that tends to alternate in strength with political nationalism (connected with the teachings of Rousseau) with which it constantly influences and in turn is influenced by. This could mean that cultural nationalism would follow when political nationalism has come to a dead end, and in doing so may even reach and mobilise members of the nation thus far unaffected by the national spirit.<sup>112</sup> The thought of cultural nationalism is therefore essentially to provide some legitimacy and space for national aspirations of mainly a cultural character, providing a benign sort of nationalism that would adopt as its basis principles of universalism rather than those of particularism.

The argument of Kohn that cultural nationalism was succeeded by a ‘rational’ political nationalism in mid-nineteenth century once a middle class had emerged on the political scene,<sup>113</sup> cannot be approved without reservations. Conditions in one place are seldom duplicated in another, but viewing the benign cultural and the malign political nationalism as competing forces on the political arena – the

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<sup>109</sup>. Smith, A. D. (1971) p. 14.

<sup>110</sup>. Breuilly (1993) (His position is fully outlined in the introductory chapter of his book.)

<sup>111</sup>. Hutchinson (1994), p. 41.

<sup>112</sup>. Such a development is in the Irish case scrutinized by Hutchinson in chapter four of his *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State*, (1987), London: Allen & Unwin.

<sup>113</sup>. Kohn (1944), chapter 7.

former communitarian and the latter state-oriented - may be more suitable an approach. They may even operate in alternating cycles, as Hutchinson suggests.<sup>114</sup>

That nationalism is not an inherently negative phenomenon may be true in theory. In practice, however, the self-consciousness characterising the nationalist doctrine inevitably appears to lead to the exploitation of others. Herder's cultural form of nationalism, which envisages a world of political units founded exclusively on nations, accompanied by a desirability to preserve cultural diversity, is as benign as any powerful idea could conceivably be. It is, however, often when failing to realise the nationalist ideal to its full extent that peace is put at risk and instability likely to ensue.<sup>115</sup> Gellner acknowledges the positive potential of the doctrine but believes that the peaceful implementation of the nationalist principle is difficult due to 'the specific nature of the world we happen to live in, which militates against any impartial, general, sweetly reasonable nationalism'.<sup>116</sup>

Since the basis of shared allegiance is constitutional principles rather than common ethnicity, civic nationalism is often regarded as the opposite of the potentially exploitative ethnocentric exclusionary nationalism. However, civic cannot be used interchangeably with benign as concerns nationalism. Michael Ignatieff explains: 'In societies where a majority ethnic group defines the content of national symbols and traditions to the exclusion of others, it is easy for 'civic' values to become an instrument of oppression'.<sup>117</sup> Recognising the heterogeneity of the modern nation-state, the nonetheless generally inclusive and tolerant civic nationalism may be the only antidote to exclusive and intolerant ethnic nationalism. In the civic nationalistic worldview the state defines the nation, whereas ethno-nationalists maintain that nation defines the state. As Robert Fine puts it: 'in the dualism of 'civic' versus 'ethnic' nationalism, the latter appears to the former as backward, but the former appears to the latter as

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<sup>114</sup> Hutchinson (1994), chapter 3.

<sup>115</sup> Smith, A. D. (1981), p. 199.

<sup>116</sup> Gellner (1983a), p. 2.

<sup>117</sup> Ignatieff (1999), p. 144.

the bearer of a new 'orientalism'.<sup>118</sup>

Michael Mann believes *aggressive* nationalism to be 'a perverted form of the drive towards democracy'.<sup>119</sup> This he contrasts with the democratically achieved *mild* nationalism. Mann thus considers exclusionary nationalism to be largely the product of unsuccessful attempts to institutionalise democracy, and achieving federal, inter-regional democracy would do away with aggressive forms of nationalism.<sup>120</sup> This may address the circumstances where nationalists, in seeking to rectify their national situation characterised by inequalities and imperfections caused by past injustice, in their quest for improvements often create more of the same.

As for the terminology of the positive and negative dimensions of the ideology Ignatieff makes an interesting distinction, which is worth noting in passing. He distinguishes between *patriotism*, as being the benign sort of nationalism exemplified by love of country and national solidarity, and *nationalism*, with the malign characteristics of intolerance and violence. The difference between the two is that 'a patriot loves a country which already exists, whereas a nationalist often loves a country which does not.' Hence 'patriotism', he continues, 'is the privilege of those with states', while nationalism is the language of the stateless'.<sup>121</sup> With this terminology a nationally conscious Kurd, for instance, would be a nationalist, (under present circumstances) not a patriot.

To conclude this brief discussion on the benign and malign features of nationalism, it appears fair to say that nationalism is intrinsically neither good nor bad, although the negative impact of the ideology is more in evidence than its positive effects. As Michael Ignatieff notes,

it is not one thing in many disguises, but many things in many disguises; nationalist principles can have dreadful consequences in one place, and innocuous

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<sup>118</sup> Fine (1999), p. 153.

<sup>119</sup> Mann (1995), p. 44.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. pp. 62-63.

<sup>121</sup> Ignatieff (1999), p. 142.

or positive ones in another place. Context is all.<sup>122</sup>

There will always be certain principles that people adhere to worldwide, but equally certain is that the differences that exist between people producing those exclusive particularities are bound to persist. This reality explains why nationalism is to be a permanent fusion of the universally accepted and the objectionable particular. Nationalism is also an expression of identity, the underlying components of which are now to be identified and examined.

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<sup>122</sup> Id. (1994), p. 9.

## Chapter 3: The Components of Kurdish Socio-Political Identity

### 3.1 Class

The term class indicates a division of society, a system of social ranking and distribution of power. Class structure may also imply conflict, suggesting domination and dependence.<sup>1</sup> Although the significance and political weight of the Kurdish class system may still be rather limited, it is deemed that bringing this element into the discussion will contribute to the formation of a solid understanding of crucial aspects of the structure of Kurdish society, and build on the previous discussions of nationalism and its development in Kurdistan.

#### 3.1.1 Classical paradigms

When theorising and conceptualising class, the writings of Karl Marx are an appropriate starting-point.<sup>2</sup> According to fundamental Marxist thought, a class is defined by its relationship to the means of production. Economic relations are based on property: a class either controls a factor of production - as does the bourgeoisie - or it does not – as characterised by the proletariat. Marx believed that economic domination and political domination are firmly linked insofar as control of the means of production generates political control. The division of classes thus represented a division of both property and power, which was manifested in relations between ‘exploiters and exploited’ and ‘oppressors and oppressed’ (frequent terminology in particularly the *Communist Manifesto*). The following quotation illustrates this relationship:

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<sup>1</sup>. Berki (1986), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>. ‘Its importance is due to its intellectual influence on subsequent theories of class and to its political influence on the revolutionary direction taken by certain societies inspired by his writings as a whole, and by his unfinished theory of class in particular. Thus, Marx’s analysis of class represents an exercise in both theoretical and applied sociology.’ Edgell (1993), p. 2.

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his 'natural superiors', and has left remaining to man no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest...<sup>3</sup>

This radical theory was somewhat moderated by Max Weber, who developed Marx's theory of class into what later became known as the concept of social stratification. This indicates a division of society into several strata, arranged in a hierarchical order. Unlike Marx, who focused on conflict between and polarisation of the classes, the Weberian perspective highlights the class structure in terms of its problematic nature and inclination to fragmentation.<sup>4</sup>

Giddens builds on this further and suggests a structure of three main classes: the property-equipped upper class, the middle class distinguished by knowledge and skills, and a working class, with its 'labour-power'.<sup>5</sup> These classes are however likely to be internally divided, and the number of class fractions that may emerge out of this makes Giddens model less clear than it would seem at first glance.

In a wider context, Marx believed that class relations were not affected by nations and national boundaries, and any importance these held would be even more reduced with the continued evolution of capitalism. The state was, in Marxist terms, perceived to be

shaped by its dual internal and external roles of, respectively, inter-class domination and inter-class competition. Internally ... basically an apparatus which ensures the domination of ruling classes and the cohesion of class-divided societies ... externally ... an apparatus of competition between territorially delimited ruling classes.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>. Marx and Engels (1888/1998), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>. Giddens provides an informative and detailed overview of Weber's theories on social stratification in his *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies*, (1973).

<sup>5</sup>. Giddens (1973), pp. 107-112.

<sup>6</sup>. Cochrane and Anderson (1986), pp. 211-212.

Marx's internationalist theory held that the working class, or the proletariat, was basically an international class, which rejected the notions of nations and nationalism as well as those of classes and capitalism.<sup>7</sup> Class-consciousness emerged together with nationalism and although in various ways under different national and international conditions, the two concepts are linked and interrelated. 'Nationalism', as Breuilly contends, 'redefines the nature of legitimate authority'.<sup>8</sup> This comes about since nationalism is often the force that through change brings new political elites to the centre stage and in the process supersedes the established ruling class. 'Nationalist politics' can in some circumstances denote 'crisis politics',<sup>9</sup> and such political crises could make the ruling class disapprove of nationalism as an ideology and as a movement, presenting a formidable opposition not easily overcome by advocates of the national movement.

The development in nineteenth century Europe suggests that class struggles were fought on a national rather than international level, and as such reinforced the nation-state politically, culturally and economically as a sovereign unit. In this process, classes were unified within the boundaries of the state and separated from their fellow strugglers in foreign lands. This development was not quite what Marx anticipated, with the nation-state being strengthened rather than abolished – a development which reflects the previous discussions on the subject.

### 3.1.2 Class formation in the Middle East

The nature of class relations within nations and regions differs, and in order to provide an appropriate background on which to base further analysis, class-related developments on the regional level will be briefly outlined, as they are felt to be reflected locally.

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<sup>7</sup>. Outlined in *The Communist Manifesto* (1888/1998).

<sup>8</sup>. Breuilly (1993), p. 25.

<sup>9</sup>. Ibid.

The traditional classes in Marxist thought, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, did not clearly emerge in Middle Eastern societies.<sup>10</sup> The feudal society, for long dominant in many areas of the Middle East, characterised by its strict hierarchical organisation, is by definition divided in strata. In such a setting political integration tends to be stronger than economic integration, since 'classes do not emerge as a societal wide economic actors'.<sup>11</sup> The feudal class society gave way in Europe to the capitalist class society, but that pattern was not followed in the Middle East. Neither the Marxist nor the Weberian paradigms are wholly suitable for analysing the social composition of Middle Eastern societies, and the fluidity in the nature of class structure does not facilitate the application of those Western models to this region.

Landowners together with merchants have been the only permanent classes indigenous to the region, but their roots can only be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century. The extensive agrarian reforms that were carried out by regional governments, such as in Iraq after 1958, stripped the traditional land-owning classes of their landed assets, but their members did not disappear from the political stage, as they moved into the commercial or industrial sector. Richards and Waterbury identify three sets of actors to have emerged after the agrarian reform, namely the 'new' capitalist farmers, the medium-size landholders, and the large mass of smallholders. The first group is often represented by urban dwellers, whose rural interests are commercial in nature. The next rural stratum controls smaller land holdings and produce mainly for family subsistence, which means less diversified economic interests. The last grouping is struggling to make ends meet and these farmers are distinguishable from landless farmers and rural labour in that they own land, and for that reason their social status tends to be higher.<sup>12</sup>

From this discussion one may reach the conclusion that conventional Marxist entrepreneurial bourgeoisie is not discernible in Middle Eastern societies. Another scholar to recognise the weakness of the polarised bourgeoisie and

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<sup>10</sup>. Ayubi (1995), for instance, concerns himself with the 'missing bourgeoisie': see pp. 158-162.

<sup>11</sup>. Vogler (1985), p. 181.

<sup>12</sup>. Richards and Waterbury (1990), pp. 403-404.

proletariat in this region is Ayubi, who points out the absence of these 'polar classes' and acknowledges the significance of the intermediate social entities.<sup>13</sup>

Richards and Waterbury point at the petty bourgeoisie as being the social group to have emerged as the economic and political driving force. This social entity constitutes 'property-owning, mainly self-employed entrepreneurs in trades, services, petty manufacturing, and farming, who seldom hire labour'.<sup>14</sup> They are moreover characterised by 'the small-scale trading and manufacturing segment, the lower echelons of the new middle class, and those drawn from both segments but of specifically rural origin',<sup>15</sup> and the two scholars emphasise that the petty bourgeoisie is far from a static dynamism.

If it is a class, it does not wish to remain as it is but aspires to some other status... It does not seek to reproduce itself as a class. Its role ... has been to push its children on to higher education ... The petty bourgeoisie not only tries constantly to cast off its skin, but it is ideologically changeable as well. Its constant is a penchant for activism.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, it can be concluded that the petty bourgeoisie in the Middle East is hardly to be viewed as a class, rather an intensely dynamic actor. As a political force, the petty bourgeoisie is known to have been significant - an illustrative example would be the *bazaaris* of Iran who for long have been important actors on the domestic political arena.

### 3.1.3 The 'class-divided' society of Kurdistan

As suggested above, a conventional class analysis does not appear to be the most appropriate instrument with which to examine the fundamental structure on which the organisation of Kurdish society rests - hence a theory with greater potential for applicability to Kurdistan has to be identified.

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<sup>13</sup>. Ayubi (1995), pp. 177-178.

<sup>14</sup>. Richards and Waterbury (1990), p. 410.

<sup>15</sup>. Ibid. p. 413.

<sup>16</sup>. Ibid. pp. 413-414.

Kurdish society could be regarded as resembling what Anthony Giddens terms a 'class-divided society' (as opposed to the class society, brought about by capitalism). This concept concerns non-capitalist civilisations and describes societies that are divided along class-lines but show no structure or organisation according to class divisions.<sup>17</sup> Thus, even if we accept that classes are existing elements in Kurdish society, it is debatable whether the Kurdish population is class conscious.<sup>18</sup> The people themselves may not be aware of the social divisions that theorists say divide their society or may not feel that they belong to a particular social rank. In other words, 'the members of a class may not be class-conscious in their behaviour, but their behaviour could nonetheless be class-conditioned'.<sup>19</sup> Such a Kurdish reality could well be subject to change in the future, depending on the direction of political but also economic development. These sentiments may even be reinforced if the Kurdish region achieves independence, or conversely subdued if there is long-term continuance of status quo. In case of the former, one may point to a fact recognised by Samir Amin, namely should a firm structure of social classes be established within a state, it does not automatically mean an instant 'entrance of that society into the central (complete) or peripheral (dominated) capitalist era'.<sup>20</sup> Such a development in Kurdistan does not seem to be imminent, and should a 'restructured' Kurdish society emerge it is likely to remain on the margins of an integrated capitalist world community for some time.

The idea of a well-developed class system aside, social cleavages certainly exist in the Iraqi Kurdish areas. These cleavages have expanded in recent years and are now manifested in different loosely formed groups as well as between the ruling elites (especially the KDP and the PUK) and the general population. In addition to these cleavages, noticeable social divisions have also evolved between the internal refugees, the Kurds deported from Baghdad-controlled territories of Kirkuk, Khanaqin and Mosul,<sup>21</sup> and the existing population of the

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<sup>17</sup>. For a discussion of this, see Giddens (1981a), pp. 105-108.

<sup>18</sup>. See Giddens (1982), pp. 163-168 for a pertinent elaboration on the concept of 'class consciousness'.

<sup>19</sup>. Batatu (1978), p. 7.

<sup>20</sup>. Amin (1980), p. 46.

<sup>21</sup>. In particular the oil-rich areas of Kirkuk have been subjected to a large-scale depopulation campaign by the Baathists, aimed at changing the demography from Kurdish to Arab in an area,

autonomous region.

Brass notes that an economically dominant class may find it to its advantage to co-operate with external authorities as a means to enhance its own power.<sup>22</sup> This has been a recurrent theme in Iraqi-Kurdish relations<sup>23</sup> with powerful Kurdish leaders exchanging the Kurdish cause for the Iraqi/Arab upon being presented with the right incentives. Such self-interest by the ruling class, or rather individuals, clearly causes a weakening of the national movement, but again, this is no indication of an orderly division of the population into classes.

The polarisation of class differences within nations and reduction of differences between nations as Marx's *Communist Manifesto* in essence argued for, is not reflected in Kurdish society, or in Kurdish-Arab relations. On a broader level, class struggles have not been waged in the international arena, rather on a national level, which suggests that should Kurdish society in time become more class-oriented, any conflicts of a class-related nature are unlikely to engage the masses of the region, let alone internationally. Rather, the nation-state may gain strength from such a development and expand as opposed to diminish in importance and influence. This is recognised by Carolyn Vogler in stating that 'class conflict has been associated with a strengthening and expansion of nation-states and a polarisation of differences between nations'.<sup>24</sup>

Should the autonomous Kurdish region in Northern Iraq develop into an independent state, class interests would, in all likelihood, remain subordinated to national interests whilst the communal interest of strengthening the national economy is likely to take priority over any aspects of class interests. The emergence of distinct social classes would also reflect 'the extent of

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which has long been considered part of Kurdistan. Thousands of Kirkuki Kurds were uprooted and directed towards the autonomous region, particularly the area of Suleymaniya, where the Kurdish authorities on an already tight budget were forced to cope with this massive influx of refugees. For a detailed account of this ethnic cleansing, see Talabany (1999).

<sup>22</sup>. Brass (1991), p. 26.

<sup>23</sup>. There are similarities with Turkey, where particular Kurdish regions have seen economic integration into the national framework through the co-operative (or submissive, depending on one's perceptions) actions of powerful Kurdish figures. This is explained by Kendal (1993), 'Kurdistan in Turkey' in Gerard Chaliand (ed.) *A People without a country. The Kurds and Kurdistan*, London: Zed, pp. 38-94.

interdependence established by economic activity, which [would not necessarily] correspond with states as political units'.<sup>25</sup> It is true that national sovereignty would encourage the emergence or consolidation of class struggles, but the continued existence of a nation-state would also hinge on those class relations being regulated or contained within the national boundaries. Any economic and cultural ties are likely to extend across political boundaries, so any chances of a coherent definite class structure to develop and solidify in an independent Kurdistan confined to the Kurdish areas of Northern Iraq would have to be regarded as slim.

Patterns of social stratification in Kurdish society may well be best understood in the light of regional analyses, and examined in terms of power relations. As Ayubi notes, 'very often aspects of horizontal stratification (i.e. class, elites, etc.) are intermeshed ... with aspects of vertical differentiation (e.g. tribe, sect, ethnic, etc.)'.<sup>26</sup> The vertical differentiation of tribe in particular is interesting in this context of Kurdish societal organisation, and due consideration will subsequently be given to tribalism as a dynamic force in Kurdish society.

#### 3.1.4 Summary

As a general rule, struggles between nations seem to take priority over and moderate class conflict within them,<sup>27</sup> and Kurdistan is no exception. The outbreak of a revolutionary class conflict, as envisaged by Marx, between a large marginalised and alienated work force and a small wealthy employer-class in Iraqi Kurdistan, seems unlikely to occur. Likewise is the Leninist idea of a classless society in which nationalism would disappear but ethnic consciousness preserved not wholly applicable to Kurdish conditions.

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<sup>24</sup>. Vogler (1985), p. 3.

<sup>25</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>. Ayubi (1995), p. 175.

<sup>27</sup>. The suppression of any symptoms of class conflict in the Palestinian movement is illustrative in this context and relates well to the Kurdish case.

Kurdish society is not homogeneous, but socially stratified. To assume that this social stratification indicates a clear division into a class system would, however, be premature a judgment. The large Kurdish diaspora is not believed to have altered this picture in any substantial way.<sup>28</sup>

Class divisions within nations that struggle to establish themselves on the international level (or even regional level) are clearly of lesser significance than differences between nations. National interests instead assume great importance and are the moderating factors in any potential class conflict. In view of this, it appears as if the overall national struggle of the Kurds has continued to take precedence over class conflict also after the developments of the early 1990s. But are the social cleavages that have arisen during the past decade likely to undermine the tribes and the tribal structure? In order to address that question, there is a need to analyse the workings of the tribal system.

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<sup>28</sup>. Concluded through substantial consultation throughout the community of politically active Kurdish exiles in Sweden.



## 3.2 Tribe

Kurdish politics has for long been described simply in terms of its authoritative tribal nature, and the belief that influential and robust tribal leaders completely dominate the domestic political scene with their overarching influence seems as cemented as ever. This reflects the traditional view of tribalism<sup>29</sup> as being understood in geographical terms, i.e. the idyllic notion of a traditional tribal leader, who, positioned on a mountaintop or in a valley, serves as the guiding authority for all the tribesmen in all conceivable situations. Despite being greatly simplified, this understanding may be useful as a basis for an analysis of how Kurdish politics has been conducted in the past. However, in an assessment of the current dynamic political arena and its present characteristics, this impression needs to be thoroughly revised.

In order to understand the complexities of tribal influences in Kurdish politics, an insight into how tribes generally function in political contexts is likely to prove useful. Any such analysis would, however, be country-specific, but it is felt that a certain degree of generalisation is required if the aspirations for comparative elements to enrich the overall discussion are to be achieved. Most of these comparative studies consist of observations made in the Arab world and, as is sometimes pointed out by various authors, might not apply to societies on the fringes of the region, such as Iranian tribes, but their applicability to the Kurdish Middle East is, as will be suggested, in certain instances clear.

### 3.2.1 Comparative perspectives on tribalism

The term tribe can be understood as either a political unit or a cultural community. In order to avoid conceptual confusion, tribe will in this discussion be treated as a political organisation, which is also in agreement with the observations made by Gellner on Middle Eastern tribes primarily manifesting

themselves as political units with a subservient cultural role.<sup>30</sup> It is, however, important to emphasise that Kurdish tribes do not organise themselves independently, but tend to seek political space within the framework of the political parties. In other words, tribes come to rely on the modern organisation of the political parties.

A common factor for all tribal discussions is that tribes have been where they are for centuries and this fact raises pertinent questions of what sort of social entity they are that ensures their survival over such long periods of demographic and political change.

Patricia Crone succinctly defines a tribe as ‘a society which relies on descent for political integration’.<sup>31</sup> This can be explained as tribesmen originating from one patriarch, which makes them all brothers and as such, a cohesive social unit. All the people of a tribe share ancestry - a single past and a communal future, which encompasses their collective life at present. No clear borders exist. The tribal order is characterised by a somewhat specific ‘structural logic’. Paul Dresch, who based his work on tribes in Upper Yemen, made the following observation:

The tribes themselves are territorial entities. Usually the territory of each is contiguous, each has known borders with its neighbours, and there are very few points within ‘the land of the tribes’ which do not belong clearly to one tribe or another.<sup>32</sup>

A system based on tribal values and traditions contains potentially democratic elements, since the tribal *majlis* may serve as a forum for consultation and decision-making.<sup>33</sup> It is, however, important to note that there are various forms of tribalism: some with more and some with less of such a democratic element. An important factor determining the level of democracy is the environment –

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<sup>29</sup>. This phenomenon is also referred to as parochialism and communalism, but here *tribalism* would be the most appropriate term to use.

<sup>30</sup>. Gellner (1983b), p. 436.

<sup>31</sup>. Crone (1986), p. 51.

<sup>32</sup>. Dresch (1989), p. 75.

<sup>33</sup>. This is for example noted by Joseph Kostiner in his discussion on tribe and state in Saudi Arabia: Khoury and Kostiner (1990), p. 245.

whether mountainous, rural lowlands or a city milieu.

Dresch noted in a discussion of the continuity of tribes that people might transfer themselves between tribes and as this occurs, there seems to be ‘a system of redefinition [which] combines geographical and political units in new patterns’.<sup>34</sup> An example of such occurrences may be found in the history of the powerful Qashqa’i tribe in southwest Iran,<sup>35</sup> a case, which highlights the fact that tribes are generally geographically fixed, while men and families need not be. In the words of Dresch, ‘territorial fixity is definitive of collective identities, while families and particular men can move and take their names with them’.<sup>36</sup> Thus tribes may merge with other tribes in the spirit of brotherhood, which results in this change of identities – a practice which appears to be of long standing. From this it becomes clear that there is a need to distinguish between the tribe as an enduring social and political unit, and the people who at any time constitute it, since tribes as such by far outlive their individual members who may display a certain mobility.

The genealogical structures of tribes are sometimes fluid, insofar as a person who displays unfettered loyalty to a tribesman may eventually assume the position of a ‘related’ kinsman, whereas blood-relatives on the other hand who prove themselves disloyal may lose their status as close kinsmen. Davis refers to this as the principle of ‘kinsman is as kinsman does’,<sup>37</sup> a feature whose presence in Kurdish society is supported by van Bruinessen, stressing that ‘actual political allegiance to a lineage becomes [over time] more important than real kinship’.<sup>38</sup> However, actual or constructed the descent claimed, the general pattern is dominated by the inevitability of lineage: in other words, the generational model of ‘inheriting’ obligations and rights from one’s ancestors and of one’s descendants to exercise those same loyalties. Davis again: ‘the obligation to support certain other people, and to die with them if necessary, is part and parcel

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<sup>34</sup>. Dresch (1989), p. 328.

<sup>35</sup>. Beck (1980), p. 223.

<sup>36</sup>. Dresch (1989), p. 332.

<sup>37</sup>. Davis (1987), p. 61.

<sup>38</sup>. van Bruinessen (1992), p. 51.

of existence'.<sup>39</sup>

A tribe is not a cohesive, homogeneous unit, but one, which is divided in a number of sections. Between these sections there are 'intertribal' differences that are emphasised and de-emphasised according to the political climate. In times of conflict the nature of relations within a tribe changes dramatically, and this is when the segmentary character of the tribal structure becomes visible. The normal relationship between the different sections characterised by opposition to one another sometimes leading to fragmentation would instead transform into processes of re-alignment and unity of the whole tribe. In the face of an external threat the common identity of the sections, which usually is of minor relevance, suddenly assumes great importance.<sup>40</sup> Internal disputes are thus 'put on hold' when faced with external aggressors in similar way as class conflicts are suspended within a nation when it tries to assert itself on an international level.

Another common factor for tribal units in different areas is the position of *shaykhs* and their importance to the tribe. They have no formal power as such, but as respected elders and kinsmen they are 'able by subtlety and firmness and example to persuade people to act in ways which would maintain or increase their collective prestige'.<sup>41</sup> A capacity for peace-keeping is one of the most important functions of a *shaykh*, and one may say that 'the resolution of conflict rests on self-help'.<sup>42</sup> When faced with external aggression, which called for concerted action to defend the tribe's common territory, *shaykhs* from different sections consult each other, harmonise any differing views and decide on the best course of action. The *shaykh* then acts as the 'face' of the tribe, as Dresch puts it, who summarises the prominent standing of a *shaykh* as follows:

Someone must proffer the rifles or bulls, someone must call the tribesmen together, someone must speak for them as one group, call on another for support against a third or for mediation. There is no settled sense to what is occurring until someone steps forward and puts into words who is related how and to

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<sup>39</sup>. Davis (1987), p. 61.

<sup>40</sup>. Dresch (1989), p. 346.

<sup>41</sup>. Davis (1987), p. 96.

<sup>42</sup>. Crone (1986), p. 50.

whom.<sup>43</sup>

What distinguishes tribally organised people from non-tribal people the most in the eyes of tribesmen is the belonging to a specific entity and the quality of honour that it brings, as explained by Dresch again:

The honour of the tribe or section depends on maintaining the 'inviolability' of its territory, a concept which includes rather more than simple defence of the border line. ... The arable land is privately owned. ...none is held in common by sections or whole tribes, but the possession of arable land is essential to one's standing as a tribesman. ... One shares honour, which must then be defended and kept inviolate, primarily because one shares borders, which define the tribe's or section's territory.<sup>44</sup>

### 3.2.2 Tribes and state formation

Tribes relate differently to the distinct political constructs of 'nation' and 'state'. Tribal units may generally be regarded as positive components in the nation-building process, but could potentially obstruct efforts at state-building, constituting loose elements. An examination of this in the Kurdish context may prove particularly illuminating of the roles of tribes in these political processes: the Kurds constituting a nation, in which tribal influences and structures are dominant features, possibly moving towards establishing itself as a state among others on the international arena. In such a scenario of nationhood being transformed into statehood, the activities and attitudes of tribes have to be addressed and evaluated.

Nation-builders are faced with a difficult task trying to redirect the loyalty of tribesmen traditionally devoted to their tribes to serve the nation. The ideological objective for state-builders would then be to incorporate tribal leaders in the state organisation in an attempt to tie those strong allegiances to the state, a

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<sup>43</sup>. Dresch (1989), p. 99.

<sup>44</sup>. Ibid. pp. 80-82.

system sometimes referred to as 'political tribalism'.<sup>45</sup> An illustrative case of this is the process of building the modern state of Saudi Arabia, where the power of the government was in effect extended by gradually and subtly subjugating tribal leaders. Leading figures of the state associated themselves with influential leaders from the tribal establishment, and the co-operation that ensued, the nature of which was characterised by tribal values, carried with it the necessary element of familiarity through which the people sensed continuity in their society undergoing rapid change. This is articulated by Joseph Kostiner in the following paragraph:

Tribal values did not replace state administration but modified it, making it softer, easier to absorb. Thus, paradoxically, they became an important factor in spreading the authority of state institutions<sup>46</sup>

In relation to power and the sources of power, we will again turn to the authority on tribes, Dresch. He points out that there is a tendency (in the Western hemisphere) to 'equate power and identity, as if, for example, state and nation were the same',<sup>47</sup> but he stresses that this is not how one should view tribes. Rather 'power is elaborated on the basis of tribal identity, and that identity far outlives power's demise, retaining the memory and repute when the substance has gone'.<sup>48</sup> Hence, one may conclude that tribes as such are not threatened by power, as wielded from external, superior structures such as a state. In other words, it is not an easily accomplished task to annihilate tribes as political and social entities from the state territory, regardless of how strong and powerful the state may be.

Moving on from the Arabian Peninsula to North Africa, the tribal organisation in Libya through the work of John Davis will be looked at. Similarities between the two Arab regions can certainly be found, but the Libyan context is also profoundly different in the sense that 'it [the tribe] connoted a radical alternative

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<sup>45</sup>. Or *al-qabaliyya al-siyasiyya* as coined by al-Naqib in his *Al-Mujtama' wa al-dawla fi al-khalij wa al-jazira al-'arabiyya* [*Society and the State in the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula*], (1987) Beirut: CAUS, and elaborated on by Ayubi, N. (1995), pp. 240-253.

<sup>46</sup>. Kostiner (1990), p. 246.

<sup>47</sup>. Dresch (1989), p. 354.

to the state ... the tribalism of many Libyans was not a simple survival, an inability to adapt, to change, but was a self-conscious contestation of a government and its works'.<sup>49</sup>

Tribes in remote areas of Libya hence lived without any state intervention, and were in that sense stateless. The maintaining of social order and peace in their communities was contingent upon keeping within the strict pattern of social organisation of the tribe, producing strong sentiments of solidarity which were contrasted with the 'impersonality' of states. This Libyan idea of statelessness has both positive and negative elements to it. Of a positive nature is the central role of kinship and deep-seated loyalty – 'they depend on past domesticities and cannot be altered' - that provides support and security for each tribesman. This support, however, makes the protective state superfluous and any national government redundant. The fragility of this balance is easily disturbed and creates an atmosphere of fear, as Davis puts it, 'social order based on deterrence requires constant vigilance and is not flexible',<sup>50</sup> an observation that reflects the atmosphere reigning in many Kurdish tribal areas.

A traditional tribal society (being present in Kurdish as well as Arab society of Iraq) does not readily acknowledge the authority of state-appointed figures. This signifies the importance of establishing a wide national political platform, which can accommodate also the traditional forms of political and societal organisation. In the discussion of a Kurdish independent state, it is appropriate to return to a question that was posed earlier, i.e. the assumption that tribes may facilitate nation-building but severely obstruct efforts at state-building. Tribal Kurdish society appears to be comparable to that of Yemen, where Dresch observed that for tribes 'autonomy was the prime concern ... its precondition was the exclusion of non-tribal people defined by birth, a conception at odds with the language of modern politics'.<sup>51</sup> This implies that if certain tribes opposed Iraqi authorities they may also oppose central Kurdish authorities.

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<sup>48</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>. Davis (1987), p. 182.

<sup>50</sup>. Ibid. pp. 41-42.

In order to achieve mass mobilisation of rural people, communal partisanship, as a means to involve different groups of a community most of whom identify with interests which they regard as being inimical to the values of their communal traditions, has been invoked by many a nationalist movement. Kurdistan is no exception. Commitment to the traditional values on which much of the tribal society rests is not a recognised theme of pantribalism (as outlined below), but communal partisanship as a means through which to channel tribalism has been frequently utilised in Kurdish politics. The Kurdish movement during the decades of the leadership of Mustafa Barzani owed its organisation and structure more to tribalism than nationalism, and the KDP under Mullah Mustafa's management operated on a basis of communal partisanship.

In areas where traditionalism remains the strongest element and has not given way to efforts at modernisation and attempts to introduce a process aimed at achieving sustainable social change, communal partisanship may be regarded as a form of tribal movement similar to a political party. Members may view the party as an extension of their societal establishment, the social aspects of which encapsulates the particularities of traditional tribal organisation manifested in spiritual and sentimental attachments. The party thus becomes an alternative expression of the traditional tribal social order: a political platform with an added dimension of the integration of a comprehensive system of values, a system whose traditional values may also include elements of nationalism.

However, in comparison with political parties,<sup>52</sup> it must be stressed that in terms of being stable and sustainable entities, any such ideological formations cannot match a tribal order. Members of tribes do not defect from the organisation should they disagree with the philosophy or beliefs of the leadership (although they can of course depart or be exiled for other reasons). In the words of John Davis, 'lineages are not opinion-based groups'.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>. Dresch (1989), p. 395.

<sup>52</sup>. Here referring to 'a voluntary association of individuals, united for common political purposes': Scruton (1996), pp. 405-406.

Tribal forces dominated the Kurdish political arena through arrangements characterised by communal partisanship until the mid-1970s, and in the more traditional Kermanji-speaking areas in the rural north of 'Free Kurdistan', communal partisanship still appears to be the most useful basis through which to mobilise large segments of the population.

New ideologies, such as that of nationalism, established themselves on the Kurdish political scene in the twentieth century, and the impact was felt mainly in the urban milieus. In these areas young people were able to advance their academic interests by attending universities, presumably not an activity greatly favoured in a traditional tribal society. It would appear likely that higher education may over time enable tribesmen to build a different platform from where they could exert a new form of political leadership accompanied by an ideology - a sharp contrast to the tribal organisation. Such an educated class would be a threat to the continued power-position of the tribes, in the sense that the tribe had always been the sole invoker of group mobilisation.

Resulting from this emergence of nationalist ideologies, people's awareness of belonging to specific tribal groupings and having different orientations in terms of religion, ethnicity and language weakened. The intellectual Kurdish leadership that emerged in such an urban setting in the late 1970s had put tribal affiliations aside (those who had any) and regarded the force of tribalism as the internal enemy, 'the native oppressor',<sup>54</sup> of Kurdish nationalism. Their views reflected the popular assumption that tribalism is incompatible with the constructive development of a nation socially and politically. Tribally structured societies traditionally feature old and deep-seated loyalties, the persistence of which may hinder the emergence of national solidarity. Tribal movements based on ethnic group loyalties are seen to inevitably undermine the emergence of broader loyalties essential to form the basis of nation-states. In the eyes of many nationalists and scholars of the subject alike, these tribally organised individuals often fail to exhibit sufficient enthusiasm for trading their separate tribal identities to that of the nation to which they belong and in doing so they

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<sup>53</sup>. Davis (1987), p 61.

incapacitate the state and are hence viewed with scepticism. This view is, however, contested by Richard Sklar in his study on Nigeria, in which he redefines the relationship between tribal practice and nationalist ideals, asserting that tribalism has contributed in crucial ways to nationalism. The tribal society of this West African country bears resemblance to that of Kurdistan, and provides an historical example of contemporary relevance.

Sklar discerns a clear manifestation of tribalism: namely pantribalism, which he argues has served as an impelling force to the development of mass political parties as well as a promotor of national independence. Being secular in nature, the idea of pantribalism focuses on the creation of a common platform for people with similar culture but different tribal affinities. As Sklar writes: 'the pantribal spirit was ardent in the breasts of those who felt the most urgent need for unity beyond the parochial confines of their tribes'.<sup>55</sup>

This pantribalism manifested itself in the formation of a broad based political party alongside a pantribal cultural organisation, a committee of paramount chiefs, whose sanctioning of governmental decisions provided important moral support for the policies of government. It was also in a position to mediate in conflicts between tribal units, that the government would have been unable to handle successfully. Hence it was a 'crucial link between ... [the government], the chiefs, and other men of influence to facilitate the implementation of party policies ... with a minimum of difficulty or resistance'.<sup>56</sup>

Similar to Nigeria in the 1960s, tribal leaders in Kurdish areas are often the most influential opinion-makers, and their co-operation is crucial for a political party seeking support in an area under the control of a particular tribe. Despite differences, tribes experience common interests and in order to safeguard these, attempts to bring tribal leaders together in a political party with pantribal overtones may well prove successful. The support of traditional authorities normally means support of large numbers of people of their following. While

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<sup>54</sup>. Hassanpour (1992), p. 61.

<sup>55</sup>. Sklar (1960), p. 416.

<sup>56</sup>. Ibid. pp. 410-411.

some tribal leaders might be attracted to the cultural message of pan-Kurdish unity in tribal disguise, others might find the political and economic power of the pantribal elite appealing. Thus if utilising the potential of tribalism, this ‘difficult’ force can indeed be incorporated and positively contribute to the national movement.

### 3.2.3 Tribalism and Kurdistan

Tribalism in Kurdistan developed out of nomadism – regarded as the original form of Kurdish social organisation. A feudal structure of society then evolved, the gradual transformation of which further gave way to landlordism<sup>57</sup> (signifying land owned by wealthy *aghas*, chieftains, whose ancestors were feudal lords). In order to contextualise this there is a need to go back to the wider region and the establishment of the state of Iraq.

Under the decentralised Administration of the Ottoman Empire, most areas (including the Kurdish) were governed chiefly by local authorities, whose sources of power were often rooted in the conventional society, i.e. that of tribes. Tribal leaders made up the most notable and influential elements among the ruling cliques in these local administrative units. However, throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Ottomans initiated a process of detribalisation, as an attempt to break Kurdish power.<sup>58</sup> This ‘modernising’ trend was reversed by Great Britain, who during the Mandate period 1919-1932, launched a policy whereby many tribal leaders regained the power and authority that was taken away from them by the Ottoman government.<sup>59</sup> The British even introduced separate legislative measures for the tribal areas. Due to these major efforts, by the mid-1920s, tribal leaders once again emerged as the rural areas’ most powerful political and administrative units. This was important for the British as co-operation of tribal chiefs ensured political stability in the rural areas. From

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<sup>57</sup>. Pelletiere (1984) equates this term with detribalisation, as he writes ‘the essence of tribalism is that a tribe owns its land in common; landlordism is the antithesis of that principle’ (p. 18).

<sup>58</sup>. Pelletiere (1984) offers a long discussion on this Ottoman policy: see pp. 31-41.

<sup>59</sup>. For an account of the enthusiastic re-tribilising measures of the British, see chapter eight, ‘The Kurds, Britain and Iraq’ in McDowall (1996).

this one may conclude that the British appeared to support state building only when it coincided with its colonial and imperial interests.

The power structure created by the British government during the Mandate period was characterised by an emphasis on the stark contrasts between the people constituting the Iraqi state, and this policy affected inter-ethnic relations of the post-Mandate years. There were thus no efforts at trying to integrate the tribes in the state formation process, as Nelida Fuccaro recognises:

Independent Iraq inherited from the Ottoman and British administrations a long-standing conflict between cities and the countryside, which reflected a dichotomy between the sedentary and tribal worlds.<sup>60</sup>

Following in the footsteps of the British and also the Hashemites, the Baathists were resolute in pursuing tribalisation policies to advance their wider aims and objectives. A post-1975 retribalisation of society was enforced by Baghdad's efforts at forming *jash*-contingents. As David McDowall points out: 'It was Baghdad ... which deliberately fostered tribalism by co-opting the chiefs to raise militia forces against the Kurdish national movement'.<sup>61</sup>

Baghdad with its *Anfal*-campaign played havoc with the economic base in many areas of rural Kurdistan, and as a result of this some tribes had little option but to accept rather unethical offers from the government to serve state interests. As al-Khafaji writes, these tribes 'became mercenaries (eg Zibari, Hirki) to secure the means of preserving and enhancing their authority'.<sup>62</sup> This policy of turning some prominent tribes into mercenaries was successful insofar as the regime managed to create sharp divisions among the Kurds, which weakened the Kurdish national struggle. This employment of tribalism as a tool to aggravate inter-Kurdish belligerence was not a newly formulated policy by the Iraqi government but one, which appeared to be as aggressively pursued throughout the 1980s as in the preceding decade.

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<sup>60</sup>. Fuccaro (1997), p. 561.

<sup>61</sup>. McDowall (1995), 'The Struggle for Kurdistan', *MEI*, No 498, 14 April, pp. 19-20.

Increased social mobilisation may be a contributing factor to the dissolution of tribal loyalties. If people are no longer confined to strict tribal territory, chances are their tribal awareness becomes less prominent over time. As large numbers of Kurds rushed to the relative safety of the cities following Baghdad's massive depopulation and resettlement campaigns targeted at Kurdish areas, it would be easy to assume that the power and influence of tribes has weakened significantly over the last two decades. This may, however, not be the case.

With the new developments of the 1990s, there has been a general trend to discard the element of tribalism in analyses of Kurdish society and its impact on politics. However, Iraqi Kurdistan has been an area where the new phenomenon of *neo-tribalism*, or rather the re-emergence of tribalism, has occurred, referred to as tribalism 'in a new guise'. This does not indicate that the geography of tribal divisions has changed, or that the influence of tribal leaders remains unaltered. Various political figures on the Kurdish political arena still act in line with traditional tribal custom, but the difference is that both human and environmental settings have changed, which is an effect of *neo-tribalism*.

As indicated above, the urbanisation of large segments of the population in the 1980s caused a transformation of the societal organisation, in the process of which the tribally inspired loyalties lost their appeal to many former tribesmen. In the urban milieu the mediating functions of a tribal leader – in the past, the most indispensable of his duties – were no longer in demand. However, this development does not incorporate the notion that the need for supportive patrons among ordinary Kurds has expired. Rather, dependence on patronage to accommodate their basic needs is still largely a feature of mainstream Kurdish rural as well urban life, the difference being that responsibilities, formerly held by the tribal chieftains, are now shouldered by the KDP and the PUK. In their respective areas of authority the two party leaderships have sought to secure the allegiance of the people by seeing to their needs in the areas of employment, provision of housing and building materials, the supplying of various goods, and

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<sup>62</sup>. He also points out that in their heyday these battalions numbered more than 250 and

protection - in other words networks of patron-client relationships have developed. David McDowall explains:

The similarities between old and new are striking: both operate through intensely loyal retinues and, through these, command the loyalty of several 'tribes'. Such tribes are today less visible to outsiders than traditional ones. Some are tribal groups in the traditional sense. But many are old jash contingents, or peshmerga groups headed by a local commander. Some are dependably loyal to the paramount, others trade on the best offer they can get, and switch allegiances when advantageous.<sup>63</sup>

This *neo-tribalism* is not an isolated phenomenon in Iraqi Kurdistan, but one that is also discernible in Iraq proper. In order to reaffirm his grip on power at a time when the uprising of 1991 had seriously challenged his authority, Saddam Hussein approached the old tribal chieftains and sought to strengthen his position through allegiances with these local notables. This focus was primarily on the Sunni-dominated central parts of the country, but also the Shia south was important as tribal recruiting ground. Capitalising on the reigning climate of fear and suspicion, measures such as this indicated that the Iraqi president aspired to solidify national unity under his authoritarian rule to ensure that further popular revolts were to be avoided.<sup>64</sup>

The concept of *neo-tribalism* may not be as 'new' as some suggest. In an African context, observations were made already back in 1971 of territoriality no longer constituting the sole basis for tribalism, and the phenomenon had 'extended to areas ... far removed from the tribal homeland'.<sup>65</sup> As a result of modernisation, the tribesmen might not have lived in the same area, but that did not prevent them from 'still identify[ing] with one another in specific contexts'.<sup>66</sup> This relates to the analyses above regarding neo-tribal tendencies in Kurdish politics, and indicates that although Kurdistan is highly specific in many regards, the developments there tend to reflect developments elsewhere.

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incorporated some 100,000 Kurdish tribesmen. See al-Khafaji (1994), p. 27.

<sup>63</sup>. McDowall (1995), *MEI*, No 499, 28 April.

<sup>64</sup>. Amazia Baram has painstakingly examined this in his 1997 article.

<sup>65</sup>. Mafeje (1971), p. 259.

### 3.2.4 Summary

The basic features of Kurdish tribalism seem to be similar to tribal structures and organisations elsewhere in the Middle East, but in terms of practices, Kurdish Northern Iraq does differ in certain regards. For instance, in a Central African context, tribalism is described as an effect of weak and corrupt states, not the cause of it,<sup>67</sup> which would not accurately describe the situation in the Kurdish areas. Another dimension that sets Africa clearly apart from the politically tribal Middle East is that the African tribes in being less tightly integrated come across as cultural rather than political units, which contrasts the Kurdish tribe, which has been perceived as a primarily political community.

In a North African or Maghreb Arab context, tribalism is the result of people evading the state and, as indicated above by John Davis, statelessness is a positive notion for these peoples. Again, this situation diverges from Kurdish sentiments and reality. Moreover, in the Arabian peninsula, the force of tribalism was well capitalised on when the modern states were being established, insofar as co-operation between state figures and tribal leaders brought about a natural transfer of political power. Perhaps this development relates best to the Kurdish setting, and how the tribal factor in Kurdish politics may be approached and utilised.

Closer to home, the Iraqi regime's use of tribalism is manifested in that Saddam Hussein is not concerned with ideology. By avoiding the use of ideological indoctrination, a dependence on kinship and strong sentiments of unfettered loyalty to the Leader and his Administration develops. The leaderships of the two Kurdish parties do not carry this to the same extremes, but in essence it is the same idea utilised by Kurdish and Arab leaders.

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<sup>66</sup>. Ibid.

Tribal divisions have always been present in Kurdish society, but instead of making concerted efforts to heal the rifts and lessen the divides, the KDP and PUK have through various 'loyalty-schemes' aimed at various parts of the population in fact exacerbated the same. The tribal leaders that have been incorporated in their respective party systems represent a group of people of KDP or PUK standing, rather than individuals of Iraqi Kurdistan as a whole. Political activity channelled through tribal systems has been a recurrent theme throughout Kurdish history, and a practice which does not appear to be on the decline.

Century-old political loyalties are important as a basis on which to mobilise large sections of the population in a short time. Tribes are, in the words of Dresch, very much 'a pact built around protection',<sup>68</sup> the need of which did not cease with modernisation of the society and urbanisation of the people, although there are those who argue for the non-sustainability of a tribal system. Sathyamurthy, for instance believes that 'traditional structures are susceptible to erosion inherent in the size, mobility and organisation of a modernising or industrial/technological society'.<sup>69</sup> The complete erosion of tribal structures could be contested by pointing at the length of time tribes have existed, and that alone would be indicative of the unlikelihood of seeing these entities disappear in the near future. Dresch sums it up eloquently in the following paragraph:

Formations of power rise and fall in the tribal system without changing much part of tribal classification. Tribes seldom, if ever, win or lose definitively. The course of power is of vital concern to understanding events in the short term and guessing who will support whom at present. But if the tribal system is to be seen as a source of problems for modern politics, it has also been capable of absorbing and indeed containing an extraordinary range of conflicts imposed on it from elsewhere in the course of the last thousand years. Its resilience has, in its own way, been as great as that of, say, the great religions and philosophies whose combinations of a few clear principles with an indefinitely wide range of practice

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<sup>67</sup>. Maybury-Lewis (1997) has elaborated on this, see particularly pp. 53-55.

<sup>68</sup>. Dresch (1989), p. 346.

<sup>69</sup>. Sathyamurthy (1983), p. 73.

gives the illusion of unchanging permanence.<sup>70</sup>

A question of great relevance is whether modernity, as implicated in the formation of a nation-state, is compatible with such a traditional element as that of tribalism. Modernity has weakened tribal relationships and social cleavages, as examined in the previous section, do seem to in the long run undermine the tribes and the tribal structure. It would appear that 'the tribe and the modern state represent two opposite ends of an organisational spectrum',<sup>71</sup> but in contrast to conventional wisdom it may prove conceivable to achieve a combination of continuity and renewal, which the two concepts basically stand for.

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<sup>70</sup>. Dresch (1989), pp. 354-355.

<sup>71</sup>. Crone (1986), p. 77.

### 3.3. Religion

Politics and religion are distinct, but they depend upon each other for their healthy functioning. If political action mediates religious faith, religious faith in its turn mediates a truly humane politics.<sup>72</sup>

Few, if any, societies can claim that religion has no impact on their societal development in the sense that the political discourse is free from all forms of religious influence, connotations and symbolism. As Haynes in his analysis of the relationship between the political and religious spheres of societies observes: ‘the relationship between religion and politics is both dialectical and interactive: each shapes and influences the other’.<sup>73</sup> This is clear to see in the Kurdish socio-political order, where all political leaders have also been religious by tradition.

The population of central Kurdistan is overwhelmingly Muslim, so the religious-historical evolution of this relatively traditional society, as well as the role played at present by this basic component and shaper of Kurdish politics, will be examined from a Sunni Islamic perspective. The existence of religious minority communities in the area, however, gives rise to the question whether religious cleavages are discernible within society. These may not be of a serious nature but such divisions may prove conflict-generating, and threaten Kurdistan’s long history of religious pluralism and tolerance.

#### 3.3.1 The religious plurality of Kurdistan

Providing an in-depth account of the different religious denominations and their interaction throughout Kurdistan is a much too ambitious task for the current section and its purposes. Consequently a more concise analysis of the beliefs in the area of immediate interest will be attempted.

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<sup>72</sup>. Davis (1980) p. 153. For a pertinent and detailed discussion on the language of religion and the language of politics, see his chapter 6.

<sup>73</sup>. Haynes (1998), p. 5.

The vast majority of Kurds profess Sunni Islam and by adhering to the *Shafi'i* school of law, they distinguish themselves from their neighbouring Turks and Arabs (who out of the four schools of Islamic law follow the *Hanafi* rite).<sup>74</sup> Even though the differences between these two schools of thought are by no means significant in terms of religious practices, the *Shafi'i* belonging provides some Kurds with an important marker by which they maintain their ethnic identity towards hostile external elements.<sup>75</sup>

The other main branch of Islam, Shi'a, is also represented among the Kurds, but in relatively small numbers. Kurdish Shiites, generally referred to as *Fayli-Kurds*, are in Northern Iraq mainly to be found in the districts of *Khanaqin* and *Mandali*. They constitute a fair share of all Kurds in Iraq, but their numbers have dwindled considerably after the accession of the Baath party to power in Iraq.<sup>76</sup>

*Ahl-e Haqq* ('People of God/the Truth'), also known as *Kakai* in Iraq, live in districts south of *Kirkuk*, and van Bruinessen believes that they are 'the remnants of a much larger community all over the area that is now southern Kurdistan and Lorestan'.<sup>77</sup>

Another heterodox sect, often in an erroneous and insulting manner referred to as 'devil-worshippers', is that of the *Yazidis*. They appear to have originated from the Sunni branch of Islam, but resemble more an extremist Shiite denomination. More than any other religious sect the *Yazidis* have been subject to severe persecution by other Muslims. Only found among the Kurds, the *Yazidis* speak *Kurmanji*, and reside mainly in the mountainous areas southwest and east of *Mosul* and in *Sinjar*, by the Iraqi-Syrian border.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>. van Bruinessen (1992), p. 23.

<sup>75</sup>. Kreyenbroek (1996), p. 93.

<sup>76</sup>. Between 1969 and 1988 more than 130,000 *Fayli-Kurds* were deported from Iraq to Iran under the pretext of them being of Iranian origin (due to their unfortunate ethnic-religious combination of being Kurds and Shiites), despite the fact that they had been living in Iraq for generations. Salih (1994), p. 196.

<sup>77</sup>. van Bruinessen (1992), p. 23.

<sup>78</sup>. Kreyenbroek (1996), pp. 96-99.

With regard to Jewish elements in Kurdish society, they have for long constituted lively communities throughout Kurdistan, primarily functioning within the more specialised economic spheres of society, together with the Christians. As for Jewish presence in Iraqi Kurdistan, their numbers dwindled considerably in the mid-twentieth century when a majority of the Kurdish Jews migrated to the State of Israel after its establishment in 1948.

Prior to external engagement in the Kurdish areas of powers alien to the region, there were three distinct Christian communities in Kurdistan, namely the Syrian Orthodox, the Assyrians, and the Armenians. Of these, mainly Assyrians lived in what is today Northern Iraq, a large number of whom after conversion by French Catholic missionaries in the seventeenth century, were called Chaldeans. Numerous Christians were later to flee the region after hostility towards them – not unrelated to the interference of Russia and Britain under the pretext of protecting the local Christians - led to bloody massacres.<sup>79</sup> Many Kurds viewed the missionaries as ‘the forerunners of direct military intervention’, sentiments which served to exacerbate the tension between the two ethnic-religious groups in Kurdistan.<sup>80</sup>

This demonstrates how religion was turned into a divisive and conflict-generating factor by foreign powers well before the division of Kurdistan following the First World War. External interference in Kurdistan created heightened tension and socio-cultural divisions that may not otherwise have emerged, or at least may not have assumed such great proportions.

### 3.3.2 The development of ‘Kurdish Islam’ and the political role of *shaykhs*

Islam is very much an integral part of the societies of the Middle East, and Kurdistan is no exception. Michael Gilson explains how Islam is such a dynamic force and a powerful transformer of social structures within society in the following paragraph:

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<sup>79</sup>. van Bruinessen (1992), pp. 24-25.

Part of the vitality and dynamism in Islam in society springs from the tensions, competition, and contradictions inherent in the ranks of the different specialists and holy men, who may at one moment be completely and publicly at odds, asserting their sole control of a given power or path to blessing, and at another moment be happily cooperative or even unified.<sup>81</sup>

A discussion on such ‘holy men’ – with reference to the previous section – would in a Kurdish context be translated into *shaykhs*, religious leaders, and their political functions. As already stated, *shaykhs* serve as important mediators and act to prevent inter-tribal disharmony from reaching its full military potential. Often they hold double roles as spiritual and political leaders, and early on made religious practice in rural areas a powerful force. In the words of Mesut Yeğen, the *shaykhs* ‘fulfilled the role of a mediator between the religion of Islam and Kurdish nationalism’.<sup>82</sup>

Two general patterns are discernible in the historical development of Islam in Kurdistan: one manifested in an ‘official and institutionalised Islam’, and one in what may be termed a ‘popular Islam’. Many Kurdish chieftains associated themselves with the institutionalised religion without emphasising their national and/or ethnic belonging. In the fringes of the areas controlled by the official religious authorities, a different form of Islam existed in the shape of mystical Sufi orders under the leadership of *shaykhs*. As van Bruinessen points out, ‘there was not a clear-cut distinction here between official and popular religion’, and since the different interpretations enriched and complimented the other ‘they were not seen as rival traditions but as parts of the same complex’.<sup>83</sup>

Kurdish religiousness is largely characterised by the prominent position of Sufi brotherhoods and their peculiar practices, which is not found among many other Muslim communities, where more formalised religion is practised. The Kurdish image of Islam has strong mystical overtones and many Kurdish ‘*ulama* have been associated with a *tariqa*, or dervish-order, led by a *shaykh*. In traditional

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<sup>80</sup>. Ibid. p. 229.

<sup>81</sup>. Gilsenan (2000), pp. 29-30.

<sup>82</sup>. Yeğen (1996), pp. 219-220.

<sup>83</sup>. van Bruinessen (1982), p. 285.

Kurdish society the religious leader has a strong position, and being perceived as a link between God and the human being, he often found himself in a favourable situation which could successfully be capitalised on in order to acquire power and influence.

Observed by van Bruinessen, the *shaykh* has not one but multiple roles. First and foremost, however, he is a 'holy man, [an] object of popular devotion'. Due to this, he enjoys great respect, which makes him the ideal intermediary in conflicts - a position that generates political leverage.<sup>84</sup> With the complete disappearance of the autonomous Kurdish principalities in the mid-nineteenth century, many conflicts between tribes flared up. In this context the *shaykh* was the only Kurdish personality who stood above tribal affiliation and who could mediate in conflictual situations.<sup>85</sup> The Sufi orders and their shaykhs were therefore considerably important as they managed to 'generate a more general awareness of ethnic unity overriding tribal and regional differences'.<sup>86</sup>

Religion and politics are widely perceived as being inseparable in Islam. This perception derives from the fact that the Islamic community, the '*umma*', holds simultaneous functions as a religious and a political body. Against this background it seems natural to expect any religious figures to pursue political activities and goals. It would appear inaccurate to claim that the consciousness of the Islamic '*umma*' since the time of the autonomous sixteenth and seventeenth century Kurdish principalities has outdone national consciousness. Rather, it has complemented it. During the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, at a time when the force of nationalism began to gain ground in Kurdistan, the spiritual leaders came to assume greater importance in the political sphere.<sup>87</sup> Through their Sufi order, the *shaykhs* could reach his devoted followers over a large area, which gave him the capacity to mobilise significant numbers of enthusiastic supporters should the situation

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<sup>84</sup>. To this it can be added that his potential of a mediator was further strengthened by the fact that as many *shaykhs* do not tend to live in the area of their birth they have no allegiances to any of the local tribes. van Bruinessen (1982), p. 286.

<sup>85</sup>. Salih (1994), p. 200.

<sup>86</sup>. van Bruinessen (1992b), p. 51.

<sup>87</sup>. On the various ways that the *shaykhs* gained political and economic influence through religion, see van Bruinessen (1992) pp. 205-208.

require.<sup>88</sup>

It has often been claimed that the radical and secular nature of nationalism renders traditional religious authorities hostile towards this ideology, but as Breuilly points out, any such hostility depends on 'the position the nationalist movement takes towards established religion'.<sup>89</sup> If it is a case of fighting the same enemy, nationalists may well ally themselves with the religious authorities. Moreover, 'nationalist definitions of the nation were often suffused with religious terms',<sup>90</sup> and the Kurdish experience is a case in point, as previously indicated. In Kurdistan the clergy, perhaps less institutionalised and more popular than in many other places, has indeed played a vital role in the nationalist movement.

Of the many Sufi orders that exist in the Islamic world, two in particular have been of importance in Kurdistan: the Qadiriya and the Naqshbandiya orders. The first Kurdish revolt with nationalist overtones in 1880 was led by the Naqshbandi Shaykh Ubeidullah, and the major one in the 1920s by Shaykh Said, representing the Qadiriya-order.<sup>91</sup> As for the modern Kurdish leaders in Northern Iraq, the late Mullah Mustafa Barzani (of Naqshbandiya) and Jalal Talabani (of Qadiriya) have made good use of their families' traditional religious roles in their political careers, although not themselves *shaykhs*.<sup>92</sup>

### 3.3.3 Religion as a mobilising force in Iraqi Kurdistan

Religions are hardly static ideologies but dynamic philosophies and as such in constant processes of change - 'consequently their relationships with politics also vary over time'.<sup>93</sup> The role of religion played in Kurdish politics in the early days of nationalistic fervour has been looked at, and as we turn to more recent times, the question is whether modern Islamic movements can yield the same

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<sup>88</sup>. van Bruinessen (1992), p. 210.

<sup>89</sup>. Breuilly (1982), pp. 311-312.

<sup>90</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>91</sup>. For an account of this see Olson (1989).

<sup>92</sup>. Salih (1994), p. 199.

influence and power over Kurdish politics as religious leaders did in the early twentieth century. Shaykh Said's revolt in 1925 relied heavily on religion as its main basis for mobilisation and propaganda.<sup>94</sup> Could any of that be seen today? Are the symbols for Kurdish nationalism, as expressed in Northern Iraq, still of a religious nature?

All over the Middle East, religion is viewed as instrumental in legitimising power for many regimes, be they monarchies or republics, and this frequent use of religious references to is not unknown to Kurdish politics. Apart from the legacy of traditional elements of religious character and their impact on the political discourse, religious references have also been used as a response to regional developments. Not only the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, but also deliberate policies by Saddam Hussein to legitimise his rule in religious terms, have impacted on the Kurds and their resort to religious references.

Marxist-Leninist thought was a strong element in Kurdish political discourse throughout the 1970s and 1980s, but due to the upsurge in radical Islam in the region in the mid- and late 1980s, Kurdish organisations (mainly the PKK but to a lesser extent also those in Northern Iraq) were compelled to appear more accommodating in their attitudinal and practical approach to religion, as a result of the political climate in the Middle East.

At the time when a rebellion led by the chieftain Simko challenged the Iranian State in the 1920s, two important ideologies emerged that had a wider appeal than tribal loyalties: pan-Islamism and Kurdish nationalism. These movements offered the tribal leaders ideological and material sources of power similar to that of the state, but the difference was the Islamists and nationalists relied on the tribes for military power.<sup>95</sup> When Islam turned into a political force in Iranian Kurdistan, the tribes were needed for their military prowess, a historical parallel that begs the question whether today's Islamist movements operating in

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<sup>93</sup>. Haynes (1998), p. 5.

<sup>94</sup>. Olson (1989), p. 153.

<sup>95</sup>. van Bruinessen (1983), p. 378.

Northern Iraq are in a similar need of a tribal base in order to make any impact on Iraqi Kurdish politics.

In many parts of the Middle East where political Islam has become a force, it tends to emanate from the urban society and recruits mainly from a marginalised youth. Also in Northern Iraq, the influence of these groups can be seen only among the most needy, who appear to accept the Islamists' authority because of the financial gains. The radical Islamic movement trying to establish itself in Northern Iraq has to impose itself as a social actor, challenging the power of the local *shaykhs* and Sufi orders, hence engaging in somewhat of a 'social contest'. Due to the nature of Kurdish religiousness, such neo-Islamism hence faces constraints that other Islamist movements in the region do not have to concern themselves with.<sup>96</sup>

Hence politics, religion and military still appear to be closely intertwined. The new religious elements' lack of a political and military base, in other words tribal base, hinders their efforts to gain an influential position in the politics of Iraqi Kurdistan (the IMK is admittedly the third largest party in the self-ruling entity, but it does not rival the 'big parties'). Many of their difficulties stem from the fact that these new religious political groupings are regarded as agents acting on behalf of foreign powers, in particular the Iranian and Saudi regimes, and are strongly disliked by intellectuals and grass roots alike who are 'religious in their hearts'. The mainstream population can be divided into two groups regarding their negative attitudes towards the 'neo-Islamic' micro-movements: firstly the older generation, the traditionally religious people who are not easily influenced by any new ideas, and secondly the younger generation who become politically active but cherish little if any traditional religiousness and tend to reject the advances of these new religious movements.<sup>97</sup>

There are also important geographical differences in the acceptance of neo-Islamic influences. As David McDowall points out, the Islamic movement enjoys its strongest support in Sorani urban areas ...[which] suggests that the

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<sup>96</sup>. Compare the views of Oliver Roy (1994), *The Failure of Political Islam*, London: I.B. Tauris.

Islamic impulse is felt less strongly in more traditional zones, the mountains and the Kermanji area'.<sup>98</sup> *Jund-al-Islam*, as noted earlier, is indeed operating in the south-east of the autonomous region.

Hamit Bozarslan in a discussion on political Islam in Kurdistan stated that Kurdish Islamism is likely to affect the region mainly in two ways. There is a risk of further internal division of Kurdish society if Kurdish Islamic groups adopt a universalistic approach and establish unifying links with forces outside the Kurdish context, be it Turkish, Iranian, Iraqi or any other Islamic body (a fear exemplified by *Jund al-Islam*'s alleged connection to the al-Qaida organisation). Islamism is by definition no comprehensive ideology for a national struggle, and the link created between nationalism and Islamism may create an ambiguity in the political discourse and lead to non-Islamist political groups making use of religious references to legitimise their hold on or aspirations for power.<sup>99</sup>

In spite of the vast majority of Kurds are Muslims, religious fanaticism has been conspicuous by its relative absence from Kurdistan. Before the emergence of *Jund al-Islam*, those religious movements formed *within* the Kurdish region, have tended to be moderate, even progressive in character, compared with Islamic groups elsewhere and those 'exported' to the area. Following the 1979 revolution in Iran, Islamic extremism started to appear on a small scale throughout Kurdistan, but this was regarded as the result of outside intervention in order for a certain regime to establish supporting organizations amongst the Kurds, or simply to encourage inter- and intra-Kurdish hostilities, by introducing a new form of highly politicised Islam.<sup>100</sup> *Jund al-Islam* may well be regarded as a modern phenomenon in so far as it is a reaction to modernity among the uneducated masses.

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<sup>97</sup>. Explained by Dr Latif Rashid, London 1999.

<sup>98</sup>. McDowall (1995), 'The struggle for Kurdistan', *MEI*, No 499, 28 April.

<sup>99</sup>. Bozarslan (1998), 'Minority Nationalism and Political Islam: the Kurdish Case', paper presented at the Kurdological Conference *Between Imagination & Denial. Kurds as subjects and objects of political and social processes*, May 29-31, Berlin.

<sup>100</sup>. For more on this see forthcoming chapter 6, *Iraqi Kurdistan on the regional scene*, on the role of the regional powers.

Republic of Iran to establish and consolidate Islamic political parties in Northern Iraq, groupings that have not survived for long, in spite of financial as well as military support from Tehran.<sup>101</sup> The most enduring Islamic force is Shaykh Muhammad Khalid Barzani's Kurdish Hizbullah. The support for his party is, however, thought to be based on the traditional loyalties to the Barzani-*shaykhs* rather than on the Islamic ideology.<sup>102</sup>

### 3.3.4 Summary

The rise of political Islamist movements in the Arab world can be understood against the background of the Arab military defeats, in particular that of 1967, as elaborated on by Piscatori, but they also appear to be reactive against a secularising and modernising of society, which is perceived as generating a decline in Islam's social importance.<sup>103</sup> In Kurdish society, however, such a situation of social and political crisis does not appear to have occurred. Due to the aforementioned nature of Kurdish religiousness with the strong elements of sufism, the significance of religion in the social spheres of life appears unlikely to decrease. Transferred to the political spheres, religion as such cannot be regarded as a divisive force. As van Bruinessen, who has carried out most extensive research on the social and political organisation of Kurdish society, concludes: 'the religious factor, although important, ... does not seem to be decisive by itself in the political alliances and oppositions'.<sup>104</sup>

The theocratic doctrine on the divine origins of power, that the king owes his power from God and not from those he rules – in the Islamic world most clearly embodied in the Shi'i doctrine of Ayatollah Khomeini's *velayat-e faqih* - leads to a strong position for the religion in the state. Religion has never quite achieved such overarching influence in Kurdish politics – it is traditionally an

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<sup>101</sup>. The Iranian involvement in Iraqi Kurdistan will be examined in forthcoming chapter six.

<sup>102</sup>. Salih (1994), pp. 204-205.

<sup>103</sup>. James P. Piscatori, (1986), *Islam in a World of Nation-States*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 26-34.

<sup>104</sup>. van Bruinessen (1992), p. 23.

inclusive element and, crucially, intertwined with tribalism, but not in itself a strong element.

The importance of Islam in Kurdish socio-political development may find its parallels in Arab society, as the ‘prophet had worked among tribes, their tribal and religious values reinforced and validated each other’.<sup>105</sup> This points at the profound importance of not looking at the religious factor in isolation, but viewing it against the background of the tribal organisation and socio-political structure of society.

In a traditional society such as the Kurdish where religion is still a powerful force in peoples’ lives, it is important to recognise the dichotomy between the psychologically separate town and village/tribe, the latter of which bows more to the influence of religious authorities. As Sathyamurthy points out, ‘political consensus is an offshoot of religious (communal) consensus or *ijma*’ expressed on behalf of the community by the *mujtahed* or the *ulama*. The entire process of legitimisation – religious and political – rests on the *ijma*’.<sup>106</sup> Such a situation is not ideal for a nationalist leadership seeking to bring the whole nation together with the aim to reach a permanent state of national unity. Wrestling the people’s loyalty from the *ulama* requires a meticulously tactful approach by those wishing to extend the popular base of the Kurdish national movement, not to mention the difficulties of gaining the following of the tribally conscious for whom the imagined community of Kurds is likely to be remote. Sathyamurthy concludes, ‘the ideology of nationalism with all its emphasis on modernity, material progress and political viability is constantly subject to the vagaries of an equally vital but fundamentally different force in the form of an entrenched religion’.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Crone (1986), p. 75.

<sup>106</sup> Sathyamurthy (1983), pp. 79-80.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

### 3.4 Language

To a people fighting for their lives and control of their land, their own language is a very precious thing. Not all Kurds are fair with European features; some look like Arabs. Not all Kurds wear their traditional baggy trousers or many-coloured dresses; some work in the city and attend universities in Western clothes. But until now, nearly all Kurds, educated or uneducated, fair or dark, living in Turkey or Iran or Iraq or the USSR, have spoken Kurdish.<sup>108</sup>

Despite the failure to adopt a *lingua franca* in the Kurdish-speaking areas, the Kurdish language is regarded as a major component of nation- and state-building. One needs only to look at the division of India into a number of regions to understand the influence of language on nation- and state-building ideologies. The importance of language has increased greatly due to the rise of various nationalisms in many parts of the world, and also in the case of the Kurdish national movement, the language aspect has given added weight to political aims. The linguistic variety of Kurdistan is substantial but despite this, the common language provides a broad basis for nationalism.

#### 3.4.1 Language as a political factor

A distinct language is for people a cultural marker of the highest value, as it often represents the most cohesive factor for the collective national identity. Language has always had a particularly important role in defining nationality. As the creation of a state is often accompanied by a struggle for hegemony this may be articulated in 'the power to define language': in the words of Billig, 'more is at stake in drawing the boundary of a language than linguistics'.<sup>109</sup> Hence the importance of a language extends beyond mere linguistics and transforms into a political factor, often in response to the repression that concentrates on the language and culture, preventing its development.

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<sup>108</sup> Kahn (1980), p xii. Some 20 years later this situation has changed slightly, with many Kurds (particularly those living in Turkey) having a rather fractured command of Kurdish.

<sup>109</sup> Billig (1995), p. 32.

Language is thus very much a source of power, and as such a major component of nationalism. It plays a vital role in the operation of ideology and in the framing of ideological consciousness.<sup>110</sup> Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson single out language as a key dimension in societal planning aimed at reinforcing dominance of a particular ethnic/linguistic/political group at the expense of another. They write that ‘language is used increasingly ... in maintaining, legitimating, effectuating and reproducing an unequal division of both structural power and material resources’.<sup>111</sup>

The rise of linguistic nationalism has its origins in the thoughts of the German philosopher Herder in the latter part of the eighteenth century, who believed that the nation’s ‘very existence is inconceivable without its own language’.<sup>112</sup> Also Fichte placed a great deal of emphasis on the nation as a cultural community – ‘Wherever a separate language is found, there a separate nations exists’.<sup>113</sup> From its modern inception many would indeed regard nationalism as inextricably bound up with language. Language was seen as ‘an outward sign of a group’s peculiar identity and a significant means of ensuring its continuation’.<sup>114</sup> The relationship between language and nationalism has remained very close, with language being a clearly defined marker of those differences that distinguish nations from one another.

In order to ascertain how great a role the Kurdish language plays in the national movement it may be useful to draw some historical parallels with Europe, where these ideas originated. Hobsbawm observes that ‘for Germans and Italians, their national language was not merely an administrative convenience or a means of unifying state-wide communication, as French had been in France ... It was the only thing that made them Germans or Italians, and consequently carried a far heavier charge of national identity than, say, English did for those who wrote

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<sup>110</sup>. Ibid. p. 17. This was strongly argued by the influential Russian social science theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, whose writings are scrutinised in Michael Holquist (1990), *Dialogism. Bakhtin and his world*, London: Routledge.

<sup>111</sup>. Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (1999), p. 29.

<sup>112</sup>. Quoted in Edwards (1985), p. 23.

<sup>113</sup>. Fichte (1922), *Addresses to the German Nation*, Chicago:Open Court, p. 215 (quoted in Canovan (1996a), pp. 52-53).

<sup>114</sup>. Kedourie (1961), p. 71.

and read the language'.<sup>115</sup> One may say that for the Kurds and the Kurdish identity the language factor takes up a middle position between these German-Italian and English cases, considering other factors that determine and make up Kurdishness.

Hobsbawm asserts that to different degrees it is of importance for linguistic nationalism to require 'control of a state or at least the winning of official recognition for the language'. He goes on to say that 'at all events problems of power, status, politics and ideology and not of communication or even culture, lie at the heart of the nationalism of language'.<sup>116</sup> An interesting example of this is the Jewish nationalist movement in its successful attempts to revive Hebrew. That the Zionists opted for a language that was not spoken by anyone reconfirms the above statement that communication was not at the core of the issue.

There is evidence to suggest that those mostly concerned with maintaining and, if necessary, reviving a language, are nationalist intellectuals from the urban middle class, a social class not traditionally represented in Kurdistan. These individuals may not be representative of the heartland native speakers, as such persons may 'have in fact assimilated successfully into the majority mainstream'.<sup>117</sup>

Many Kurds in the Turkish parts of Kurdistan speak poor or no Kurdish, but as Yalçin-Heckman notes, 'knowledge of the language is a less important factor than one's attitude toward the language'.<sup>118</sup> Particularly when a people's identity is perceived to face great uncertainties, language easily becomes a focus for nationalist sentiments.

A prominent linguist, Einar Haugen, firmly tied the development of a language to the rise of nationalism in his now widely accepted model of language

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<sup>115</sup>. Hobsbawm (1992), pp. 102-103.

<sup>116</sup>. Ibid. p. 110.

<sup>117</sup>. Edwards (1985), p. 71.

<sup>118</sup>. Yalçin-Heckman (1989), p. 119.

standardisation.<sup>119</sup> Standardisation is ‘the process of one variety of a language becoming widely accepted throughout the speech community as “a supra-dialectal norm”’,<sup>120</sup> i.e. the most ‘superior’ form of all dialects. The creation of a standard form of a national language is a complex process. Karl Deutsch observed that ‘a standard language is not merely a standardised simple local form [but] a combination of several idioms’.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, ‘the national standard language is itself the result of economic, cultural, and political co-operation and affiliation’.<sup>122</sup>

When examining the issue of language standardisation of the Kurdish language, it is useful to include a brief regional comparison. In contrast to Persian and Arabic, Kurdish has not experienced a transformation into ‘a uniform, generally binding national language of all Kurds’, mainly due to the lack of a state apparatus to oversee and direct such a development, a problem compounded by the combination of the existing linguistic differences and official repression. Kreyenbroek observes that ‘while Kurdish remained mainly a spoken language, the differences between regional forms of speech did not present a problem’. However, ‘in the years immediately preceding and following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, when the creation of an independent Kurdish state was a real possibility, the need for a standard written language was evidently felt more acutely’.<sup>123</sup> This illustrates why a standardisation of the Kurdish language(s) ought to be promoted by the Kurdish leadership(s), just as language standardisation was an important concept in Arabic-speaking countries.

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<sup>119</sup>. Einar Haugen (1966), ‘Dialect, Language, Nation’, *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 68, No. 6, pp. 922-35.

<sup>120</sup>. Ferguson (1983), p. 31.

<sup>121</sup>. Deutsch (1942), p. 536.

<sup>122</sup>. Ibid. p. 537.

<sup>123</sup>. Kreyenbroek (1992), p. 69.

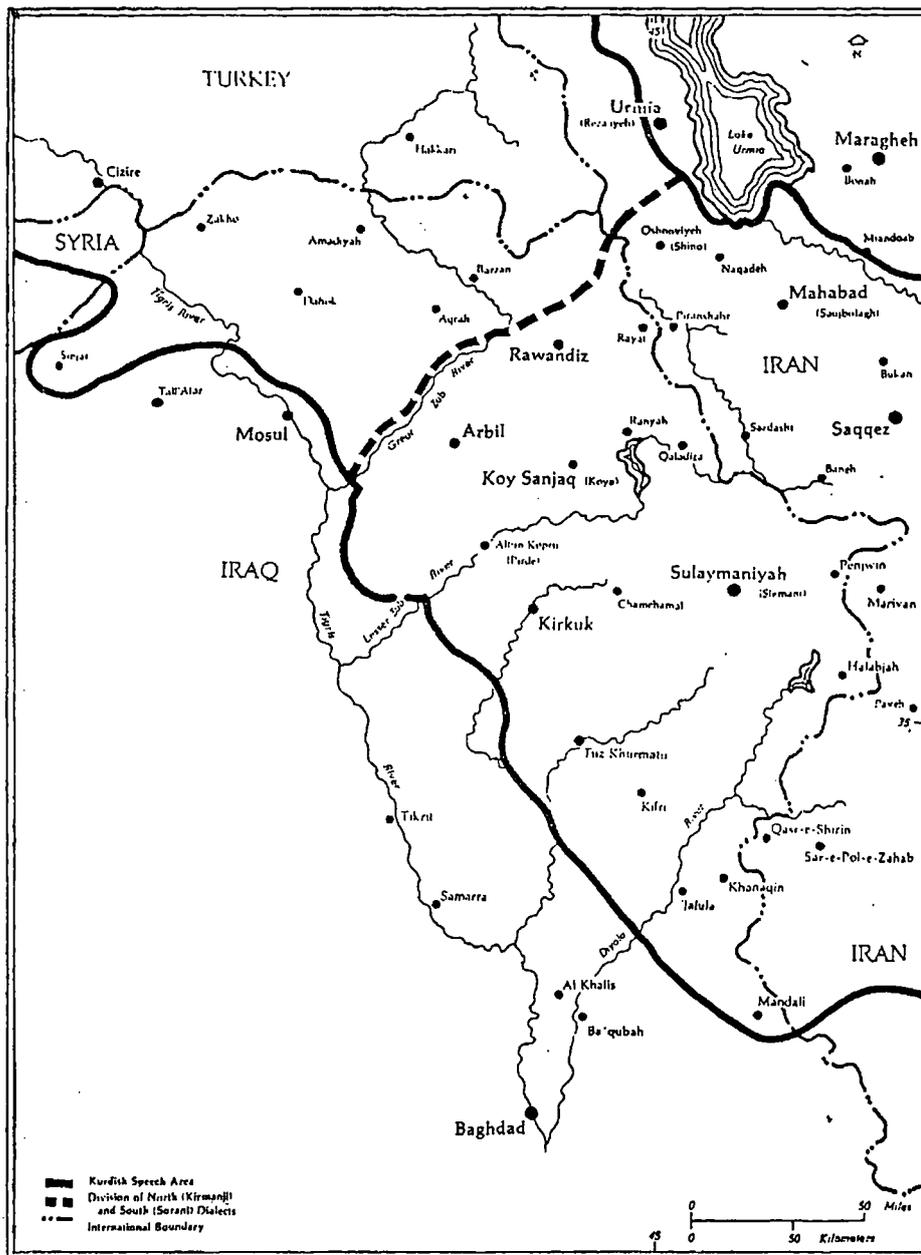


Figure 3.4.1: *Kurdish Language Areas in Iraq*<sup>124</sup>

<sup>124</sup>. Hassanpour (1992), p. 5. (Hassanpour, however, terms it 'Kurdish speech areas in Iraq'.)

### 3.4.2 The Linguistic diversity of Kurdistan – language and boundaries

In certain areas of the world, notably Europe, national boundaries also serve as linguistic boundaries. The Pyrenees, for instance, naturally separate French and Spanish speakers, and in a similar fashion there is a correspondence of political and linguistic borders in the case of Sweden and Norway. Not all borders, however, being of a linguistic, international or ethnic character, are clearly and distinctly demarcated. This has resulted in ‘mixed language zones’,<sup>125</sup> of which there are many in the Middle East.

Kurdish in all its varieties has for long existed in mixed language zones. Kurdish is an Iranian language, distinctly different from Arabic and Turkish. There is an impressive number of Kurdish dialects, some of which are not mutually understandable.<sup>126</sup> The most common division is between the two main dialects, or dialect-groups: Kurmanji, (or northern Kurdish) spoken in the Turkish parts of Kurdistan and the northernmost areas of Iraq and Iran, and Sorani (or southern Kurdish), spoken in Central and southern Kurdistan, i.e. Northern Iraq and northwestern Iran (cf. Figure 3.4.1: *Kurdish language areas in Iraq*). Besides these two major idioms, there are two smaller dialects, Zaza and Gurani, the former with speakers in Turkey, and the latter spoken in southern and southeastern Kurdistan. Each of these vernaculars is subsequently subdivided into further dialects. It is important to note, however, that no clear boundaries exist between these languages and dialects, as van Bruinessen observes, ‘dialects merge gradually; groups speaking one dialect may live among a majority of speakers of another’.<sup>127</sup>

The division of Kurdish into the main dialects Kurmani and Sorani has (despite the terms being modern), been maintained and reinforced throughout history by the combination of geopolitical realities, which has led to the creation of two national literary languages: the former using the Latin alphabet while the latter being expressed in a modified form of the Arabic script. Bridging the gap

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<sup>125</sup>. Fischer (1980), p. 413.

<sup>126</sup>. A comprehensive list of Kurdish languages, dialects and sub-divisions and how they linguistically relate to one another can be found in Izady (1992), p. 169.

<sup>127</sup>. van Bruinessen (1992) p. 22.

between the Sorani and Kurmanji appears rather insurmountable a task, and the standard forms of the two main dialects that have developed independently of each other would have to be viewed on an equal basis if a 'proper' standardisation is attempted. The process of standardisation does have its limits insofar as language 'defines the conditions under which minor and major adaptations can be made across a horizontal spread of linguistic diversity in order to maintain national viability on a larger scale'.<sup>128</sup>

Hence the idea of creating a standard form of Kurdish, one Kurdish lingua franca to be accepted by all Kurds, appears almost too ambitious to be realised. In agreement with Hassanpour that Kurdish is a 'bi-standard' language,<sup>129</sup> there is a greater likelihood of a continued development towards and consolidation of one standard form of Kurmanji and one of Sorani. This is in essence based on the assumption that unifying a bi-standard Kurdish language would prove too great a challenge, considering that the pure linguistic aspects would in most probability be side-stepped and overrun by political issues. For the Kurds, 'political unification seems to be the primary condition for dialectal unification'.<sup>130</sup>

In an independent Kurdish state, even in the case of a microstate,<sup>131</sup> Kurmanji and Sorani respectively would have to be adopted as official languages, as hegemony on neither side is likely to bring overall satisfaction to the 'other' language group. Furthermore there will need to be more than a general acceptance of the co-existence of other Kurdish languages/dialects, whose specific language functions will have to be supported by a central Kurdish Administration.

For the Kurds standardisation of their languages would not be an end in itself, as Hassanpour rightly points out. Rather it would be 'employed as a means of linguistic and national survival',<sup>132</sup> highlighting the fact that language is a highly

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<sup>128</sup> Sathyamurthy (1983).

<sup>129</sup> Hassanpour (1992), p. 436.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Such a possibility is discussed in the concluding chapter eight.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. p. 35.

politicised factor in Kurdish politics. The creation and maintenance of two lingua francas would be greatly facilitated by a Kurdish language academy. Conspicuous by its absence from Kurdistan, language academies have in different parts of the world served as solid foundations for nationalists to build upon.<sup>133</sup> History has witnessed a Kurdish academy, which existed in Iraq during an eight-year-period in the 1970s, an institution whose establishment and life expectancy was wholly determined by political circumstances.<sup>134</sup> Should the Kurds of Iraq prove successful in their state-building efforts, a new apolitical Kurdish language academy may see the light of day. There is an urgent need for such an institution to supervise the dynamic on-going process standardisation of a language represents.

In every language, irrespective of whether its standard has been established only recently or not, the standard keeps evolving: standardisation is not a task that would once occur and then disappear when satisfactorily solved.<sup>135</sup>

It is a difficult task trying to clarify the situation whether the two main forms of Kurdish are to be regarded as separate languages or just comprise a large variety of dialects, particularly in view of the fact that many of the experts in the field find it difficult to harmonise their views on the matter. Within the field of linguistics the general distinction commonly drawn is that dialects 'are mutually intelligible varieties of one language, while languages are mutually unintelligible'.<sup>136</sup> Izady, for one, emphasises the fact that the basic similarity between (what is here referred to as) Kurmanji and Sorani is 'very strong', and its speakers can communicate 'to a reasonable degree'.<sup>137</sup> There are others, however, who analyse the situation differently and from a linguistic point of view, based on the differences in vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation between the two, advocate that 'Sorani and Kurmanji differ as much from each

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<sup>133</sup>. Relevant comparative cases are the Arab language academies in Syria, Iraq and Egypt and their importance for the Arab nationalists, which is discussed by Altoma (1974), 'Language education in Arab countries and the role of the academies' in Fishman, J. (ed.), *Advances in Language Planning*, The Hague: Mouton & Co. N.V.

<sup>134</sup>. For an account of the rise and fall of this institution, see Hassanpour (1992), pp. 448-451.

<sup>135</sup>. Ibid. p. xxxi (Ladislav Zgusta's introduction: 'Introduction: Language, Nationhood, and Minority Status').

<sup>136</sup>. Edwards (1985), p. 18.

<sup>137</sup>. Izady (1992), p. 170.

view, based on the differences in vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation between the two, advocate that ‘Sorani and Kurmanji differ as much from each other as English and German’ - hence it is more suitable to term them different languages.<sup>138</sup>

Hassanpour seems to reach the middle ground between these two positions when he states that ‘speakers of the two dialects do communicate, with difficulty, in normal conversational situations ...[but] ... until they have had considerable previous contact, the speakers of Kurmanji and Sorani are not able to communicate effectively in all contexts’.<sup>139</sup> With regard to inter-dialectal mutual intelligibility, one could also point to the fact that there are different degrees of intelligibility insofar as some speakers of a certain dialect may understand the other dialect well, whereas others may not. Another obstructive factor that renders a conclusive statement on this issue difficult is that neighbouring dialects may be mutually understood, while Kurmanji-speakers in the northernmost areas of Kurdistan may not understand the Sorani-speakers residing south of Sulaymaniya.

If one places the discussion in a political context, additional observations can be made, and in doing so there will be a return to the above-mentioned issue of national and linguistic boundaries. The classification of languages and dialects tends to follow the politics of state-making suggested by Michel Billig, whose views are worth quoting at length:

Where national boundaries are established, then, the differences in speech patterns either side of the boundary are more likely to be seen as belonging to distinctly different languages by the speakers themselves, their national centres and the world in general. ... The common practices of naming languages [i.e. ascertain whether dialects or languages] tend to emerge through struggles for hegemony.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup>. Kreyenbroek (1992), p. 71. In fact, Kurdish with its enormous variety of dialects would be the ultimate language for an exercise in meticulous subdivision which would produce an end result of innumerable *idiolects* - ‘the speech of one person’ (Edwards (1985), p. 20).

<sup>139</sup>. Hassanpour (1992), p. 24 (*italics original*).

Sorani and Kurmanji are thought to have developed 'along parallel lines' up until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War.<sup>141</sup> Following the subsequent division of Kurdistan, Sorani was allowed to flourish in Northern Iraq, (as opposed to the complete ban on Kurmanji in the Turkish Republic), and as the most well-developed literary dialect of the two, Sorani enjoys a more elevated position in Kurdistan proper than does Kurmanji.<sup>142</sup> Given the current trends, it is conceivable that this in a future scenario of Kurdish independence from Iraq may result in Sorani-advocates adopting a hegemonic position towards northern Kurdish and its speakers and in doing so instigating an internal struggle for linguistic domination. Alternatively, national leaders may choose to downplay the importance of language or dialect, so as not to alienate Kurds of different ethno-linguistic background. An exaggerated emphasis on language would positively turn away potential nationalist enthusiasts supporting the notion of an independent Kurdish state, who consider themselves Kurds but do not speak Sorani.<sup>143</sup> A struggle for linguistic domination between advocates of Sorani and Kurmanji is already under way in the diaspora. The latter, largely developed in exile, claim that the Latin alphabet is far more appropriate for the Kurdish language than the Arabic, used for Sorani, and advocates of each dialect vigorously promote the suitability of their favoured version.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Billig (1995), p. 33.

<sup>141</sup> Hassanpour (1992), p. 436.

<sup>142</sup> Kurmanji, whose 'real development still takes place in almost entirely in exile' (italics added), Kreyenbroek (1992), p. 75. Based on a 1947 estimation of the Kurdish-speaking regions of Iraq, the Sorani-speakers account for approximately 70 per cent of the population and Kurmanji-speakers about 25 per cent.

<sup>143</sup> The issue of how to avoid the emergence of linguistic hegemonic ambitions on either side of the Sorani-Kurmanji-divide has been dealt with in a creative manner by the 'Kurdish Voice of America' radio-station. Michael Chyet said the following:

For us, the most important thing is not just broadcasting solely in either Kurmançî or Soranî. We try to use both dialects together. We want our listeners to hear both dialects. For instance, a Kurdish radio broadcasting out of Baghdad broadcasts for an hour in Kurmançî, then an hour in Soranî. And so someone who just wants to hear Kurmançî listens for that one hour only. But we don't give our listeners such a choice. Whoever listens to our program on a daily basis will understand both dialects, whether intended or not. I believe that, in this way, a better relationship can be established between those who use each dialect. Perhaps the first time one listens it's difficult, but with time, one becomes able to benefit from both dialects.

'Interview with Dr. Michael Chyet: A silent people should make their voices heard' by Mesut Dodan, *Ozgur Politika*, May 21, 2000.

As is often the case in efforts of purifying a language, there has been a Kurdisation of the Kurdish language when loanwords previously adopted, formally or informally, from the dominant languages are cleared out. This process began in 1920s Iraq. Despite the fact that the Kurds of Iraq comprise only 18 per cent of the total Kurdish people,<sup>145</sup> Kurdish cultural life is very much centred on Iraq, as commented on by Kreyenbroek in the following manner:

the successes of the Iraqi Kurds in the field of language and education have ... enabled them to create an impressive literature and a fully adequate written language, and have produced a generation of Kurds whose primary and secondary education have been in Kurdish. Such achievements will undoubtedly help the Kurds of Iraq in their future efforts to preserve their cultural and ethnic identity.<sup>146</sup>

The media is instrumental when it comes to promoting or suppressing a language. As regards language planning, the ruling ethnic group, or in this case the central government, would use their monopoly of the media to ensure the language and culture of the Kurds were suppressed by way of ignoring its broadcasting potential in television and radio, recognising that 'radio and television are among the most powerful means of national integration'.<sup>147</sup> With the launch of the first Kurdish satellite television channel MED-TV in 1994 (later banned and renamed MEDYA-TV), licensed in the UK with studios in several EU-countries, the Kurds succeeded in establishing a strong and useful tool of communication among themselves, which also served to impair the cultural hegemony the regional states held over the Kurds.<sup>148</sup> This successful initiative launched from and based in Europe, was complemented through the efforts of the Iraqi Kurds. Themselves in charge of the media, their enthusiasm abundantly displayed in establishing especially new television-stations, has kept the Kurdish language alive and well in Northern Iraq.

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<sup>144</sup> Such a linguistic struggle is evident in Kurdish academic circles in Sweden, which harbours the cream of Kurdistan's intellectual elite.

<sup>145</sup> Blau (1992), p. 49.

<sup>146</sup> Kreyenbroek (1992), p. 79.

<sup>147</sup> van Bruinessen (1998), p. 48.

<sup>148</sup> For an account of this see Amir Hassanpour's article 'Satellite Footprints as National Borders: MED-TV and the Extraterritoriality of State Sovereignty', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 18, 1998.

### 3.4.3 Language shift vs language maintenance

The position of the Kurdish language is not one of great strength. Resulting from various degrees of assimilation, forcibly or voluntarily undertaken, a large number of Kurds lack adequate knowledge of Kurdish (particularly in its written form), and often prefer to communicate in Turkish, Arabic or Persian. This has led some observers to question the long-term survivability of the Kurdish language, in other words, whether a language shift is likely to occur in Kurdish-speaking areas. The complexities involved in such an analysis is expressed in the following paragraph:

Different languages have different political rights, not by virtue of any inherent linguistic characteristics, but dependent on the power relationships between the speakers of those languages.<sup>149</sup>

Language shift means that 'a community gives up a language completely in favour of another one'.<sup>150</sup> This is sometimes also referred to as language death, and indicates major changes in the circumstances of those speaking the language. Language shifts occurred frequently throughout Europe in medieval times, and a pertinent example is the linguistic transformation that took place in Spain when Arabic gradually retreated in the fourteenth century.<sup>151</sup>

It has been said that 'language shift will occur only if, and to the extent that, a community desires to give up its identity as an identifiable socio-cultural group in favour of an identity as a part of some other community'.<sup>152</sup> Manoeuvring in such direction would indicate a sense of inferiority towards another linguistic community, a process, which, in view of Kurdish history, looks unlikely to be embarked upon by the Kurds. However, there are circumstances in which the Kurdish language may be ascribed a degree of linguistic inferiority, namely the religious perspective, although within Islam any non-Koranic language is given a lesser status, so Kurdish should not be singled out in that sense.

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<sup>149</sup> Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (1989), p. 60.

<sup>150</sup> Fasold (1984), p. 213.

<sup>151</sup> Bartlett (1996), p. 132.

One should also point out that a linguistic minority grouping might involuntarily find itself in a subordinate position by actions taken by the majority group. To illustrate this, Hechter's theory of internal colonialism will prove useful, (as was the case in the preceding chapter). According to Hechter, there is a dichotomy between the core and the periphery and as the more advanced group politically dominates the periphery from their position at the core, this dominance subjects the peripheral population to a clearly inferior status by means of political exploitation in all its various forms.<sup>153</sup> Hence the language may appear inferior to the surrounding languages.

Fasold identifies certain socio-economic conditions that may either favour or complicate a shift to a language of greater use, based on case studies as varied as the Scottish Highlands, Hungary, French-speaking Canada and New Mexico - in its diversity the findings thought to be applicable also to the Kurdish case. Urban people, limited in numbers and concentrated to industrial or commercial centres will find it more difficult to maintain their language than rural-based communities living in isolated geographical areas. Improvements in transportation and communication tend to promote a shift of language 'with the centres of culture associated with the incoming language'.<sup>154</sup> Among the factors that weaken a language already in decline is naturally the 'outmigration from linguistic heartlands', but also what Edwards terms 'in-migration of foreign speakers' plays an important role.<sup>155</sup> These observations relate to Kurdistan insofar as the heavy Arabisation with its influx of people from the larger ethnic group - if allowed to continue - may, in the long term, be a cause for language shift. The current status of Kurdish, however, exhibits sufficient strength to avoid being 'put to death' by Arabic.

Language shift may, however, be said to have occurred in Kurdistan, though resulting from the conflictual development between two Kurdish vernaculars, rather than being a consequence of the prestigious status or linguistically intimidating dominance of Arabic/Turkish/Persian over Kurdish. The language

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<sup>152</sup> Fasold (1984), p. 240.

<sup>153</sup> Hechter (1975).

<sup>154</sup> Fasold (1984), p. 241.

in question is that of Gurani, which Kreyenbroek regards as nearly extinct,<sup>156</sup> whose demise, however, cannot be attributed to the linguistic murder theory. Formerly a literary language of high standing,<sup>157</sup> Gurani gradually came to be replaced by the Sorani dialect. This development got underway in the eighteenth century ‘with the onset of the socioeconomic disruption ... through wars and deportations’,<sup>158</sup> highlighting the fact that ‘language decline does not occur in a vacuum but is accompanied by changes in the entire social fabric’.<sup>159</sup> With the political decline of the ruling Ardalán-princes, and its replacement by a new dynasty, the environment in which Gurani once flourished irrevocably changed. Still alive in small pockets of Iraqi Kurdistan, Gurani in northwestern Iran is ‘under great pressure from South Kurmanji speakers’, and Izady points out that ‘with the avalanche of the Iraqi Kurdish refugees, nearly all speakers of South Kurmanji, into eastern and southern Kurdistan in Iran, the process of Gurani dilution and assimilation has been hastened tremendously’.<sup>160</sup> Not only did Gurani lose prestige as a literary language in the nineteenth century, it has ever since also experienced a steady decline to the point of near extinction.

Languages are known to have declined and finally to have died away if ‘an inadequate concentration of speakers [are] faced with economically powerful and technically sophisticated neighbours’.<sup>161</sup> This is not quite reflected in the Middle East, where modernisation has yet to transform the regional states into powerful players in the combined fields of economy and technology. However, there may be sufficient grounds on which to fear modernisation because of the impact it may have on a national language, insofar as ‘language shift often reflects pragmatic desires for social mobility and an improved standard of living’.<sup>162</sup> Opting for the dominant language may be regarded as long-term beneficial but also essential by many people. However, important to note is that improvements of one’s status in society do not automatically follow a shift of

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<sup>155</sup>. Edwards (1985), p. 71.

<sup>156</sup>. Kreyenbroek (1992), p. 82.

<sup>157</sup>. ‘The language of polite society and belles lettres in most of Kurdistan’ and spoken by ‘the Kurdish princely house of Ardalán [1168-1867]’, Izady (1992), p. 175.

<sup>158</sup>. Ibid. p. 173.

<sup>159</sup>. Edwards (1985), p. 86.

<sup>160</sup>. Izady (1992), p. 174.

<sup>161</sup>. Edwards (1985), p. 50.

language, if the person is not regarded to be of the right ethnic mix.

The use of the dominant language often appears to be of great significance in the most vital areas of life for the future for many people, and it is debatable whether people would unreservedly support the maintenance and retention of a cultural marker such as language, if it does not benefit them economically. Turkish Kurdistan is a case in point: an underdeveloped area, which in economic terms has become equated with simple-mindedness and destitution of its people, in turn associated with the language spoken, i.e. Kurdish. Such 'linguicism' ('linguistically argued racism'<sup>163</sup>) found in Turkey is not quite paralleled by state-policies and public sentiment in Iraq, where government-sanctioned repression in this respect has been less intense due to the political resistance of the Iraqi Kurds, which has led to relatively favourable conditions for the development of their language.

Rather than to concede defeat to Arabic, it appears more accurate to visualise an active policy of language maintenance<sup>164</sup> in Northern Iraq, with a continued use of the Kurdish language that has for long been the means of communication, in spoken as well as written form, on a collective basis by the community.

#### 3.4.4 Summary

Sorani and Kurmanji appear sufficiently able resist the linguistic influence of their powerful neighbours, but the Kurdish language would still have to be ascribed the status of an endangered language due to the official linguicidal policies of central governments. There are many examples of language shifts to have occurred throughout history, and the difficulties experienced by the Kurdish language underlines the role of state policy.

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<sup>162</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>163</sup>. A concept coined by Tove Skutnabb-Kangas in 1988 and outlined in her 'Multilingualism and the Education of Minority Children' in Skutnabb-Kangas and Cummins (eds.), *Minority education: from shame to struggle*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, pp. 9-44.

Nationalist Kurds may choose to use the Kurdish language to 'de-Arabise' Kurdistan with the view to reverse the socio-political Arabisation-trend, should that policy continue unabated.<sup>165</sup> However, it is of great importance not to equate Arabisation with modernisation, as the Kurdish region is not being modernised by the large numbers of Arabs being resettled there. If the two concepts of Arabisation and modernisation are closely associated, it may have the effect of transforming a pro-Kurdish language movement, nationalist in character, from a potentially dynamic process to a static entity – one that is perceived as being backward and conventional.

The absence of a standardised Kurdish language has created confusion and even doubts regarding the Kurds as a nation, and it has been very much in the national interest – beside the purely linguistic interest – to try to rectify this situation. The Kurds are yet to attain an unquestionable political existence, and until that happens, the chances of their language achieving a standardised form should, however, be regarded as slim. This highlights the importance of linguistic issues to be given a place in the national movement as well as in any examination of the region's political development.

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<sup>164</sup>. A prominent example of language maintenance is the French-speaking people of Quebec in Canada, the case of Montreal as outlined by Fasold (1984), pp. 227-231.

<sup>165</sup>. For language-related aspects of Arabisation, see Hassanpour (1992), p. 123.

## Chapter 4: Kurdish Identity Formation

### 4.1 Identity-building on national, collective and individual levels

When discussing identity formation, it is of great importance to distinguish between political-institutional identity on the one hand, and ethno-cultural identity on the other. As Parekh underlines, ‘the identity of a political community is located in its political structure, and not in the widely shared personal characteristics of its individual members’.<sup>1</sup> A politico-institutional approach is most suitably employed here since ‘ethno-cultural characteristics are too vague to specify and agree upon, are rarely shared by all or even a majority, pertain to their private lives, at best define a people and not a political community’.<sup>2</sup> There exist a multitude of markers of group identity of which the factors mentioned above - class, tribe, religion language are but a few. This discussion on identity formation and its components is illustrated in Figure 4.1.1: *Identity Diagram 1*. The four major components previously described, i.e. class, tribe, religion and language, all serve as the basis for cohesion of the Kurdish people. In addition to those major identity constructs, there are other determinants that also exert considerable influence over the formation of Kurdish identity. The last two variables on the chart have previously been dealt with and the one concerning external interference will be outlined in the ensuing section D. This theoretical model applies in its original form to a state and has therefore been altered slightly to suit the current case study, which may be termed a sub-state entity. In building on the third chapter and its discussion on the establishment of a Kurdish state, there is in addition Figure 4.1.2 - *Identity Diagram 2* - which demonstrates the change of the role of identity from a dependent to an intervening variable in forming the conduct of the state. This shows the interplay between internal and external dynamics as identity in this different setting represents a crucial intervening variable.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>. Parekh (1999), p. 69.

<sup>2</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>. These two diagrams are inspired by an illustration originally put forward by Theophylactou: see p. 6, (1995).

Figure 4.1.1: Identity Diagram

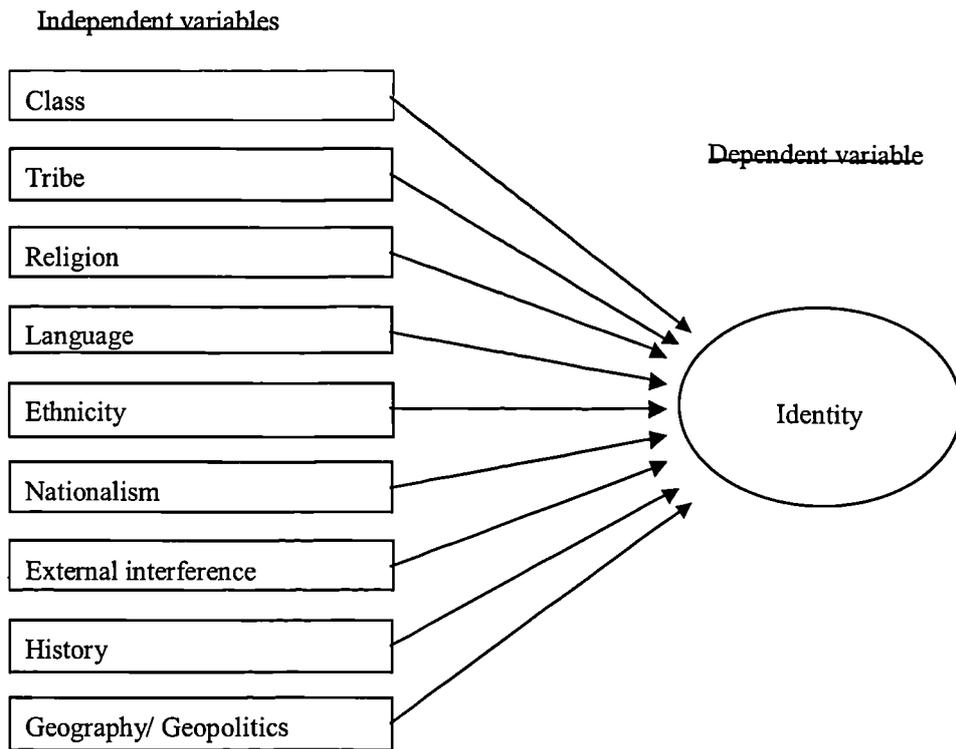
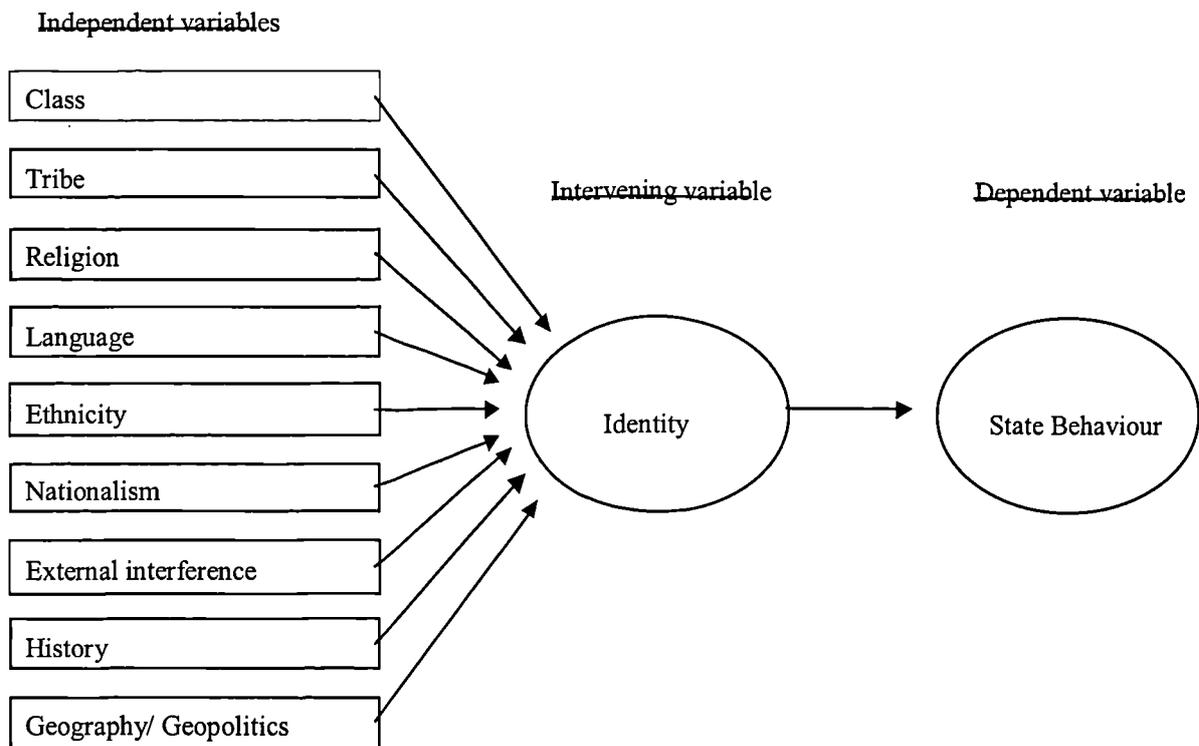


Figure 4.1.2: Identity Diagram



#### 4.1.1 The construction of a national identity

Identity is essentially a 'people's source of meaning and experience', a meaning which 'is organised around a primary identity ... that is self-sustaining across time and space'.<sup>4</sup> More specifically *national* identity, which suffices as the scope of analysis, concerns identification with 'a particular community based on a shared loyalty ... and participation in its collective self-understanding'.<sup>5</sup>

There appears to be a widely held assumption in nationalist circles regarding identity that a continuity exists from ancient times until the present, thus 'romanticising' the inheritance of identity (much the same as is done with the term nation). Most observers of identity politics, however, point to the fact that identity is anything but a static entity but characterised by dynamism, always in a process of change. Keith and Pile suggest that identity should be regarded as 'incomplete', and 'understood as a *process* rather than an *outcome*'.<sup>6</sup> The construction of a national identity normally assumes historical, social and political dimensions, and if one takes the same position as Keith and Pile, this incomplete process implies constant reshaping, reforming and recombining of factors employed.

Invented tradition is often relied on when creating and maintaining a national identity, a vital element in order to achieve and maintain social stability. However, it may also be utilised by nationalist groups so as to strengthen the basis on which their political aspirations rest. The concept of invented tradition is perceived as 'a set of practices ... which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past'.<sup>7</sup> Hobsbawm identifies three types of invented tradition: firstly those advancing social cohesion of the community, distinguished from those forming institutions and sanctioning them legitimacy, and traditions assigned social functions (- 'the inculcation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of

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<sup>4</sup>. Castells (1997), p. 6.

<sup>5</sup>. Parekh (1999), p. 69.

<sup>6</sup>. Keith and Pile (1993), p. 28 (italics added).

<sup>7</sup>. Hobsbawm (1983), p. 1.

behaviour’).<sup>8</sup> This invention of tradition is not unknown in Kurdish politics of identity formation, and one may relate to O’Shea’s suggestions of the ‘unifying myths’ underpinning Kurdish identity: those regarding language, topography and rural idyll.<sup>9</sup> The latter indicates a heavy focus on the rural at the expense of the urban life, creating images of a Kurdish national identity based on pastoral themes - some accurately depicted, others less accurately - which may not be representative of the current social organisation in Kurdistan, but enhances the cohesion of national sentiments and strengthens collective consciousness. Invented tradition in the Kurdish context then appears to be principally aiming at advancing the community’s social cohesion.

A defined and well-identifiable past can help to cement an identity in so far as it reminds the community of common origins, values, aims and interests, and emotional experiences. If a national identity were perceived to be under threat, a dispirited community would often look to the past for inspiration, which is when the usefulness of tradition-invention becomes clear: the community can be reminded of its identity by re-creating the past. The past is hence crucial in creating and preserving identities. Identity can only survive with constant reference – implicit or explicit – to the past. As already emphasised, identity is not something monolithic, on the contrary, it is in constant flux - it changes both according to internal dynamics and as a response to outside influences. Historical episodes are discovered, discarded, appearing, reappearing or disappearing from the collective memory.<sup>10</sup>

Of Castells’ different forms of national identity-building, one is particularly applicable to the Kurdish case, namely that termed *resistance identity*: ‘generated by those actors that are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatised by the logic of domination, thus building trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from, or opposed to, those

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<sup>8</sup>. Ibid. p. 14.

<sup>9</sup>. Paper presented by Maria O’Shea, ‘Imagining Kurdistan’ at the Kurdological Conference *Between Imagination & Denial. Kurds as subjects and objects of political and social processes*, May 29-31 1998, Berlin.

<sup>10</sup>. Connerton (1989), p. 51.

permeating the institutions of society'.<sup>11</sup> This identity by resistance is regarded as a very important, or even *the* most important type of identity-building insofar as 'it constructs forms of collective resistance against otherwise unbearable oppression'.<sup>12</sup>

Identity may be seen as the combination of all the features that are thought by one group of people to distinguish it from other groups. A process of identity formation is largely influenced by the interaction with outsiders of various kinds, and there is always a need for 'the other' against whom one's own identity is formed. Identity is therefore 'other-related'<sup>13</sup> and presupposes difference. The development of any strong identity is quite inconceivable without identifying and marking the differences that define others. Inconstant and relational a social force, identity would appear to change in response to the difference defining the identity of 'the other'. In simple terms, one may say as Cohen does, 'you know who you are, only by knowing who you are not',<sup>14</sup> which would appear to be applicable also to the national identity of a community.

Relating to post-Westphalian Europe, the 'Turkish danger', i.e. the Ottomans, represented 'the other' in Europe's political life and as such served as a prerequisite for the European identity. The way in which the Europeans acted for the defence of Europe against the 'Turkish danger' in the post-Westphalian era, making the Ottomans a constantly present element in the European political culture, highlights the fact that the existence of an external enemy always strengthens group solidarity – often translated into identity. The way the Europeans denoted the Ottomans 'the other', makes for parallels to be drawn to the Kurds separating themselves from their 'others', namely Arabs, Turks and Persians. However, since difference from others is often the basis of the identity of a people, an overemphasis on this element means one's identity becomes 'other-directed'. In other words, 'others become its constant frame of reference',<sup>15</sup> causing a loss of focus for one's own identity, which is a hazard in

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<sup>11</sup>. Castells (1997), p. 8.

<sup>12</sup>. Ibid. p. 9.

<sup>13</sup>. Keller (1992), p. 141.

<sup>14</sup>. Cohen (1994), p. 1.

<sup>15</sup>. Parekh (1994), p. 503.

the development of Kurdish national identity.

The idea of defining one's own identity against that of others assumes greater dimensions in the volatile region of the Middle East in general and Kurdistan in particular. In 1994 Kanan Makiya touched upon this when observing how the 'spiralling logic of violence' experienced in the recent past is 'both cause and effect of the increasing inability of individuals and political groups to establish an identity for themselves that is not exclusively reactive and hostile to others in its origins'.<sup>16</sup> The environment in which a sustainable Kurdish national identity could be created has not presented itself, and considering the harsh circumstances under which the Kurds have asserted their identity, perhaps it is fair to state that theirs, even more than other national identities appears reactive and hostile to 'their others'.

#### 4.1.2 Individual vs. collective identity

Collective identity is acquired and maintained by collective experience and collective memory. Such experiences have often been accumulated in the course of a group's existence, and have been passed on to the succeeding generations through history, literature, material, culture, ceremonies and so on – in short, through the traditions of society. The collective memory contains experiences that a substantial number of group members have undergone in the more or less distant past. Its content constantly changes. Shared experiences for Kurds for instance rest on common suffering - the long-established persecution of Kurds by Iraqi Arab Baathists was itself likely to have been a factor provoking the Kurds to assert their identities - but positive experiences also shape the collective memory of the Kurdish nation. Collective memory could, however, be quite selective in nature, as likely to be myth as reality, and this is where the influence of invented tradition may leave its mark. Important to note is also that 'what people choose to remember depends on their current situations and aspirations'.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>. Makiya (1994), p. 198.

<sup>17</sup>. UNRISD (1995), p. 95.

The concept of a collective identity indicates ‘a sense of shared *continuity* on the part of successive generations of a given unit of population, and to shared *memories* of earlier periods, events and personages in the history of the unit’: two components that produce ‘a collective belief in a common *destiny* of that unit and its culture’.<sup>18</sup> From this one may conclude that class, tribe, religion, language, ethnicity, territory, *per se*, do not suffice to create a strong national identity – shared experience does.

An important distinction between individual and collective identification is that for individuals, identity would normally be ‘situational’, whereas a collective identity tends to be ‘pervasive and persistent ... less subject to rapid changes and ... more intense and durable’.<sup>19</sup>

Notwithstanding the clear differences between these two main forms of identity, one still needs to recognise the need to place individual and collective identities in a unified analytical framework, as Jenkins calls for. This is because ‘even the most private of identities is not imaginable as anything other than the product of a socialized consciousness and a social situation ... [and] ... even the most collective of identities must, in some sense, exist in the awareness of individual actors’.<sup>20</sup> In other words, the ‘collective cannot be “real” without the individual’.<sup>21</sup> Ultimately the collective, or the sense of groupness, depends on the individual identity. That individual and collective identity is essentially one that was also advocated by Herder, who examined this issue in the light of the development of language, and proposed that ‘it is through language that the individual becomes at once aware of his selfhood and of his nationhood ... in this sense individual identity and collective identity become one’.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>. Smith (1992), p. 58 (italics added).

<sup>19</sup>. Ibid. p. 59.

<sup>20</sup>. Jenkins (1997), p. 72.

<sup>21</sup>. Ibid. p. 166.

<sup>22</sup>. Barnard (1969), p. 7.

## 4.2 The identity dimension of politics

The identity dimension of politics in Iraqi Kurdistan carries great significance in its potential to either reinforce or tear apart the cohesion of the social fabric of society. A versatile tool, the politics of identity can thus be utilised in a way as to strengthen the community, but, employed less wisely it may also serve to impair the unity of the people.

Identity politics should not be regarded as ‘some sort of surface froth that floats around on top of more important social processes’.<sup>23</sup> Rather it is a vital aspect to take into account when analysing political developments in general and those of unstable areas in particular, where identity clashes can cause the beginning of conflicts and perpetuate their durability. As will be argued below, it is neither always possible, nor desirable for that matter, to delineate a domain of the religious/linguistic/economic/tribal to be distinct from other elements in the process of shaping a national identity, as they frequently interact and influence each other.

### 4.2.1 Identification with the state

With the rise of the nation-state came the idea that there should be one identity central to the political community – a shared identity to serve as the social bond between the people that constituted the new state. However, as is now a well-known fact, creating a nation-state is one thing, but making the people who live there believe in it is quite another – abundantly clear at the time of the creation of the modern Iraqi state out of the British mandate in 1932. The way Iraqis had to be made, or how the people had to be transformed into Iraqi citizens with a common Iraqi identity was a substantial problem and this project of social engineering resulted in the manufactured character of the Baathist Iraqi identity.

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<sup>23</sup>. Keith and Pile (1993), p. 31.

The new reality of a 'formal identity' that membership in a nation-state provides, may appear somewhat confusing for many people of a traditional lifestyle. Sathyamurthy discusses these differences between simple and modern societies, and asserts that a person's position in simple societies 'is determined by the social niche which he or she occupies in society, which in turn is determined by occupation, family or lineage, clan membership, tribal identity'.<sup>24</sup> In other words, this is the basis for nationality: smaller group-membership leads to larger and more inclusive group-memberships. This stands in sharp contrast to the system of modern societies, where 'an individual possesses citizenship directly and not as a logical result of prior membership of "some organic sub-part" of the nation-state'.<sup>25</sup> This form of legal and technical citizenship is alien to the way people of traditional societies perceive belonging, with the result that 'in many cases such formal identity diverges from "real", "internalised" emotionally-felt membership'.<sup>26</sup>

At present described in toponymic or ethnonymic terms - the former describing the place, region or country one inhabits (i.e. the Iraqi part of Kurdistan) and the latter indicating ethnic and cultural belonging – Kurdish identity would assume different dimensions should developments in the autonomous region go in the direction of Kurdish political independence. National identification could then be expressed in politonymic terms – indicating a way of describing people according to the political entity to which they belong. In other words, 'Kurdish' would then take on the meaning of a citizen of a Kurdish state.<sup>27</sup>

The 'us-them' divisions that identity-formation creates (in terms of 'the other') is not necessarily harmful to the state, but that would only seem to apply if the national feeling for the overall nation is more powerful than any divisive call for particular regions that strong local identities create. Emphasising one's own cultural identity and adhering to larger, more inclusive national identity may not

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<sup>24</sup>. Sathyamurthy (1983), pp. 72-3.

<sup>25</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>. Terms borrowed from the Russian ethnographer Y. V. Bromley (1984), *Theoretical Ethnography*, Moscow: Nauka Publishers.

necessarily be incompatible.<sup>28</sup> However, there has to be recognition of the fact that the viability of a state, particularly a newly formed one, does to a great extent depend on its national identity being embraced by a majority of its people. The frailty of the Iraqi national identity is a main reason for the high degree of tension and recurring violence in Iraq, an existing potential also in a Kurdish institutionalised national identity that does not satisfactorily accommodate the different sub-identities.<sup>29</sup>

The roots of particularly tribalism and religion are so deep that the imposition of a new national identity is likely to be met with strong resistance. It may even appear unrealisable an idea trying to make people with many different and deep-rooted allegiances identify with a newly formed state. Resulting from the nationalist project of nation-building many Kurds appear to generally identify with the imagined 'Greater Kurdistan', and a sense of belonging to *Kurdistan* (as opposed to Iraq or even Iraqi Kurdistan) rests on feelings of hope, culture and history: a sense of being a part of the Kurdish nation.<sup>30</sup> In reality, however, most Iraqi Kurds recognise that they are a part of Iraq (although outside its legal structure for the past decade), as changes there affect them in a way that changes elsewhere in Kurdistan may not. Emotionally, and perhaps even ideologically, they may feel a part of the greater Kurdish nation that extends across Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey, but factually the identification is with Iraq.<sup>31</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Globalisation and the politicisation of identity

An effect globalising trends may have on Iraqi Kurdistan, as in many other places, is the tendency to shrink 'the definition of "we" to include only like-minded others and enlarging "they" to include everyone else'.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>. Cf. Connor (1972), p. 345.

<sup>29</sup>. A fear expressed by Iraqi Shi'a Kurds. Iranian Kurdistan March 2001.

<sup>30</sup>. As became clear in consultations with a variety of members of the exiled Kurdish community in Sweden.

<sup>31</sup>. Unambiguous sentiments found in many Iraqi Kurds. (Iranian Kurdistan, March 2001).

In this globalised world a national identity must, in the words of Michael Billig, 'compete with other identities on a free market of identities'.<sup>33</sup> One effect of globalisation is to diminish differences between nations, but there is also a tendency of that same process to cause a fragmentation of the unity, imagined or real, within those nations. Should the state experience a decline in its abilities to exert power, it would also lose the ability to impose a uniform sense of identity, which may lead to the emergence or consolidation of new identities. In a previous chapter it was concluded that the process of globalisation is unlikely to cause immediate decline in the power of the states in the Middle East, and it is debatable whether the ability to implement uniformity of a national identity has ever been firmly in the hands of the various governments ruling Kurdistan.

The existence of overlapping identities, as explained below, presents the ruling elites with opportunities to shape the nation's identity according to their political interest. When so utilised, political expediency often inspires disproportionate emphasis on one particular identity at the expense of others – the choice being expedient rather than principled. Such practice has been common for authoritarian regimes - the obvious example being Saddam Hussein's Iraq - as 'centralising dictatorships, lacking a broad institutional base, need to rely greatly on mobilisational efforts, such as appeals to identity'.<sup>34</sup>

Kurdish identity has been suppressed, and remains so under Baghdad's Arabisation- and resettlement-programs.<sup>35</sup> The politicisation of Kurdish identity has for long constituted an important tool utilised by regional states to further their foreign policy objectives, largely made possible due to the subordinate position the Kurds hold in the region. Certain historical observations can be made with regard to how state ideologies have influenced the shape and form of

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<sup>32</sup>. Rosenau (1995), p. 193.

<sup>33</sup>. Billig (1995), p. 133.

<sup>34</sup>. Darwisha (1999), p. 555.

<sup>35</sup>. There are numerous examples of ethnic groups who have been subjected to harsh state policies with regard to identity. One case is the Turkish community in Bulgaria, whose identity, as described by a Human Rights Watch report of 1989, was systematically destroyed by the Bulgarian authorities, claiming that 'Turks are in fact Bulgarians whose ancestors were forcibly converted to Islam during Ottoman rule.' Human Rights Watch (1989), *Destroying Ethnic Identity: The expulsion of the Bulgarian Turks*, New York, NY: U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee, p. 5.

Kurdish identity. During the Ottoman era, for example, it was the over-arching Islamic identity that connected people, a religious unity that was discontinued with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the ideologically secular nation-state. Following the creation of the Sunni-ruled Iraqi state, the religious element gradually took the form of an (to the governing elite) oppositional (Shiite) identity, and identification with the Baathist doctrine was not readily forthcoming throughout the country.

It is clear that the definition of identity has served as a primary lever to secure Baathist regime survival in Baghdad, but this may not be so for a Kurdish government, as the conditions are somewhat different in Kurdistan. However, there is no room for complacency regarding the power of identity politics, as it is quite conceivable that a government may be brought down if playing the cards of tribal identity with less subtlety than required. The same is true for linguistic identity, where a large chunk of the previously proposed microstate of Northern Iraq may turn against the government if their dialect does not find itself on equal footing with Sorani.

#### 4.2.3 Ethnicity as an ethno-political identity

Ethnicity is a social resource, to be drawn upon or exploited in varying contexts.<sup>36</sup>

It may appear natural that ethnicity first and foremost defines a national identity. In the case of the Kurds, 'Kurdishness' has of course been a powerful affinity but it is only one of several loyalties that have created the multitude of Kurdish identities. However, when ethnicity becomes politicised 'all of the other components of social identity are subordinate to the ethnic components'.<sup>37</sup> This comes about as 'the particular power of ethnicity ... lies in its potential to "totalize" – to transcend other loyalties and obligations and become the sole basis of identity'.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>. Jenkins (1997), p. 90.

<sup>37</sup>. Yalcin-Heckman (1989), p. 120.

<sup>38</sup>. UNRISD (1995), p. 195.

As a social identity, ethnicity assumes collective as well as individual aspects, 'externalized in social interaction and internalized in personal self-identification'.<sup>39</sup> It has been suggested that ethnic identity more than any other form of identification is 'like an overcoat – something to be taken on or off, or even swapped, as external conditions dictated'.<sup>40</sup> This can perhaps with the most clarity be seen among Kurds in Turkey.

Jenkins singles out ethnicity as being constructed as 'an attribute of the Other',<sup>41</sup> (echoing the basis for identity building as described above) although it is mostly concerned with the identification of 'us', since the categorisation of 'them' would describe the convictions of racism.<sup>42</sup>

Birch sees ethnicity as an independent variable, giving rise to identities and loyalties which persist over long periods, largely regardless of other factors.<sup>43</sup> Edwards views ethnicity primarily as 'a matter of belief',<sup>44</sup> a belief shared by the members of the ethnic group of being of common descent. This belief in common ancestry is by Weber thought to be

a consequence of collective political action rather than its cause; people come to see themselves as belonging together – coming from a common background – as a consequence of acting together. Collective interests thus do not simply reflect or follow from similarities and differences between people; the pursuit of collective interests does, however, encourage ethnic identification.<sup>45</sup>

Yalçın-Heckmann reflects on the difficulty to distinguish ethnic structures and identity from tribalism, primarily in rural areas: 'the unmistakable mixture of ethnicity together with kinship and tribe makes the local political phenomena distinct'.<sup>46</sup> With reference to this distinction, Edwards states that 'ethnic

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<sup>39</sup>. Jenkins (1997), p. 14.

<sup>40</sup>. van Bruinessen (1996).

<sup>41</sup>. Jenkins (1997), p. 14.

<sup>42</sup>. As argued by M. Banton in his, *Racial and Ethnic Competition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983.

<sup>43</sup> Birch (1978), pp. 333-334.

<sup>44</sup>. Edwards (1985), p. 8.

<sup>45</sup>. Jenkins (1979), pp. 9-10 accounting for the views of Max Weber from his *Economy and Society*, G. Roth and C. Wittich (eds.), Berkely, CA: University of California Press, 1978.

<sup>46</sup>. Yalçın-Heckmann (1991), p.40.

membership ... differs from the kinship group precisely by being a presumed identity'.<sup>47</sup>

The conspicuousness of the visibility of ethnicity in the Kurdish areas of Iraq and the high level of awareness of their specific ethnic belonging is an indication of its powerful influence. The emergence and politicisation of the concept of Kurdish ethnicity is best explained from the primordialist approach, as outlined by Hakan Yavuz, explaining that in the ideology of primordialism 'ethnic identity is an objective entity with inherent features such as race, territory, language, and kinship'.<sup>48</sup> Viewed in this primordial light, ethnicity is then an aspect of human nature, a socially unconstructed phenomena. It is also conceivable to view Kurdishness from an instrumental angle, as something situationally defined (and as such manipulable for strategic and/or tactical purposes) and changeable - in other words socially constructed. Jenkins debates this 'situational ethnicity versus primordiality' and he recognises that 'ethnicity is neither static nor monolithic [and] it should not be taken to mean that it is definitively and perpetually in a state of flux'.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>. Edwards (1985), p. 389.

<sup>48</sup>. Hakan Yavuz (1998), p. 10.

<sup>49</sup>. Jenkins (1997), p. 51.

### 4.3 The multiplicity of Kurdish identity

A community's identity is ... a cluster of interrelated and relatively open-ended tendencies and impulses pulling in different directions and capable of being developed and balanced in different ways.<sup>50</sup>

The Kurdish identity consists of several 'layers of conflicting and overlapping identities'<sup>51</sup> and these multiple layers should be emphasised when outlining the meaning and substance of Kurdish identity. The complexities of a social identity is expressed through these subidentities, and inherent as they are in all forms of identity, they are perhaps more prevalent in the Kurdish context of identity-building than many other national identities. Since major identities do not neatly coincide but rather crosscut or overlap with one another, Kurds are provided with an (un)enviable ability to invoke different identities 'at the mercy of events', to use Dresch's formulation.<sup>52</sup> As most individuals possess most of these sub-identities, a plethora of different permutations of identity is created, highlighting the lack of a basis a cultural-ethnic identity would command. The different identities of Kurds cannot be clearly distinguished from each other, and their complex structures comprise many contradictory elements.<sup>53</sup> In addition to that, it is not possible to separate identities and their conditions, since 'there is no identity outside its context'.<sup>54</sup>

Just as there are high levels of *interclass* personal mobility, as previously suggested, an inter-identity mobility is clearly discernible in Kurdish society. The existence of such a multitude of identities does not facilitate an analysis of Kurdish politics. For instance, tribal affinities provide a range of potential identities rather than constituting a solid base for a clear-cut collective identity. Moreover, tribal identity has been identified as being of an oppositional nature,

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<sup>50</sup>. Parekh (1994), p. 504.

<sup>51</sup>. Hakan Yavuz (1998), p. 10.

<sup>52</sup>. Dresch (1989), p. 346.

<sup>53</sup>. An evaluation of how each subidentity relate to each other, however, is beyond the scope of this study, and such an analysis, moreover, has to be explored empirically rather than theoretically.

<sup>54</sup>. Keith and Pile (1993), p. 28.

further complicated by the fact that the identity of individuals and that of families often is separate and differentiated from collective tribal identity. A religious identity, in addition, may not interact particularly well with other principles of identification such as those connected with economic interests.

It would appear, as Kurds are educated in Iraqi/Arab schools, they gradually come to adopt a national Iraqi consciousness. This is, however, balanced by their socialising within the ethnic (Kurdish) community, which enhances their ethnic awareness leading to an overall identity encompassing distinct traits of both national and ethnic affinities. This is reflected in Yalçin-Heckmann's observation that 'simply by raising one's level of social unit one can invoke feelings of likeness, unity and solidarity between people'.<sup>55</sup> Such an overall identity, composed of Iraqi and Kurdish sentiments, is further complicated by the subidentities characterised by religion, tribe, dialect and, to a certain extent, also class-interest. These various identities 'tend to fluctuate based on context and time dimensions, among other variables'.<sup>56</sup> These different forms of identity would appear to be upheld simultaneously, but also selectively separately exhibiting different degrees of enthusiasm, intensity and belief - 'it is only when an identity meets a specific need or circumstance that [other] ties become important'.<sup>57</sup>

The social organisation of identities can be seen as hierarchical, and as such illustrated by the Russian doll-metaphor.<sup>58</sup> Each doll contains a smaller doll, and as the dolls grow smaller and smaller the more specific becomes the focus of identification. Few, if any, identities can be so neatly arranged and ranked, and such simplicity is unlikely to produce a satisfactory result in the Kurdish case. As opposed to a hierarchical arrangement of identities, which produces a dominance of one category over the others, identities may be systematised laterally, as Handelman proposes.<sup>59</sup> Such an organisation shows that all identities are of equal significance and pertinent to the Kurdish case, as the

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<sup>55</sup> Yalçin-Heckmann (1991), p.39.

<sup>56</sup> Theophylactou (1995), p. 58.

<sup>57</sup> UNRISD (1995), p. 97.

<sup>58</sup> Jenkins (1997), p. 85.

<sup>59</sup> Clearly outlined in his 'The organization of ethnicity', *Ethnic Groups*, 1 (1977), pp. 187-200.

people of Northern Iraq can be categorized in different ways in different situations and settings. This relates well to *situational identity*, as described above, how an individual 'constructs and presents any one of a number of possible social identities, depending on the situation ... as the context deems'.<sup>60</sup> This can be useful, but may also be manipulated insofar as the outward appearance is concerned, while language, dialect or manner may be more difficult to alter.

A danger of having a strong set of multiple identities is that it may easily lead to dual loyalties, the most obvious conflict arising when loyalty to the state and solidarity with the ethnic community, within or outside the borders of that state, leads to political confrontation, almost always to the detriment of the Kurdish people. In this sense, identities competing with each other place the people in awkward situations, 'torn between the claims of competing communities and identities'.<sup>61</sup> A variety of identities makes 'a kind of guerrilla warfare against the powerful' possible insofar as it 'authorizes all kinds of alliances and tactics'.<sup>62</sup> However, as Keith and Pile point out 'unfortunately, this may be unable to distinguish between important and irrelevant struggles, and it may create counter-productive alliances between groups who should not be "bedfellows"'.<sup>63</sup>

To refer to the previous discussion on the autonomous Kurdish principalities that were allowed to flourish during the Ottoman era, these entities may also be viewed as providing the impetus for Kurdish national identity. This is suggested by Yeğen in that 'these entities constituted and defined the politico-social space' of 'Kurdishness'.<sup>64</sup> The removal of the emirates that some two centuries later was followed by the dissolution of the Caliphate, had, according to Yeğen, a considerably disruptive effect on Kurdish consciousness, eroding 'the social space wherein Kurdishness was constituted'.<sup>65</sup> The fragmented nature and great diversity of the Kurdish national identity were intensified by the conflict between nationalist movements and their respective 'others', difficulties

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<sup>60</sup>. Cohen (1994), p. 205.

<sup>61</sup>. Smith (1992), p. 59.

<sup>62</sup>. Keith and Pile (1993), p. 35.

<sup>63</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>. Yeğen (1996), p. 218.

compounded by conflicting interests with their counterparts across national borders.

Just as Anthony Smith compared European identity to national identities, one can use his example for the Kurdish case. Smith suggests that the contradiction between the two may not be as great as it first appears. As he writes, 'it rather depends on the version of nationalist doctrine held'. A doctrine coloured by thoughts from the Romanticism, with its perception of the nation as 'a seamless, organic cultural unit', would enhance any contradicting tendencies, whereas a more pluralistic understanding, viewing the nation as 'a rational association of common laws and culture within a defined territory', would leave very little room for any dissension. In such an environment 'competing focuses of identity' would be given some manoeuvring space, enabling people to identify with their nation without alienating them from a looser overarching Iraqi identity. In the Iraqi case, however, what could be regarded as a Romantic doctrine has been employed, creating contradictory identities on a constant collision course.<sup>66</sup>

Despite the multiplicity of identities in the Kurdish political arena, there appears to be a strong awareness of a common Kurdish identity among Kurds.<sup>67</sup> The pressures on the Iraqi Kurds as a result of the long periods of hostilities between the Kurds and the central government, raised their national consciousness to high levels, compared to that of other subidentities. However, the gap created by differences in tribal belonging, religion, language and just general attitudes have prevented common action and has obstructed the creation of a solid base on which to conduct politics, and these multiple axes of identification has caused the shape of Kurdish identity to be vague and has given it a 'fuzzy frontier'.<sup>68</sup>

More specifically, Iraqi Kurdish identity is separate from 'other' Kurdish identities, similar to the way Palestinian identity is separate from Arab identity.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid. p. 221.

<sup>66</sup> Smith (1992), p. 56.

<sup>67</sup> Iraqi Kurds, as consulted in Europe as well as Iran, whether in exile or temporarily outside Northern Iraq, showed strong indications of this. Moreover, among Kurds in exile – no matter where in Kurdistan individuals are originally from – the evidence of such a common Kurdish identity is clear.

<sup>68</sup> The concept originally denoting the British identity. Cohen (1994), p. 35.

The ascribed Iraqi identity imposed on them sets them apart from their Iranian, Turkish and Syrian counterparts. The Kurds are hardly alone in possessing multiple identities. Some attribute 'differentiation and movement between identities [as] characteristic of modern societies'.<sup>69</sup> Marx' idea that all social identity could be reduced to class identity, clearly is not pertinent to the Kurdish case, and, one is inclined to believe, has generally been rendered quite inapplicable as a concept.

The identity of Kurds may be compared to that of Arabs in Israel, who possess a similar set of subidentities. The way the Arabs of Israel experience estrangement from non-Israeli Arabs<sup>70</sup> is reflected in the way Iraqi Kurds sometimes have been noticed to distance themselves from non-Iraqi Kurds (however, mostly in political matters).

With Kurdish national identity being so multidimensional, many Kurds could in chameleon-like manner invoke different identities from their impressive range of identities, depending on what the circumstances demand. As Kurdish national identity is such a slippery and peculiar concept, trying to untangle its complex nature of multiple loyalties and identities is an intricate task. This difficulty, compounded by the existence of a large Kurdish diaspora, also makes the definition of Kurdishness elusive, since Kurdish identity is claimed with pride in places that lie far beyond the geographical boundaries of Kurdistan. Due to this reality more clarification is needed in describing the Kurdish identity than any other 'firmly established' national identity.

Identity is very much an evolving concept, and without a past there can be no genuine identity. From this it follows that neither can there be any greater durability of an identity without a present or a future: the nation does not only look backward to past achievements but also forward to the future. Kurdish national identity therefore rests on the past, and draws on past experiences in order to shape a brighter future, which contrasts with the not infrequently gloomy present. Such a long-term transformation of identity is important for the

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<sup>69</sup>. Bondi (1993), p. 86 (reflecting the views of Marx).

<sup>70</sup>. Hofman and Rouhana (1976), p. 79.

political culture of Iraqi Kurdistan. The reformation of one's identity means lessening the grip on the past, allowing the products of the past to sustain any progress of nation-building.

Iraqi Kurdish identity may be more linked with language than religion,<sup>71</sup> and of the previously mentioned components of Kurdish socio-political identity, perhaps language is the element of identity that is most susceptible to change, and that in its communicative sense. If the perceptions of a group's identity are altered, this may lead to desires for a language shift. As argued in the previous chapter, however, such a development is unlikely to get under way in Central Kurdistan, but sufficient evidence has been presented to suggest that the Kurdish identity has good chances to subsist even if being deprived of its language. This is a reflection of Edwards' thoughts on the issue, who states that 'groupness is a tenacious quantity and is capable of surviving the loss of any objective marker, including language'.<sup>72</sup>

A central point with regard to identity formation in Iraqi Kurdistan is that the construction and maintenance of identity, in the words of Castells, 'always takes place in a context marked by power relationships'.<sup>73</sup> In autonomous Northern Iraq the all but relaxed inter-Kurdish power relationships are further complicated through influence and interference by the neighbouring powers. This external element in identity formation is perhaps of greater significance to the Kurdish case than that of other peoples.

Anthony Smith's remark that identification on a national level in the modern era has 'become the cultural and political norm, transcending other loyalties in scope and power',<sup>74</sup> is certainly applicable to Europe. The Kurdish process of identity-formation, however, has as of yet not reached that same stage. Many subidentities, particularly tribal ones, may still come across as stronger and more powerful than an all-embracing national Kurdish identity, but given time,

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<sup>71</sup>. Whereas for the Iranian Kurds, as being Sunni among the Persian and Azeri Shiites, ethnic identity is supposedly more linked with religion.

<sup>72</sup>. Edwards (1985), p.160.

<sup>73</sup>. Castells (1997), p. 7.

<sup>74</sup>. Smith (1992), p. 58.

primary identification with the national imagined community may become the cultural and political norm also in Kurdistan.

As maintained by an authority on the Kurds, Kurdish nationalism is the politics of the affirmation of Kurdish national identity, an identity that is characteristically transnational in nature.<sup>75</sup> Should the political conditions in the region change in favour of the Kurds, the potential of this transnational identity may be fulfilled in the shape of a 'Greater Kurdistan'. This is conceivable considering its capacity to rise above the current fragmented political and cultural character of the various Kurdish identities. In present circumstances this is only a theoretical possibility, but one that should be considered in a long-term perspective.

Since the definition of 'the other' is an essential part of the definition of the self of the group, Kurdish national identity of Central Kurdistan has not developed in isolation, but in tandem with the Baathist Iraqi identity. Not only do Kurds have multiple identities, they also share them with the neighbouring states and peoples. Iraq, but also Turkey and Iran have many a time exploited some of those identities in efforts to achieve their various aims. In addition, global powers have attempted to manipulate those identities for their own interests, a theme that will be revisited in the following section D. Just as identity can be a force dividing and disuniting in nature, it could also hold the key to conflict resolution, insofar as some of the identities extend to other groups within other political structures in the region. As Theophylactou perceptively concludes in his discussion on Cypriot identity-formation: 'the common denominator in both conflict and conflict resolution may well be identity'.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>. Stated by Abbas Vali in his paper 'The nation-state and its "other": Kurdish national identity and the politics of denial and exclusion in Turkey', presented at the Kurdological Conference *Between Imagination & Denial. Kurds as subjects and objects of political and social processes*, May 29-31, (1998), Berlin.

<sup>76</sup>. Theophylactou (1995), p. 16.

## **Part C**

### **Iraqi Kurdistan in the Regional and International State System**

## Chapter 5: The Kurds and the State System

### 5.1 The principle of self-determination

The Kurds' latent desire for an independent state contextualises the principle of self-determination, a brief discussion of which is deemed valuable to serve as an introduction to the current chapter. The Kurdish right to self-determination, 'their call from below', making those 'above' uncomfortable, to use Hroch's phrasing,<sup>1</sup> would indeed be a natural starting point for an analysis of the state system, its evolution and how Kurdistan can be accommodated within it.

This idea to unify the national community with its own political unit is in fact unhelpfully vague, since what exactly is the 'self' of a nation who can express its will? A sense of national identity provides the pre-political background to the emergence of sentiments of self-determination, an issue that has been examined above.

The right to national self-determination has to be distinguished from the right to self-rule, Yael Tamir points out. Derived from the theory of (liberal) nationalism, the former is essentially about 'the demand for a public sphere in which the cultural aspects of national life come to the fore', whereas the latter with roots in democratic theory is 'the right to take part in the political institutions that govern one's life'.<sup>2</sup> The demand for self-determination thus concerns cultural rather than political rights - those of preserving the existence of a nation as a distinct cultural unit. Viewed in this light, demands for national self-determination are not tantamount to demands for political independence.

Differently interpreted, however, in cases where advocates of national self-determination envisage and insist on full sovereignty for their nation, the right of self-determination would prove incompatible with the maintenance and protection of territorial integrity. In such circumstances these two concepts

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<sup>1</sup>. Hroch (1995), p. 65.

clash, as a review of the authoritative Charter of the United Nations indicates. Article 1 in the first chapter of the UN Charter that deals with the purposes and principles of the United Nations emphasises the ‘respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples’. Article 2, however, states that ‘the organisation [UN] is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members’.<sup>3</sup>

The strong opposition to any violation of territorial integrity would appear to override most claims for political self-determination, regardless of the validity and righteousness of those claims. If one is to judge the position of international law by the record of the United Nations, one may conclude, as does Hakan Wiberg in internationalising the issue of self-determination, that ‘it has little support to offer populations living inside the territories of recognised sovereign states, when they strive for independence or autonomy’.<sup>4</sup> The East Timor experience of 1999, however, provides a rare exception to this general observation, highlighting that ‘the aura of nationhood always operates within the contexts of power’.<sup>5</sup>

Demands for self-determination and self-rule alike may produce substantial divisions in society, as overlaps in land (as frequently is the case) often lead to disputes that could over time achieve greater dimensions. As a result of the turbulent developments in the early 1990s, when more than a dozen new states appeared on the international political arena, international politics began to show indications of ‘statehood fatigue’. Countries likely to be affected by further or intensified statehood demands responded with greater swiftness and innovative policies to any possible separatist tendencies. A fitting example of this is the novel approach Iran, Turkey and Syria opted for in co-ordinating their reactions to the intimidatingly democratic developments marking the beginning of the autonomous ‘Free Kurdistan’.

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<sup>2</sup>. Tamir (1993), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup>. See Articles 1 and 2 of the Charter of the UN at <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/index.html>.

<sup>4</sup>. Wiberg (1983), p. 50.

<sup>5</sup>. Billig (1995), p. 5.

The Kurds' right to self-determination rests on shared characteristics (similar to those that characterise a nation) based on there being a distinct people experiencing a common kind of historical experience, a common culture, language and social organisation, and a geographically distinct territory.<sup>6</sup> There are also rights which stem from protection, where severe oppression by the state and even genocidal policies call for a high degree of protection which could be provided by having a state of their own. These common criteria the Kurdish people fulfil with ease. The difficulty lies in obtaining recognition, which also implies support – moral but also military and economic – from the international community, an issue revisited further down.

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<sup>6</sup>. These factors were de facto acknowledged in the 1920 Treaty of Sevres, and despite the fact that the relevant article never materialised, this Treaty is of tremendous importance as it implicitly recognises the Kurdish right to statehood.

## 5.2 The state system and its origins

In any analysis of the modern state, it is important to recognise the fact that these political entities do not exist in isolation and should not, in the words of Colin Barker, be treated ‘as if it existed only in the singular’: rather they constitute ‘a world system of states’.<sup>7</sup> It would appear inconceivable to consider states outside of this conceptual framework. This state system that came into existence in the seventeenth century is based on the Treaty of Westphalia, which, concluded in 1648, marked the end of the Thirty Years War in central Europe. This peace treaty was a central historical event in many regards – not least because of its long-term consequences for international politics. It outlined the structure of the European state system, the basis for the international order, which still prevails. It laid the foundations of a system making the *territory* the base for the exercise of power - as opposed to previous dynastic orders when power was not primarily based on control of the territory.<sup>8</sup> For all intents and purposes, ‘Westphalia was a *modus vivendi*, an agreement ... [based] upon the mutual obligation of political authorities not to interfere in one another’s territory’,<sup>9</sup> hence, frontiers, which had been of lesser significance, now became important.

A durable model for co-existence between sovereign states, and the first step towards a standardised and regulated international society, the Westphalian order determined the structure of conflict-management and the balance of power. This dynamic system, with the central concepts of *power*, *state* and *sovereignty*, implies an accumulation of power of the state and correspondingly a weakening of transnational as well as subnational structures. These sovereign qualities swept away the old feudal systems and the principle of sovereignty deprived local rulers of their power-positions. Instability, which had been a common feature of the old order, was to be overcome and replaced by a stable society, created and maintained by a strong capable government through the exercise of

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<sup>7</sup> Barker (1978), p. 118.

<sup>8</sup> Rather, it was based on the simple belonging to a certain family: when succession of rulers is determined by blood relationship, the political character becomes more limited in scope - the politics of a Safavid monarch might be explained by his being a Safavid.

<sup>9</sup> Philpott (1998), p. 89.

sovereignty. The capacity to prevent disorder hence derived from establishing sovereignty over territory and people.

The balance of power is an important feature of the state system. This institution for the control of violence has helped shaping and preserving the system of states by safeguarding the independence of individual states during the past centuries. In the process, it has contributed to the promotion of stability in the international arena. In the classic European state system a most important element, which facilitated the maintenance of the balance of power, was the shared culture, which 'encouraged understanding and acceptance of the objectives and instrumentalities of the balance of power'.<sup>10</sup> As the state system expanded and a new international community came into being, there was no longer one single culture with which all actors could identify. Indeed, 'the cultural homogeneity which gave the European state system its distinctive flavour has disappeared'.<sup>11</sup> So in combination with the emergence of other determining factors such as ideology, the smooth operation of the balance of power has been made difficult.

The concept of an international state system does not imply a rigid, static set of relations, but the notion of 'system', as Immanuel Wallerstein's world system theory holds, in contrasting the realist school of thought, may indicate an existence alongside a world economy, which could exercise some control over the system of states. The degree to which the political processes are determined and influenced by the world economy has been widely debated, and for this brief discussion it will suffice to merely touch upon the world-system perspective of Wallerstein and the alternative, conflicting theory of one of his main critics, Theda Skocpol.

Wallerstein did not intend his world-system to be understood in geographic, global terms. Rather, he perceived it as 'a "world" system, not because it encompasses the whole world, but because it is larger than any juridically-

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<sup>10</sup>. Berridge (1987), p. 152.

<sup>11</sup>. Ibid. p. 153.

defined political unit'.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, 'it is a "world economy" because the basic linkages between the parts of the system are 'economic''.<sup>13</sup> Wallerstein focuses on economic processes on a wider scale when explaining state development, an approach, which suggests that states do not act as independent actors, but strictly operate within the fixed structure of a world capitalist economy. This perception of states as secondary phenomena to the capitalist world economy is contested by Skocpol, who lays great emphasis on political determinants in state development, and maintains that states were instrumental in the making of a world economy. Markets and patterns of trade are, according to Skocpol, unlikely to 'be understood in their origin, functioning, or effects except with reference to changes in class and political structures'.<sup>14</sup>

The world-system theory seems to suffer from a lack of flexibility insofar as it disregards and excludes the formation of dynamic interrelationships between internal forces within the state on the one hand and with the world economy on the other. One is inclined to believe that political factors have had a greater impact on the formation of the state system than acknowledged by Wallerstein, although Skocpol appears to overemphasise the significance of such political factors.

It would appear that the current world order of states, based on the Westphalian principle, is a logical construction for the purpose of accommodating the organisational needs of humanity. As such, the state system may prove to be a permanent feature of human organisation. The international state system is, however, in a wider perspective a comparatively recent development, and as previous political institutions have proven vulnerable to human creativity it may be reasonable to expect also this form of political organisation to be transitional in nature. There appear to be two main challenges to the Westphalian order: the element of globalisation and the threat constituted by various emerging sub-nationalisms.

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<sup>12</sup>. Wallerstein (1974), p. 15.

<sup>13</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>. Skocpol (1977), p. 1087.

### **5.3 Threats to the Westphalian order: is the nation-state becoming redundant?**

Despite the fact that the number of nation-states has increased this past decade, there are indications of their control being greatly reduced, largely due to the force of globalisation. Through internationalisation of national economies the nation-state has lost part of its sovereignty, particularly with regard to the economy, and some go as far as to say that ‘the authority of states has, like money, moved offshore’.<sup>15</sup> This has come about through global transfers of labour with large-scale migration across national borders, the internationalisation of capital, but perhaps most significantly, the development of global communication systems. In the words of Michael Billig, ‘the flow of information across electronic networks knows of no national boundaries’.<sup>16</sup> However, what is important to note is that not only does the world globalise in areas of economics and culture: the state is in itself also affected by globalisation. In this sense it may be said that the combination of all factors mentioned above serves to reduce the autonomy of the nation-state and infringes upon its sovereignty.

Often viewed as great threats to the state and seeking its displacement are the transnational or non-state actors – ‘non-governmental organisations, which operate internationally’.<sup>17</sup> These have in the second half of the twentieth century steadily increased their presence and influence on the international political arena. The transnational actor that appears most powerful to challenge the state on both international and domestic levels is the multinational, or transnational corporation, a term, which indicates that its operations are conducted in more than one country, and deals with foreign direct investment.<sup>18</sup> First and foremost an economic institution, the transnational corporation is nonetheless territorially based in that its headquarters is firmly established in a chosen place where it has a history and legal presence. Lacking a ‘state-defined’ territorial base, however,

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<sup>15</sup>. Rosenau (1995), p. 193.

<sup>16</sup>. Billig (1995), p. 130.

<sup>17</sup>. Berridge (1987), p. 23.

<sup>18</sup>. Ibid. p. 24.

it is able to exert extensive influence on the political arena in the following ways:

firstly, through influence, or even control, over both the foreign and domestic policies of its *host* states – at least in matters where its interests are affected; secondly, through its employment as an instrument of the foreign and domestic policies of its *host* states; thirdly, through influence, or even control, over the foreign political and foreign economic policies of its *home* state towards its host, or potential host, states; and fourthly, through its employment as an instrument of the foreign political and foreign economic policies of its *home* state towards, amongst others, its host states, irrespective of whether or not it has also contributed to shaping these policies.<sup>19</sup>

With so much potential power the multinationals are clearly in a position to exert great influence over the state,<sup>20</sup> although it is important not to stress this potential too far – their control is by no means unlimited. The state is ‘politically buttressed against the multinational by nationalism [and so] its countervailing power is considerable’.<sup>21</sup> If the multinationals had been able to exert unlimited control over the policy-making processes of states, trade would rarely have been used as a political weapon. An example of this is the unilateral sanctions the USA have applied to Iran through its D’Amato law/Iran-Libya Sanctions Act, passed in 1996, aimed at impeding nations from trading with Iran. Not only foreign companies are targeted, but also influential American corporations are banned from signing any deals to develop Iran’s rich oil and gas fields. These kinds of policies are economically ineffective and politically counterproductive, and if multinational corporations exerted such power over states as is sometimes claimed, economic warfare would not be so frequently utilised in international politics.

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<sup>19</sup>. Ibid. p. 25.

<sup>20</sup>. The relations between the multinationals and the states resemble relations between church and state from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries. For an interesting account of this, see Strange (1986), p. 310.

<sup>21</sup>. Berridge (1987), p. 26.

Globalisation may be perceived as a force that in the long run undermines the nation-state,<sup>22</sup> contributing to a process of these entities eventually being absorbed into larger units and finally superseded by a world government. Held shows that this development begins at the economic and cultural level, where an increase in connections lessens the ability of the government to exercise power in an effective manner. A multifaceted growth in transnational processes leads to a further decrease in state power - a development that brings about co-ordination internationally or intergovernmentally in areas traditionally controlled and operated unilaterally by the state. As a result, full sovereignty is effectively compromised as participation in various political and economic constellations on the international level becomes greater. Economic necessities may prove strong enough to compel states to surrender parts of their sovereignty to supra-national organizations, rendering the emergence of 'global governance' possible. Such an order is characterised by an overarching system of policy-making and administration, in which individual states' exercise of power may diminish even further should a supranational state with extensive powers emerge on the international arena.<sup>23</sup>

This development has precipitated what Rosenau refers to as 'pervasive authority crises', which indicate the lack of efficiency and capability regarding the implementation of policies. He writes that states 'can still maintain public order through their police powers, but their ability to address substantive issues and solve substantive problems is declining as people find fault with their performances and thus question their authority, redefine the bases of their legitimacy, and withhold cooperation'.<sup>24</sup> This became evident following the dramatic transformations that have occurred since 1989, but it is not only the areas of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe that have experienced these authority crises. Rosenau believes that they are to be found in most parts of the world, but points out that they manifest themselves in different shapes and forms. One example he presents is Canada, where 'the authority crisis is rooted

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<sup>22</sup>. For an analysis of why globalisation is an irreversible process, see Walter B. Wriston, 'Technology and Sovereignty', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 67, Winter 1988/89, pp. 63-75.

<sup>23</sup>. Held (1991), pp. 207-9.

<sup>24</sup>. Rosenau (1995), p. 207.

in linguistic, cultural, and constitutional issues as Quebec seeks to secede or otherwise redefine its relationship to the central government'.<sup>25</sup>

- 4 The Middle East and in particular the Kurdish-inhabited areas are certainly not alien to authority crises as defined by Rosenau. The basic feature of globalisation – the increased flow of economic and cultural exchanges – is admittedly difficult for the Middle Eastern states to curb throughout Kurdistan. When the governments in Tehran, Ankara, Baghdad and Damascus find themselves unable to regulate the flow of ideas and commodities at their Kurdish borders, their internal policy instruments are rendered ineffective. Exerting this control was difficult already in the 1980s, and with the creation of the autonomous Kurdish entity in Northern Iraq in 1991, was made well-nigh impossible.

In order to retain some degree of state power in relation to the Iraqi Kurdish areas, and to prevent the intensification of transnational processes between different Kurdish regions, the respective governments have made their presence felt by firmly establishing their security and intelligence services in the autonomous region.<sup>26</sup> This, in combination with repressive measures of various degrees directed at their own Kurdish populations, keep any pan-Kurdish sentiments from gaining momentum, at least in the short term.

Due to prevailing globalising trends, there appears to be a strong desire to control regional institutions and limit any developments that might undermine national sovereignty. Resistance to the emergence of competing power centres that could result in divided loyalties is another sign of the state attempting to counter globalisation. Since the involvement of these states in international organisations and multilateral treaties is reasonably limited, they are not forced to surrender much sovereignty, if any, for the purpose of co-operation on a regional or international level. The Middle Eastern states with sizeable Kurdish populations seem to have steered clear of the supranationalism that may characterise other parts of the world and any system of 'global governance' does

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<sup>25</sup>. Ibid. p. 207.

not appear to have gained a foothold in this region. That is not to say that these states are not affected by globalisation, but the extent to which they have bowed to influence by international forces on the global arena is proportionately limited.

A fundamental consequence of globalisation is that developments in one country create a reaction in another place, far beyond the borders of that country. Hence decision-making on the sole basis of domestic economic or political conditions is rendered impossible, making consideration of regional and international developments necessary. This is highly relevant when dealing with the Kurdish question, and particularly with regard to developments in Iraqi Kurdistan over the past decade.

In particular for regimes of a more authoritarian character - to a greater or lesser extent describing the nature of the Kurdish-populated states - the feature of globalisation in its external environment could potentially be a very problematic one, since it is a process that, as has been described, threatens territorial sovereignty by reducing the control exerted by the state. Keeping globalising forces and influences at bay would then have to be combined with efforts to curtail the other main threat to their existence as nation-states: i.e. the internal threat of sub-nationalisms.

The sovereign prerogatives of states are not only vulnerable to the activities of global forces, but demands from domestic sources also challenge their authority and territorial supremacy. Such tendencies do not form in isolation from events on the global level, as observed by Kolinsky, 'the changes occurring 'above' the level of the state, are not without consequence for the patterns of authority and political integration within national structures'.<sup>27</sup> Through the ethnification of nationalism, or materialisation of identity politics, the political basis for the modern nation-state has been undermined. There seems to be a growing concern that today the threat of conflicts between states may not be as great as the danger

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<sup>26</sup>. This will be discussed in chapter six.

<sup>27</sup>. Kolinsky (1981), p. 86.

of internal friction and collapse due to the rise of ethnic and cultural loyalties that were for long subordinated to state allegiances.

### 5.3.1 Beyond Westphalia

The state system was effectively kept in place and sustained by the Cold War, during which time the general atmosphere of hostility between the great powers prevented subnational and transnational expressions from emerging, the growth of which may have reduced the state's capacity to carry out its essential functions.<sup>28</sup> The end of the Cold War unleashed subnational as well as transnational forces of varied strength and intensity previously prevented from flourishing: a development, which begs the question whether the complete dissolution of the state system is to be expected.

Those who assert that we are moving towards a new era where borders as such become fluid and ever-changeable as they once were in European medieval times, envisage the emergence of a supranational world in which the nation-state will cease in importance as an operational entity, giving way to a borderless world.<sup>29</sup> Such a development would imply that the main points of Westphalia - i.e. the elements of *national sovereignty* and *political territory* (the legitimate basis for the state) would need to be reconsidered or even discarded if a post-Westphalian or neo-Westphalian order is to be created. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to theorise in depth about the general appearance of such a system on the international level, but a brief outline may be useful.

In a neo-Westphalian order the fusion of sovereignty, territoriality and nationality would be subject to substantial changes. Hegel argued that the firm consolidation of the modern state as a permanent institution and basis for an international order owed its success to the fact that 'it struck the correct balance between individual rights and loyalties to the community, the market economy

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<sup>28</sup>. See for instance Rosenau (1995).

<sup>29</sup>. A vocal advocate of this theory is Eric Hobsbawm. See particularly his, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (1992), Cambridge University Press.

and social welfare [and] state sovereignty and international order'.<sup>30</sup> The collapse of this critical balance, argues Carr, has brought about the crisis of the state, in particular caused by the collision of the forces of nationalism and internationalism.<sup>31</sup>

Seeking to reinstate an equilibrium, Carr envisages new state structures, which would balance 'respect for national differences and cosmopolitan sentiments',<sup>32</sup> and where sovereignty 'would endure yet relinquish much of its classical significance'.<sup>33</sup> As Linklater observes, 'nations would continue to be important in the new structures of cooperation, but the connection between nation and sovereign statehood would be severed'.<sup>34</sup> The new configuration of state structures would be more cosmopolitan, more respectful of multiple identities and more strenuously involved in combating economic inequalities than any of its predecessors.<sup>35</sup>

Central in Carr's writings is that post-nationalist political structures promote the welfare of individuals rather than the interests of states. Linklater builds on Carr's analysis and suggests that 'a post-Westphalian framework can develop where like-minded societies are keen to establish closer forms of political cooperation to integrate shared ethical norms into the structure of social and political life'.<sup>36</sup> Such co-operation would mean relinquishing parts of their sovereignty as the type of international governance conceived by Linklater is not based on the fusion of sovereignty, territoriality and nationality. However, states will retain the form of sovereignty although in a watered-down version of the concept, but in a post-Westphalian global order, significant powers on the national level will be transferred to authorities on an international level. There will be a multitude of political allegiances and an absence of a central sovereign

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<sup>30</sup>. Linklater (1998), p. 147, referencing Hegel (1952), *The Philosophy of Right*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Bull argues in a similar vein: see chs 10-13 in his *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (1977), London: Macmillan.

<sup>31</sup>. Analysed in part two of his *Nationalism and After* (1945), pp. 38-70.

<sup>32</sup>. As quoted in Linklater (1998), p. 159.

<sup>33</sup>. Ibid. p. 163.

<sup>34</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>. Carr (1945), p. 43.

<sup>36</sup>. Linklater (1998), p. 167.

authority, which will create an array of diverse loyalties and prevent the emergence of authoritarian projects with hegemonic ambitions.

As for nationality, an international society of a post-Westphalian style would create a 'transnational citizenry', which, as Linklater puts it, would 'break the nexus between sovereignty and citizenship'.<sup>37</sup> On the whole, 'a post-Westphalian society promotes greater universality and diversity by striving to balance demands for the recognition of deep diversity with the ideal of transnational citizenship'.<sup>38</sup>

Post-Westphalian forms of world political organisations are unlikely to develop in all parts of the world simultaneously. It should come as no surprise that it is in Europe, 'the birthplace of the modern territorial state', that political innovations are under way.<sup>39</sup> Should this development towards a European federation continue, Europe may well come to serve as the model of a post-Westphalian political organisation, to be reproduced in other parts of the world. This would, however, be a lengthy process, and it is debatable whether these ideas have the capacity to be applicable on a global scale. Emulating developments in Europe would, in any case, not appear imminent in the Middle East.

It is conceivable that in the Kurdish context a modified form of a pre-Westphalian order may be characterised by modern alternatives to the extensive sixteenth and seventeenth century Kurdish principalities.<sup>40</sup> These emirates, situated in the border areas of the Ottoman and Safavid empires, enjoyed considerable autonomy and due to their peripheral but strategic location they commanded substantial leverage as the empires made frequent attempts to win them over and form allegiances in order to ensure their frontier security.

Resulting from Persian defeat in the battle of Chaldiran in 1514, most of Kurdistan fell under Ottoman jurisdiction, although several emirates were

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<sup>37</sup>. Ibid. p. 175.

<sup>38</sup>. Ibid. p. 176.

<sup>39</sup>. For an interesting account of this development, see Falk (1994), p. 136-137.

<sup>40</sup>. Martin van Bruinessen provides a detailed discussion on the Kurdish emirates and their setting: (1992c) pp. 145-175.

located within the Persian sphere of influence.<sup>41</sup> The Safavid Shahs desired to rule their Kurdish areas through centrally appointed administrators of Turkoman or Persian origin, whereas the Turkish Sultans adopted a pragmatic approach – undoubtedly realising the extreme difficulties of enforcing central control in the fringes of their empire - and granted the Kurds more autonomy in accepting local chiefs to serve as rulers. A new administrative system was set up in the region based on the ‘Kurdo-Ottoman pact’, where sixteen independent Kurdish principalities were recognised by the Ottomans.<sup>42</sup> Whether being the result of Turkish pragmatism or the failure of Persian methods (Esfahan<sup>43</sup> was forced to accept that instating centrally appointed non-Kurdish governors was unworkable a policy), the Kurdish ruling princes enjoyed a status of virtual independence for their emirates.

The relative stability in the political structure of Kurdistan at this time has been mythologised by Kurdish nationalists,<sup>44</sup> but this perception is to some extent illusory. It is fair to say that conditions for a more stable political climate were created in the Kurdish areas when maintenance of the strategic balance of power between the Turks and Persians was sought by most parties. The administrative system based on the ‘Kurdo-Ottoman pact’ was, in the words of David McDowall, viewed ‘as the ideal balance between localism and imperial government’.<sup>45</sup> However, the instability in this arrangement lay in the recurring ambitions of all parties concerned - Ottomans, Safavids and Kurdish chiefs – to increase their own domains at times of greater individual strength and capacity, which hardly promoted a sustained peaceful environment.

In visualising a post-Westphalian order in the Kurdish Middle East, an organisation similar to the one outlined above comes to mind, suggesting extensive autonomy with no or a deliberately weak central government. The recurrence of such a mosaic structure in the region would ideally exclude highly destabilising elements such as that of intense rivalry between competing regional

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<sup>41</sup>. See McDowall (1996), pp. 25-31 on the Kurds’ role in the Ottoman-Safavid relations.

<sup>42</sup>. Kendal (1993), p. 14.

<sup>43</sup>. Esfahan served as the capital of the Safavid dynasty, and remained the focal point in the Persian Empire for several centuries.

<sup>44</sup>. An issue examined by O’Shea (1998) p. 139.

powers where the Kurds might yet again find themselves acting as a buffer between the competitors.

On a wider level, such a loosely defined political order could possibly deal more successfully with today's stateless nations such as the Kurds. Statelessness has otherwise been somewhat of an alien concept to the system managers. The term statelessness – with its idea of displacement - does not necessarily signify aggravating dimensions of anarchism and a social order in disarray. This is particularly discernible in tribal societies where the impersonality of states is contrasted with the strong bonds of loyalty and solidarity between the tribesmen, among whom this interdependence represents the foundation on which peace and order of society rest. A cosmopolitan community committed to the promotion of welfare internationalism, as envisaged by Carr, would ensure due consideration of the interests of those politically weak – in other words, those nations without a state, and perhaps the Kurds, would fare better in a restructured post-Westphalian world.

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<sup>45</sup>. McDowall (1996), p. 28.

#### 5.4 Is the Nation-State still a potent force?

Contrasting the theories of the redundancy of the nation-state is the view that this powerful form of political organisation represents a more resilient construction than sometimes may appear, and is unlikely to vanish. Not denying the aforementioned 'crisis of the state', it might be hasty to conclude that what may appear to be nationalist (as that supporting state ideology) sentiment on the decline necessarily implies a permanently enfeebled nation-state. There is no denying that the nation-state is a vulnerable structure, but the very factors that seemingly have an adverse effect on the operational functions of the state, i.e. the supranational entities of international organisations and transnational corporations, may, upon close scrutiny, prove to be imperative to ensure the continuation of the nation-state in its present form.

The strength of the nation-state lies in its merging of the distinctive concepts of 'nation' and 'state'. As Gordon Smith points out, these two notions 'bring together conflicting sources of legitimacy': the nation(-as-people) being a product of cultural and ethnic considerations and hence, in the words of Smith, presents a 'non-rational idea', sharply contrasted with the modern state, which 'embodies the principle of "legal rationality"'.<sup>46</sup>

Just as a state may be created by a nation, a nation may be fabricated by a state - a process, which tends to subjugate "sub-state" national expressions that could threaten the emerging "national" unity'.<sup>47</sup> As indicated above, an illustrative and fitting example of such a process is Iraq, where the state has attempted to create an Iraqi nation consisting of Kurds and Arabs, but also Turkmens and Assyrians with the added divisive religious element of Sunnis and Shiites. Hardly a monoethnic state, Iraq may even be termed a nation-state-project, which would imply its striving towards the ideal of political organisation where *nation*, *territory* and *state* were as one. Again in the words of Gordon Smith, it attempted to 'foster an attendant nationhood, to make nationalism a dependent

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<sup>46</sup>. A. D. Smith (1981), p. 197.

variable, which would bring with it the natural consequence of enhancing state legitimacy'.<sup>48</sup> This is not to suggest that Iraq was the only country in the region to embark on such a course of devising its complementary nation.<sup>49</sup> Considerable ethnic, religious and linguistic diversities characterise the nature of many states in the region, and all these factors combined into what is quite inappropriately termed a 'nation-state' represents a challenge to the statesmen seeking to establish an all-embracing, often new, nationality.

#### 5.4.1 Devaluation of the nation-state concept

It is clear that developments in the second half of the twentieth century, and particularly of the past decade, indicated a reinterpretation of the territoriality and sovereignty of states. Many of the nation-states that were created in the decolonisation era as well as the large number of new states coming into existence in the 1990s were following an established pattern and, it seemed, automatically applied 'the nation-state formula'<sup>50</sup> as a natural course of action. It is doubtful whether any of these newcomers on the international political arena would have been able to achieve statehood in earlier ages, when sustaining an independent existence – i.e. 'to defend its territory and to provide physical security for its citizens'<sup>51</sup> - was one of the main functions of the state. This deflationary development may be referred to as 'lowering of the threshold requirements'<sup>52</sup> - a phrase used by Joseph Rothschild describing the gradual undermining of the institution of the nation-state - which suggests the appearance of a difference between the more recently created nation-states and their older counterparts.

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<sup>47</sup>. Ibid. p. 198.

<sup>48</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>. A clear example, among many, of a 'nation-state-project' is the United Arab Emirates, where the state has attempted to construct a new nation out of the different emirates.

<sup>50</sup>. A. D. Smith (1981), p.200.

<sup>51</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>. In discussing the problematics confronting state authority in the late twentieth century Europe, he writes that the issue of the viability of states 'has waned as the international community has lowered its threshold requirements and definitions of what constitutes viability'. Rothschild, (1979) p. 37.

One could even go as far as to question whether these new states are 'proper' nation-states, identifying them as 'broken-backed' states, as does Tinker. This term signifies the emergence of a new pattern of state, a major feature of which is the centre's inability to extend its authority to all areas of the state.<sup>53</sup> Iraq fits Tinker's broken backed states pattern in that parts of the country have at different periods been under the control of armed opponents of the central government.

The fact that the nation-states of the late twentieth century appeared to lack sufficient capacity to fully attend to their traditional functions does not, however, seem to indicate an immediate disappearance from the political scene. The basic functional needs are secured through multilateral arrangements, the military nature of which guarantees the defence of the state. Alliance-formations would often reflect the worldwide strategic interests of leading countries, and this expansion of their networks reinforces the individual state's military capacity. Entering into alliances primarily serve the state's own interests to survive as an independent state-formation. Hence the ability of the single state to ensure its own physical security, or the lack thereof, would not appear to reduce its life expectancy.

#### 5.4.2 Globalisation re-examined

Globalisation does not represent a process that has emerged in recent times, rather, in the words of Michael Smith, 'it reflects a lengthy process of historical development characterised by intense political competition and reflecting the exercise of power in a variety of forms'.<sup>54</sup> This view is supported by Anthony Giddens, who sees a strong link between the appearance of globalisation and the development of modern societies.<sup>55</sup> Often perceived as automatically generating cultural uniformity, this long-standing process of globalisation may do the opposite - make new levels of diversity appear. The existence of nation-states

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<sup>53</sup>. Tinker (1964), pp. 6-7.

<sup>54</sup>. Michael Smith (1992), p. 254.

<sup>55</sup>. See his *The Consequences of Modernity*, (1990) Cambridge: Polity Press.

around the globe provides a basis on which societies can be connected with one another. Therefore it is possible for ethnic identification to survive, since globalisation does not necessarily imply homogeneity and integration. In the words of Michael Billig, 'the forces of globalization are not producing cultural homogeneity in an absolute manner. They may be eroding differences between national cultures, but they are also multiplying differences within nations'.<sup>56</sup>

Malcolm Waters entertains this idea that a globalised polity does not have to take the form of a world government. Alternatively, he writes, 'a globalised polity can have the characteristics of a network of power centres ... co-ordinated because their controllers shared common norms and common interests'.<sup>57</sup> Such co-ordination is rendered necessary since international trade and national economies through the process of globalisation have become heavily linked to each other - an interdependence that implies a considerable difficulty for any state to exert exclusive control over its own economic system and keep its economy completely separate from others.

Out of necessity as well as resulting from strategic considerations, economic co-operation across the borders is promoted, but this co-operation may not necessarily proceed towards 'supranational integration' as suggested above. Rather, in their capacity of being the basic components of political organisations of any significance, it is conceivable that states enrol in joint ventures because they regard it as 'the best way of preserving their own national interests and, ultimately, of maintaining their position, even existence, in the world community'.<sup>58</sup> In the same vein it may be argued that international organisations are 'extensions of the existing states', and 'in its role as coordinator and mediator of policies at both national and transnational levels, central government remains in a key strategic position'.<sup>59</sup> Viewed in this light, the institution of the nation-state seems cemented and even underpinned by the very forces of supranationalism that sought to dispose of it.

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<sup>56</sup>. Billig (1995), p. 132.

<sup>57</sup>. Waters (1995), p. 111.

<sup>58</sup>. A. D. Smith (1981), p. 202.

As stated above, economic globalisation makes the state vulnerable and forced to co-ordinate its financial policies with other state and non-state actors in the international arena, but the state far from surrenders its control to other states or forces in this system of interdependence. One might conclude indeed, as Kolinsky does, that 'no state gives all: its general willingness to coordinate policies is tempered by the reserve of seeking competitive advantage where possible and by its anxiety to minimise its vulnerability to unpredictable changes in the external world. A finger is given, a hand held back'.<sup>60</sup>

Globalising trends in politics only vaguely resemble economic globalisation in terms of intensity and power. The state remains 'a critical arena for problem solving', which may be explained by politics as being 'a highly territorial activity'.<sup>61</sup> Territorially-based, the state is bolstered by the wide powers this brings, and in the Middle East in particular, borders are very much underpinning the current state system.

This discussion generates a subject matter worthy of investigation – i.e. that concerning the prospects for Kurdish statehood in the regional state system. This will be thoroughly examined in the concluding eighth chapter, outlining the possibility of a Kurdish microstate, a 'Greater Kurdistan' or even the prospect of several Kurdish republics emerging. That pertinent discussion, however, demands an analysis of the nature of Kurdish nationalism: not only tracing its origins and evaluating its general development, but also providing a classification based on previous exercises.

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<sup>59</sup>. Kolinsky (1981), pp. 100-101.

<sup>60</sup>. Ibid. p. 99.

<sup>61</sup>. Waters (1995), p. 122.

## 5.5 State and Nationalism in a Kurdish context

The Kurds constitute a single nation, which has occupied its present habitat for at least three thousand years. They have outlived the rise and fall of many imperial races: Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Mongols, Turks. They have their own history, language, and culture. Their country has been unjustly partitioned. But they are the original owners, not strangers to be tolerated as minorities with limited concession granted at the whim of the usurpers.<sup>62</sup>

### 5.5.1 Origins and development of Kurdish nationalism<sup>63</sup>

An understanding of the essence of Kurdish nationalist thinking, as summed up in Edmonds' much quoted paragraph, is necessary in order to explain the way Kurdish politics is conducted on the local as well as the regional level. As a societal organising idea, it lies intermediate between two ways of looking at the developments in the vast area of Kurdistan – on the one hand, Kurdistan as a whole and on the other, the Kurdish nationalism of each Kurdish region as a specific product of its own particular historic and socio-economic circumstances. Accounting for each regional variety of Kurdish nationalism is beyond the scope of this thesis. Rather, the origins and development of the general phenomenon will be examined, while keeping the focus on Iraqi Kurdistan. It is, after all, in Iraq that the largest degree of success and with that, persistence, has been accomplished by the nationalist movement, since Iraq is the only country where the Kurds receive legal and official recognition, which grants them certain rights *qua* Kurds.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>. Edmonds 1971, p. 88.

<sup>63</sup>. For a comprehensive history of the Kurdish nationalist movement, see Jwaideh, Wadie (1960), *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Its Origins and Development*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Syracuse University.

<sup>64</sup>. Edmonds (1971) presents a number of facts from which this 'exceptional situation derives', many that are closely connected to the policies of the former Mandatory Power. In 1918, for instance, the British favoured the establishment of semi-autonomous Kurdish provinces, only loosely attached to a central administration. Moreover, the League of Nations stipulated in 1925 that Kurdish was to be the official language for teaching in and administration of the Kurdish areas. As Iraq subsequently applied for admission to the League in 1931 and was admitted a year

Since its character and development are closely related to the historical processes of nation-state formation in the region, an analysis of the Kurdish national movement cannot be examined in isolation and must be raised from its local level. As pointed out by Sathyamurthy, 'nationalist movements, during the post-war period, must be viewed in their international context as well as against the particular historical background in which they develop'.<sup>65</sup> This context could be placed in the thoughts of Richard Jenkins, who explains that

The local has to be understood alongside, and analytically integrated into, the regional, the national and, these days, the supra-national (even the global). .... Nationalist movements are not things unto themselves, and their history is shared with other peoples and places within a context of metropolitan expansion, power and the struggle for control.<sup>66</sup>

Accordingly, while Kurdish nationalism may be regarded as the product of largely internal developments, a look at history indicates that it is to a considerable extent shaped by conflicts with adversaries external to Kurdish society. Turkish, Iranian and Arab nationalisms are not known for their mild characters, and that Kurdistan is positioned where these three (arguably four, if distinguishing between Syrian and Iraqi Arab nationalism) national ideologies meet has impacted profoundly on the development of Kurdish nationalism. The centralising, secular Kemalism has always considered the Kurds a threat to the unity of the Turkish state, and the forcible assimilation of the backward Kurdish population was accompanied with modernisation efforts to create a modern Turkey in which there was no room for any alien ethnic minority. In Iran there was a similar situation, where the Iranian Kurds were a bothersome tribal element obstructing the Shah's policies of modernisation. In addition, there was the religious aspect, which became a more prominent feature after the Revolution 1979, when the Sunni Kurds became national obstacles to the promotion of Shiite universalistic ideas. Baathist nationalism was not driven by the same ethnic intolerance, but granted the Iraqi Kurds constitutional status as a

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later, those stipulations became part of the Constitution and, crucially, 'a matter of international concern'. (pp. 92-93)

<sup>65</sup>. Sathyamurthy (1983), p. 229.

<sup>66</sup>. Jenkins (1997), p. 139.

national minority with certain language rights concerning education and media. However, as explained above,<sup>67</sup> Baath rule does not accommodate Kurdish national aspirations, and its ideology, like Kemalism and Khomeinism, is irreconcilable with that of Kurdish nationalism.

Haji Qadir Koyi was the first Kurdish intellectual who in the late nineteenth century voiced views about the establishment of what has developed into the concept of a pan-Kurdish state. In considering the traditional leaders to be 'obstructive and misguided irrelevancies',<sup>68</sup> his ideas were, however, regarded as somewhat bizarre at the time.

More enduring ideas of nationalism were brought to Kurdistan essentially by the British, who supported the creation of a separate Kurdish political entity through the post-WW1 Treaty of Sèvres. The growth of Kurdish nationalism after the First World War was also influenced by the plans of the victorious Allies for the creation of an Armenian state.<sup>69</sup> The important Treaty of Sèvres, concluded in August 1920, contained two articles regarding the Kurdish nation, which explicitly acknowledge the existence of the Kurdish people granting them an independent state.<sup>70</sup> Despite this treaty never being ratified, it is held sacred by Kurdish nationalists and these two articles remain at the heart of their claim to a sovereign Kurdistan.

Kurdish nationalism was certainly influenced by the nationalist movements of revolutionary character in Russia, Persia and Turkey in the first decade of the twentieth century. The liberal political climate that prevailed in Istanbul at this time facilitated the formation of the first Kurdish political organisation, which was followed by many more. These associations were, however, presided over by the feudal aristocracy and several decades were to pass before middle class elements began to gain access to its leaderships – a process that Hassanpour notes is still in the making.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>. See chapter one, section 1.3.1.

<sup>68</sup>. Izady (1992), p. 56.

<sup>69</sup>. Pelletiere (1984), p. 61.

<sup>70</sup>. See appendix 1 p. 129 'The Treaty of Sèvres 1920' in Sheri Laizer, (1991).

<sup>71</sup>. Hassanpour (1992), p. 58.

It was the development of the nationalist ideology that made it possible to influence nation-building efforts in an active fashion. Kurdish nationalism in the Ottoman Empire was poorly developed, as were the national movements of fellow subjects Arabs and Armenians, and as the neighbouring nations-as-people organised themselves around the nation-state principle, the Kurds followed suit. In a regional perspective, however, Kurdish nationalist ideology came to develop rather late. The Kurds were not consciously utilising this instrument until the early twentieth century, making the politicisation of Kurdish ethnicity coincide with the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of the modern nation-state system in the Middle East, the latter as introduced by the colonial powers. These developments provoked the erosion of traditional systems of authority and as Kurdish nationalism emerged as a political movement, it sought to accelerate the decline of tribalism so as to elevate the people's loyalties above those of religion and tribe to the all-encompassing level of nation. Indeed, as the idea of separation from the Ottoman Empire progressed among the urban nationalists and the 'imagined nation' began to acquire territorial dimensions, the lower strata of society were encouraged to actively connect with the forming movement.<sup>72</sup>

In Central Kurdistan there existed by the early 1920s Kurdish nationalist organisations, but if they chose to remain distinct from powerful traditional authorities such as Shaikh Mahmoud Barzinji of Sulaymaniya, they came to exert very limited influence over the population. The commoners joining the uprisings were, as van Bruinessen points out, most of them 'motivated by loyalty or obedience to their tribal or religious leaders, not by a sense of belonging to a Kurdish nation'.<sup>73</sup>

The Kurdish rebellions that occurred in Turkey in the years following the formation of the Republic ought to be considered when examining the general development of Kurdish nationalism. These were of the feudal type and none was entirely nationalistic in character, although there were nationalist undertones. In protesting against the ending of the Caliphate, the Shaikh Said

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<sup>72</sup>. van Bruinessen (1992b), p. 51.

rebellion in 1925, for instance, was at the same time religious, tribal and national.<sup>74</sup> Shaikh Said served as the leader of the rebellion, as he commanded considerable support of the masses, but the idea and tactical planning was that of the Kurdish nationalist organisation *Azadi* (Freedom) whose desire was to set up a Kurdish independent state. For many of the leading tribal and religious individuals in this rebellion, nationalist motivations were not of paramount importance but were secondary to tribal and religious considerations. The disappointment with the abolition of the Caliphate meant that 'the peasants were more receptive to religious Islamic than to nationalist Kurdish agitation'.<sup>75</sup> Tribal politics played a vital role in this and subsequent rebellions over Kurdistan and continued to exert considerable influence in the development of Kurdish nationalist thought.

These modern nationalist ideas came into being and flourished largely due to the major changes that in post-World War II years took place in the social and economic areas of Kurdish society, illustrated by the rapid growth of urbanisation and the rise of a new middle class. A natural consequence of these changes were the significant political developments of the rise of a modernist leadership and the simultaneous weakening of traditional centres of power represented by feudal lords and religious leaders.<sup>76</sup>

With the end of the feudal system in the mid-twentieth century, the Kurds started to come together as the common sentiment of nationalist aspirations created an ideology, *Kurdayetî*, which united the four major parts of Kurdistan. This 'coherent system of thought', Hassanpour explains, 'means the idea of and struggle for relieving the Kurds from national oppression by uniting all parts of Kurdistan under the rule of an independent Kurdish state',<sup>77</sup> in essence summed up in Edmonds quote above.

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<sup>73</sup>. Id.(1998), p. 39.

<sup>74</sup>. Olson (1989), pp. 153-155.

<sup>75</sup>. van Bruinessen (1982), p. 292 (He also provides an interesting account of the interplay between Shaykh Said and the Azadi group on pp. 287-88.)

<sup>76</sup>. Ibid. p. 61.

Kurdish nationalism, with its strong Sunni components, was from the beginning tied to religion, ‘the overarching solidarity of Islam’,<sup>78</sup> in the same way as the peoples of the Ottoman Empire were attached to their ruler by the common religion of Islam. Attempting to nationalise the Islamic faith was problematical, as that would mean defying basic tenets of the world religion, and an exercise that would undoubtedly be met with fierce resistance from many loyal subjects. The abolition of the caliphate, however, changed the situation considerably. It was the Sufi-leaders who adopted nationalist ideas, the acceptance of which were greatly facilitated by the fact that they were presented to the people through their traditional Muslim leaders. This effectively created a distinctively Sunni nationalist movement, a constitution it maintained until the 1960s, when a more secularly inclined leadership made it desirable for Shi’ia Kurds to play a part. The following decade the Kurdish nationalists began to successfully integrate religious minorities into the Kurdish national movement.<sup>79</sup>

Modern Kurdish nationalist ideology barely considers religion, is secular in nature and has since the 1980s adopted a wide range of ideological and political tendencies such as ‘populism’, ‘socialism’, ‘national democracy’, and ‘national socialism’. The Kurdish elite largely behind the advancement of *Kurdayetî* has periodically been receptive to influences of Marxism-Leninism<sup>80</sup> and its emphasis on eliminating national oppression as well as social-economic injustice. Marxist ideas have, however, diminished in importance, due to the difficulty with which these can be combined with nationalist ideology, as evident in PKK-policy (the PKK a prominent example of a Kurdish Marxist party), which paid noticeably less attention to Marxist ideas in the 1990s.

Van Bruinessen contends that the roots of Kurdish nationalism are to be found in two different social strata, one of which was the educated classes in the urban milieu, those who were responsive to the modern political ideologies that spurred on the nationalisms of their Arab and Turkish brethren. The other base of nationalist sentiment was that of the rural tribal setting. Far from being

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<sup>77</sup>. Hassanpour (1992), p. 62.

<sup>78</sup>. van Bruinessen (1998), p. 40.

<sup>79</sup>. Id. (1992b), pp. 52-53.

isolated from the other, these social strata are related since the tribal milieu was where the urban intellectuals originated.<sup>81</sup> Despite leaving the tribal area for the big town, ties to the respective chieftain, (characterised by loyalty and obedience) were not severed, and as these original tribesmen turned into urbanised politicians, tribal obligations did not diminish in importance. This had another dimension: unless the urban intellectuals managed to shore up support from the tribes, the likelihood of them growing into a powerful political force would be minimal. Therefore the modern form of Kurdish politics has often seen these officials appeasing the tribal chieftains, seemingly in order to accomplish policy objectives. In doing so 'they have strengthened the powers of these chieftains over the rest of the population, and contributed to the social and economic polarisation of Kurdish society'.<sup>82</sup>

This dependence on the tribal elements severely hampered the development of *Kurdayeti* into an integrative political force as the urban intellectuals and the tribes differed substantially on many issues of political nature. To achieve co-operation along a tribal spectrum would appear as almost impossible a task due to the permanent tension and conflicts that raged between certain tribes, forcing some chieftains (if not opting to remain neutral) to join the other side should a rival chief commit himself to the Kurdish movement. Hence, the choice to side with the Kurdish national movement or joining forces with Baghdad was not done out of political conviction but was a result of tribal conflicts.

An illuminating example of the political opportunism that seemed to be a defining characteristic of some tribal chiefs is the political experiment of the Mahabad Republic, where some held 'double allegiances' to the Republic as well as to the Iranian government. 'This persistent tolerance was not tactical', as Abbas Vali points out. 'Rather it signified the bitter realisation by the Kurdish leadership of the pivotal status of the tribal landowners in the structure of political authority in the Republic', in other words, 'the survival of the Republic

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<sup>80</sup>. Hassanpour (1992), p. 64.

<sup>81</sup>. van Bruinessen (1986), p. 16.

<sup>82</sup>. Ibid. pp. 43-44.

depended largely on their cooperation'.<sup>83</sup> Although challenged and relatively weakened with the passing of time, this pattern of conduct has continued to present day, as has its negative influence over Kurdish nationalism. The urban-intellectual pole, on the other hand, has at times been in opposition to and in a similar fashion betrayed the majority in the Kurdish movement when reaching agreements with the central government.<sup>84</sup>

Similar to the situation in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe when 'many seemingly ancient traditions were invented',<sup>85</sup> a related pattern can be found also in Kurdistan as nation-building efforts gathered pace. Resulting from the repressive nature of these aggressive and state-sponsored nationalisms of the neighbouring countries, Kurdish nationalists began creating their own ancient history, presumably largely as a reaction to the Turkish, Persian and Arab assimilationist historiographies, which denied the Kurds any meaningful place in history. This Kurdish history was traced back to the Aryans and their empire Media, around which nationalist intellectuals created many myths.<sup>86</sup> The construction of a national history is more important for the Kurds than for many other peoples, emphasises van Bruinessen. With so many historical personalities, events, ancestries, customs, etymology and festivals contested by the political and intellectual elite of the surrounding nations, the Kurds feel a greater need to assert themselves and their history. One example is the nationalist (mis)treatment of Salahaddin, mostly known as a great Kurdish warrior, a military commander who led the Islamic army to a decisive victory over the Crusaders, and following that established the Ayyubid dynasty in Egypt. Depending on the position taken, the symbolic role of Salahaddin ranges from a Turkish hero to an Iraqi nationalist, or simply a great Muslim leader. For

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<sup>83</sup>. Vali (1996-1997), p. 11.

<sup>84</sup>. Both these tendencies appeared in the first chapter: the former when describing the jash, and the latter exemplified by both leaders' attempts to appease Saddam Hussein: Talabani markedly in 1983 and Barzani notably in 1996.

<sup>85</sup>. Billig (1995), p. 25 (For more on invented traditions in Kurdistan, see chapter 5, section 5.1. The Construction of a National Identity.)

<sup>86</sup>. As explained by Amir Hassanpour in his paper 'The racialisation of Kurdish National Identity', presented at the Kurdological Conference *Between Imagination & Denial. Kurds as subjects and objects of political and social processes*, May 29-31 1998, Berlin.

nationally aware Kurds he no longer functions as a symbol of their own nation.<sup>87</sup> Interesting to note in passing is that in the 1970s, the Kurdish national movement began promoting the Yazidi religious belief and presented this element of Kurdish culture as the Kurds' original religion.<sup>88</sup> An element in the Kurds' own nationalist history-building, it could also have been an attempt by the nationalists to widen the popular base for Kurdish nationalism. This way of constructing and/or reconstructing history represents a potentially malign feature of nationalist activity, and one that can be traced also in the development of Kurdish nationalism. It is because nationalism seeks to reinterpret history and in doing so improve the current conditions for the people constituting its nation, that it is inward-looking and contemptuously disapproving of the way things are. As Edwards notes, 'the drive to the past ... reveals an inability to come to grips with present realities and, more specifically, the social evolution which connects past to present'.<sup>89</sup>

As previously noted, the first Kurdish associations of a cultural-political nature were formed in the big cities, a trend that has continued. Kurdistan itself has not been the main arena for the publishing of Kurdish journals or the advancement of Kurdish nationalism. The migration from Kurdistan to the big cities as well as foreign countries has in fact contributed significantly to the growth of Kurdish national awareness, now a mass phenomenon that no state repression is likely to reverse. This flourishing of Kurdish culture has been made possible due to the exile, and has been facilitated by the advancements made in the fields of information and communications technology. Contemporary ethno-nationalism such as the Kurdish has benefited greatly from this, and in addition to an intensified nationalist struggle, improvements in various forms of communications as well as government repression have solidified the Kurdish nation.

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<sup>87</sup>. van Bruinessen (1998), 'The Kurds as Objects and Subjects of their History: Between Turkish Official Historiography, Orientalist Constructions, and Kurdish Nationalists' Recuperation of their History', paper presented at the Kurdological Conference *Between Imagination & Denial. Kurds as subjects and objects of political and social processes*, May 29-31, Berlin.

<sup>88</sup>. Fuccaro (1997), p. 575.

<sup>89</sup>. Edwards (1985), p. 43.

The large number of Kurds that live outside Kurdistan proper<sup>90</sup> must be considered when examining Kurdish nationalism, due to the impact the exiled nationalists have on the shape taken by contemporary Kurdish nationalist thought. Territorial nationalism, the quest for full political independence, is no longer advocated by any larger Kurdish grouping. Rather it is cultural nationalism, which is not upsetting the delicate geopolitical balance in the region that has become the dominant form of mainstream Kurdish nationalist thought, coupled with more low-key political demands for regional autonomy, equal opportunities as well as representation in state institutions at a proportional level. About the role of the (in Europe and North America) exiled politically active Kurds, or the West-based Kurdish lobby, van Bruinessen concludes that ‘those who have voluntarily or involuntarily left Kurdistan have perhaps [indirectly] contributed more to the strengthening of the Kurdish movement than they would have done had they been able to remain there’.<sup>91</sup>

### 5.5.2 Evaluating Kurdish nationalism

As indicated above, it is feared that if attempting binding definitions of nation and nationalism, those conceptual devices will later be rendered inadequate for explaining the Kurdish case. Hence, the most suitable approach has been that of indicating the need for a ‘hybrid theory’ of nationalism in Kurdistan.

One of the more authoritative definitions of the nation presented above, such as Smith’s ‘*a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members*’,<sup>92</sup> is most fitting for the classical nation-state, and does not smoothly apply to a nation such as the Kurdish. As an ethnic group, this large population constituting the Kurds would possess cultural differentiae, territorial contiguity (but not with unhindered internal mobility) and considerable group sentiment and loyalty. Lacking from

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<sup>90</sup>. Van Bruinessen puts the estimate at a quarter or even a third of the overall Kurdish population. van Bruinessen (1992b), p. 67.

<sup>91</sup>. Ibid.

what may further characterise a nation are in particular external political relations, equal citizenship rights and the possibility for economic integration into a common system of labour.<sup>93</sup> However, if employing a less political interpretation of the term, and focusing more on the meaning of nation-as-people, one can easily conclude that the Kurds are not one of the region's colonially created nations.

Important to note is that the sharing of an historical territory, which is a basic criterion for a nation in most definitions, does not automatically mean that those individuals consider themselves being of the same nation. Rather than unifying an element, as often assumed, it could have considerable divisive effects as when there is a competition for the same piece of land. This is most clearly illustrated by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but could also apply for Kurds and Iraqi Arabs in the area of Kirkuk, the majority of its population originally Kurdish but with the city gradually Arabised the two nations have not blended into one, but instead reinvigorated individual claims - each fiercely contesting the other's historical right to the (oil-rich) land.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, of the nation's several characteristics, members of the Kurdish nation may only share two unequivocally, namely that of territory and culture. As for religion, not all Kurds are Sunni Muslims,<sup>95</sup> and in terms of language, there are many proud Kurds who communicate in Turkish and Turkish alone. Then there are those living in the diaspora, who do not relinquish their Kurdishness although they no longer share territory with their fellow Kurds and may have altered their culture. These examples of the Kurdish nation show clearly that certain shared objective features do not suffice when describing a nation - the subjective element of national consciousness is vital. The best way appears to be to follow in Canovan's footsteps, to endorse her rejection of a brief definition of the term nation, opting for a more 'phenomenological characterization',<sup>96</sup> which is more suitable to the Kurdish case.

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<sup>92</sup>. Smith, A. D. (1991), p. 14.

<sup>93</sup>. Id. (1992).

<sup>94</sup>. This was explained by a Kurd originally from Kirkuk but living in Iran. (March 2001).

<sup>95</sup>. See chapter three, section 3.3 on religion.

<sup>96</sup>. Canovan (1996b), pp. 75-76.

Kurdish nationalism, the ideology and movement, evidently appeared in the early twentieth century. It was this idea of nations being the natural political units and the base on which states and governments were to rest, which stimulated the emergence and development of a Kurdish nationalist ideology - a wholly modern phenomenon indeed. But would it be correct to term the pre-twentieth Kurdish people only a *pre-national* group or *potential* nation, in Connor's terminology? If transforming from an ethnic group into a nation requires a self-conscious desire for autonomy, this may have been the case already in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, when the Kurds were politically organised in Kurdish principalities.<sup>97</sup>

These principalities, situated in the border areas of the Ottoman and Safavid empires,<sup>98</sup> enjoyed considerable autonomy and due to their peripheral but strategic location they commanded substantial leverage as the empires made frequent attempts to win them over and form allegiances in order to ensure their frontier security. Resulting from Persian defeat in the battle of Chaldiran in 1514, most of Kurdistan fell under Ottoman jurisdiction, although several emirates were located within the Persian sphere of influence.<sup>99</sup> The Safavid Shahs desired to rule their Kurdish areas through centrally appointed administrators of Turkoman or Persian origin, whereas the Ottoman Sultans adopted a pragmatic approach – undoubtedly realising the extreme difficulties of enforcing central control in the fringes of the empire - and granted the Kurds more autonomy in accepting local chiefs to serve as rulers. A new administrative system was set up in the region based on the 'Kurdo-Ottoman pact', where sixteen independent Kurdish principalities were recognised by the Ottomans.<sup>100</sup> Whether being the result of Turkish pragmatism or the failure of Persian methods (Esfahan<sup>101</sup> was forced to accept that installing centrally appointed non-Kurdish governors was unworkable a policy), the Kurdish ruling princes enjoyed

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<sup>97</sup>. Van Bruinessen (1992) pp. 145-175 provides a detailed discussion on the Kurdish emirates and their setting.

<sup>98</sup>. For a detailed map of the location of the Kurdish principalities of early modern times, see p. 53 of Izady (1992).

<sup>99</sup>. See McDowall (1996) pp. 25-31 on the Kurds' role in the Ottoman-Safavid relations.

<sup>100</sup>. Kendal (1993), p. 14.

<sup>101</sup>. Esfahan served as the capital of the Safavid dynasty, and remained the focal point in the Persian Empire for several centuries.

a status of virtual independence for their emirates.

In these principalities the people shared a culture and were ruled by co-culturalists, in other words, the Kurdish principalities could conceivably have filled a nation-supporting function. It was during the early days of the principalities that the national Kurdish epic *Mem û Zîn* was written by Ahmadi Khani (in 1693-94): the first source in which a Kurdish nation distinct from Persians, Arabs and Turks, is articulated.<sup>102</sup> The princes may well have mobilised the masses on religious grounds against the Shiite Persians while capitalising on ethnic differences when confronting the Ottomans. However, since each prince was supposedly concerned only with his own territory and possessed no greater concerns for other parts of Kurdistan, the 'national' sentiments induced in the population were geographically limited and, as has been argued by Hassanpour, amounted to 'feudal nationalism'. This is distinguishable from the modern variant of middle-class nationalism emerging in the twentieth century.<sup>103</sup>

Even if the latter is an ideology decisively modern in character, significant divisions remain regarding the origins and nature of the nation. Hugh Seton-Watson distinguished between the 'old, continuous nations' and the consciously created, new nations, those termed 'nations by design' by Charles Tilly - a distinction associated with the emergence of the political ideology of nationalism.<sup>104</sup> The Kurdish nation can be identified with Seton-Watson's 'old, continuous nations' that existed well before the end of the eighteenth century, a time when nationalist ideologies and movements began to form and promoted their own 'designed' nations, in this regional context epitomised in the Iraqi nation (although formed in the twentieth century). Although Seton-Watson made his distinction between old and new nations within a European framework, his account is applicable to the Kurdish nation that came to evolve gradually over

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<sup>102</sup>. Hassanpour (1992), p. 56.

<sup>103</sup>. Ibid. pp. 56-57. Hassanpour's ideas are not endorsed here. As argued above, it is highly questionable whether the term nationalism can be used prior to the twentieth century in Kurdish political thought.

several centuries. The relevance of the historian's observations becomes clear from the quoted passage below.

The process of formation of national identity and national consciousness among the old nations was slow and obscure. It was a spontaneous process, not willed by anyone, though there were great events, which in certain cases clearly accelerated it.<sup>105</sup>

Indeed, when examining a case such as the Kurds it is difficult to fully endorse the modernist view that nations are not old, a view purportedly less applicable to the Middle East than Europe, where modern nations are said to have arisen from the eighteenth century onwards. Building on the argument of Anthony Smith,<sup>106</sup> not all nations-as-people, such as the Kurds, have been invented or created. The Kurdish nation is not artificial and its national ideology could be referred to as a retrospective nationalism. Moreover, capitalising on his perennialist (deriving modern nations from original ethnic ties) and ethno-symbolic approach to nations, it has become clear that in the process of consciously forming the Kurdish nation and its nationalism, ethnic components have been prominent factors and have also antedated nation-building efforts. Such a perennialist approach for analysing the Kurdish nationalism would draw more on German Romanticism than French Enlightenment, since the Kurdish nation, its people, would be the driving force behind the creation of its state, not the converse.

John Armstrong, in arguing that the terms 'ethnic' and 'nation' form a continuum, emphasises the point that regardless of their changing shape, they are collective perceptions and sentiments that persist over time.<sup>107</sup> This insight is an important one and compliments Anthony Smith's elaborations on the subject. That ethnicity and nationhood is continuous seems to apply well to the emergence and development of the Kurdish nation. Indeed, an 'imagined community' of Kurds, as van Bruinessen argues, 'a well-defined Kurdish *ethnie*

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<sup>104</sup>. Seton-Watson (1977), pp. 6-13 and introductory chapter in Tilly (1975) ('Reflections on the history of European State-making', pp. 3-83).

<sup>105</sup>. Ibid. p. 8.

<sup>106</sup>. As reasoned in *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1986) as well as a previous work: *The Ethnic Revival*, (1981), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>107</sup>. Armstrong (1982), p. 5.

has existed for many centuries, although its definition was perhaps less inclusive and populist than the present one'.<sup>108</sup>

The de-centralism, in economic, administrative and cultural terms, that characterised the autonomous existence of the Kurdish emirates under the Ottomans, allowed the formation of and encouraged the development of a social consciousness of the emirates' Kurdishness. However, whereas the ruling elites of the Kurdish principalities are likely to have been aware of Kurdish ethnicity, it is unclear whether that was felt equally strongly by the masses.

Gellner admits the existence of cultures (often overlapping and intertwined) and political units of all conceivable forms and dimensions, but insists that two did generally not converge.<sup>109</sup> However, in the Kurdish case they indeed seem to have converged. In acknowledging that a Kurdish nation, albeit a 'primitive' version of it, existed at the time of the principalities would mean discarding Gellner's idea that the nationalist doctrine signifies the awakening of nations to self-consciousness and likewise any suggestion of the modern ideology of Kurdish nationalism having invented a Kurdish nation.

Kurdish nationalist behaviour is evidently not adequately accounted for in the nationalism-theory of Gellner, the historical analysis of which gives an exemplary description of the emergence of nationalism in industrialisation's Europe. In a largely non-industrialised region it becomes difficult to find in Gellner's theory an explanation for the appearance of nationalism. Rather, it would have to be complemented by theories such as those of Hans Kohn, Benedict Anderson and Anthony Giddens, who concern themselves with its psychological dimensions.

Stressing the critical role of industrialisation for the growth of nations and nationalism as Gellner does, hence fails to make an impact on the development of Kurdish nationalism. The emphasis on economic-material conditions causes his theory to underestimate the strength of ethnic identity and the resilience of cultural elements. His theory is, however, applicable in that he points at how

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<sup>108</sup>. van Bruinessen (1992b), p. 48.

factors of modernisation caused the weakening of traditional social structures, which gave room for the development of nation and national identity. Denying that the Kurdish nation is a product of the developments of modern times in technological and economic areas does not mean discarding these other aspects of Gellner's theory. The mass appeal of Kurdish nationalism, for instance, may well stem from Gellner's argued social and economic commotions resulting from labour migration, but the nationalist thought was not brought about by the same forces.

For an analysis of Kurdish nationalism, Anthony Smith's examination of the transformation of the *ethnie* to nation through popular mobilisation is highly relevant to the Kurdish case. The increased influence of the state acted as a politicising force in that it activated and politicised a previously passive population. This does not necessarily mean that the movement itself – including its actors and their objectives – was genuinely nationalistic. Important is that the politicising conflict (i.e. the increased influence of the state) and the activity of resistance in different forms of the national movement around this conflict considerably facilitated the transformation of the Kurds from an ethnic community to a nation. In addition, it was not only a conflict between the rulers and the ruled within the state, but also a conflict within the ethnic community, an internal conflict. As a nationalist asserts that political boundaries should correspond with cultural boundaries, it is when the political leaders of an ethnic movement begin to make similar demands the movement can be said to have transformed into a nationalist movement. This process was thus greatly facilitated by the repressive activities of the state.

European classical nationalism, as has been argued by many scholars, was brought about by modernity, and came to develop alongside the emergence of civil society and democracy. Kurdish nationalism contrasts with this development as it rests on the suppression of civil society in the Kurdish areas. Abbas Vali calls this a 'dialectic of denial and resistance', (as regards the official denial of Kurdish identity in imposing the various national identities and the

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<sup>109</sup>. Gellner (1983a), p. 49.

Kurds' resistance to these policies), which defines the political structure and character of Kurdish nationalism.<sup>110</sup>

As a national community that from the outset was actively prevented from remotely satisfying its aspirations, Kurdish nationalism falls into the category classified by Seton-Watson as unsatisfied nationalisms: national movements whose demands are not properly addressed.<sup>111</sup> Any solutions put forward to satisfy Kurdish aspirations, such as federalism, proportional representation and autonomy have failed to meet their needs. In Iraq, the prevailing feeling many times among the leadership has been that Baghdad is merely trying to buy time by suggesting any of the above measures, the acceptance of which would not remarkably improve the situation of the Kurds. The expectation and desire of the unsatisfied nationalism is that it one day will achieve political independence for its people. As Seton-Watson points out, it is the dissatisfaction with the centre that explains the resurrection of nationalist movements in Western Europe, in essence the same objections voiced by the Kurds to the central government.

On a concluding note, it is significant that despite the lack of unity –the (semi-) independent Kurdish principalities never actively sought consolidation of the Kurdish nation - foreign domination was successfully kept at bay for considerable time. After the division of the Kurdistan in 1918, however, the Kurds were reduced to the status of a non-state nation under the direct rule of centralist states, causing much resentment and increased nationalist tendencies. Both 'feudal' and modern Kurdish nationalism demonstrate some higher form of sovereign political status. The former featured the Kurdish principalities that had held onto their semi-independent positions for several centuries, whereas modern Kurdish nationalism displayed the 12 month-long experience of the Mahabad Republic in 1946.

Since the spirit of nationalism shows no signs of abating even in well-established nations where it is noticeable on a daily basis, it is certain to continue

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<sup>110</sup>. Vali (1998), 'The nation-state and its "other": Kurdish national identity and the politics of denial and exclusion in Turkey', paper presented at the Kurdological Conference *Between Imagination & Denial. Kurds as subjects and objects of political and social processes*, May 29-31, Berlin.

<sup>111</sup>. Seton-Watson (1971).

to flourish in oppressed nations. This, what Billig calls 'banal' nationalism, bolsters the people's identity with the nation, on a conscious and well as unconscious level. In times of crisis it can easily be transformed into 'hot' nationalism, which could be the call of support by the politicians for waging a new war or the inspiring by the leadership of an oppressed minority to take up arms against the state.<sup>112</sup> On this basis one may conclude that Kurdish nationalism, which circumstances shaped to be more 'hot' than 'banal' (although that may be subject to change) is certain to be kept alive and to continue to form the national consciousness of the Kurdish people.

Previously touching upon malign aspects of Kurdish nationalism, its benign expressions also have to be mentioned, although briefly. Nationalism may offer a security to which people, literally uprooted from their land, adhere to in times of uncertainty. It is something to believe in, to belong to. For those Kurds (and their number is believed to be substantial) who feel threatened by influential and strong neighbours, their nationalism serves as a positive force.

### 5.5.3 Kurdish nationalism classified

As became clear by the general discussion on the nationalist doctrine, nationalism normally appears to be a response to a particular set of circumstances. And as the circumstances frequently change in Kurdish politics, Kurdish nationalism possesses characteristics of many of the types classified in the second chapter. Just as the various types of nationalism examined are not completely different in kind, several types can be displayed by a nationalist movement, at the same time or sequentially, as clearly shown in the Kurdish case. (The following analysis will reflect the classification carried out above, in terms of the order of appearance of the different types of nationalisms listed.)

Kurdish nationalism is certainly not one of *state nationalism*. The prototypes of England and France evolved over a long period of time in the direction of the

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<sup>112</sup>. Billig (1995), pp. 43-49.

nation-state, and the Kurdish nation-as-people has not been able reach the status of nation-as-state. It is not deniable that at the core lies a sizeable population with a cultural similarity, but instead of this element increasing in intensity it has decreased as time has gone by, largely due to the partitioning of Kurdistan. An important aspect of the prototype nation-states was that nationality was the primary political loyalty, whereas in Kurdistan tribal and religious-social loyalties still reign supreme. Even though Kurdistan's core possession constitutes Kurds, it does not automatically mean that a Kurdish state would be less open to rebellion and disaffection to foreign rivals. Hence, the prototype of the French nation-state and state nationalism is not applicable to the Kurdish political scene.

Kurdish nationalist ideology has changed greatly in character over the past century, a development that has resulted in it acquiring several types of nationalisms, with more types likely to emerge in the future. An envisaged future type is a *nationalism of unification* if the different Kurdish national movements were to broaden their bases. This is an issue that will be returned to in the following chapter.

In going back to the past, as the Kurds became politically aware, one of the first nationalist expressions is thought to have been one of separation, as it can be perceived to originally have been a separatist movement against the Ottoman Empire (as were many of the nationalisms in the Balkans alongside Arabs and Armenians) when it began to whither. More generally, since some forms of Kurdish nationalism hold that the nation of Kurds should be constituted as a Kurdish state, it would mean the disintegration of existing sovereign states should the ideology be successful. Hence the Kurds would engage in *separation nationalism*.

In the spirit of many former colonies in Africa and Asia that rose up against their European masters, the Kurdish national movement, or parts of it, has spoken of Kurdistan as colonised by the Arabs, Turks and Persians, suggesting that the Kurds may embrace some sort of *liberation nationalism*. Such nationalists' assertion that Kurdistan's standing in relation to the central regions of Iraq is that

of a colony is difficult to unconditionally accept. Radical Kurdish nationalists claim that the continued power of tribal leadership in relations with the state represents a colonial phenomenon. The tribal elite is accused 'of being collaborators enabling the continued "colonial exploitation" of Kurdistan by "the Turkish, Arab and Persian bourgeoisie"'<sup>113</sup> - extremely simplified a view, but still with certain similarities with former colonial activity in Africa and Asia. Baghdad's 'internal colonialism' finds parallels in the writings of Michael Hechter. Indicating a condition of structural dependence, his theory states that with the advent of modernisation the core region is likely to become dominant, as the inequalities created by the new development will consign the peripheral regions to inferior positions. This creates hostility to the core and a growth of nationalist tendencies if the peripheral regions are national in character. In Hechter's theory the English presented the core, while the peripheral nationalist regions were those of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.<sup>114</sup> This could with relative ease translate into Sunni Arab central Iraq being the 'coloniser' and the Kurds 'the colonised'.

The Kurdish movement, however, differs substantially in nature from the national liberation movements in Africa during the 1950s and 1960s in that the Africans needed to re-invent themselves as nations in order to shake off the shackles of colonialism. Kurdistan has not been subjected to colonisation in the traditional sense, but there is nonetheless an element of liberation nationalism insofar as the coming of the nation-state is regarded as the striking away of the chains of foreign rule and all that this has meant in social and moral deprivation for the Kurdish nation. Moreover, the anti-colonial nationalism of the African liberation struggles was chiefly concerned not with the nation-state itself, but rather with justice and equality, human rights and dignity, prosperity and freedom from domination, themes that are prominent also in the Kurdish nationalist expressions. Kurdish nationalism is, however, not only based on opposition to subjugation by an alien power, and there is more to unite the nationalist Kurds than a desire to throw off Arab/Persian/Turkish domination.

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<sup>113</sup>. van Bruinessen (1992a), p. 45.

<sup>114</sup>. Michael Hechter (1975), *Internal Colonialism. The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Nationalist sentiment among the Kurds shows that their nationalism clearly precedes any state they may achieve to form,<sup>115</sup> since the Kurdish nation already possesses a foundation of common religious, cultural and linguistic elements.

As was the case with the African, Asian and American dependent nationalities of Europe, where 'the strength of the metropolitan power was at least as important as the support of the nationalist movement or movements in determining the fate of a colony',<sup>116</sup> a Kurdish nationalism of liberation may owe an overwhelming degree of its success or failure to the strength of the Iraqi, Iranian or Turkish 'colonial' power. In defining themselves as an oppressed nationality, the Kurds would attack Arab imperialism - Baghdad's policy of extending its power and influence not so much through political relations as through military force throughout Central Kurdistan. However, such an effort of the Kurdish national movement to liberalise Kurdistan would have little or no comparison to the dissolution of the great European empires in the 1950s and 1960s, which were to a greater or lesser extent disbanded voluntarily. Just as one cannot put the Kurdish nationalist struggle on an equal footing with the African mid-twentieth century nationalists who fostered a feeling of common distance from the white rulers among the people, rather than a sense of common belonging, there are nevertheless traces of this type of liberation nationalism insofar as there is a distinct lack of a sense of internal unity in Kurdish nationalism amidst a strong feeling of hostility towards the alien ruler. In that sense, an independent 'ex-colony' of Kurdistan could face severe problems of internal unity, just as did many former European dependencies. In addition, it would appear that the basic liberal arguments about freedom and a simple plea for a representative government appeal as much as nationalistic arguments to the long oppressed people of Kurdistan.

After the formation of the modern nation-states of the Middle East, the Turkish, Iranian and Arab assimilation and integration processes brought about the growing apart of the Kurds. When ethno-nationalism emerged as a modern

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<sup>115</sup>. Sentiments evident in the vast majority of Kurds consulted formally and informally, even in the most apolitical individuals, in and outside their homeland.

<sup>116</sup>. Orridge (1981), p. 48.

phenomenon in the 1970s, it also engulfed the Kurdish nation, with the result that the 'repressive measures directed at the expression of Kurdish nationalist sentiment [from the central governments] have had the effect of strengthening rather than eliminating it'.<sup>117</sup> Hence it is fair to state that Kurdish nationalism certainly has elements of atavistic behaviour, one of the marks of *ethnic nationalism*. Kurdish nationalists are not unknown to relate to the behaviour of their ancestors in the distant past, which was often tribally belligerent. As shown more clearly in the case of the Kurds than many other nationalities, common ethnicity does not by itself create social cohesion, a fact that may prompt ethnic nationalists to try to achieve and maintain unity by force rather than consent - the essence of ethnic nationalism. The difficulties of solving the problems arising with Kurdish ethno-nationalism (as with all ethnic nationalisms) reflect the complex nature of the multiple identities of the Kurds, to be discussed later.

Should the Kurds of Northern Iraq achieve independence, Kurdish nationalism may seek to acquire the characteristics of *civic nationalism* in order to successfully accommodate the ethnic and religious minorities in its midst and make them subscribe to the nation's political creed. Creating and maintaining a sustainable democracy, the government must allow sovereignty to rest with the people – the essential idea of civic nationalism. This would reformulate the key struggle of the Kurdish movement, to expand the previous notion that the (Kurdish) nation should be home to Kurds only, to include those who, according to the zealous nationalists, lack the crucial requirements. In other words, there should be 'no bar to belonging'.<sup>118</sup>

After independence liberally minded Kurdish nationalists may wish to transform the exclusionary aspects of their nationalism, as liberalism requires a universalistic view of the rights to be enjoyed by man. Should the Kurds succeed in forming and adhering to a *liberal nationalism*, they would set an example to the region. Instead of operating on the assumption that the identity of individual Kurds is defined exclusively by their national membership and their personal will totally submerged in that of the nation - as understood by 'organic

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<sup>117</sup>. van Bruinessen (1998), p. 39.

interpretations of nationalism<sup>119</sup> – a combination of the particularity of Kurdish culture and the striving for personal autonomy of each individual could be striven for.

Despite constituting clear majorities in the areas in which they reside, the Kurds are to be considered national minorities in the states they inhabit, a situation that has influenced Kurdish nationalism into acquiring several characteristics of a *minority nationalist* movement. Throughout Kurdistan's often violent history collective defence of the homeland has been a key objective of the struggle, reflecting the classic aspect of place-centred politics. The struggle over land has indeed dominated the relationship between the central government and the Kurdish movement.<sup>120</sup>

Their historical experience of suffering and oppression by a powerful state is moreover a central element of Kurdish nationalistic expressions, and the unique cultural heritage of the Kurdish people is notably defended and promoted by its nationalist intellectuals. The Iraqi Kurds have a history of resistance to centralist developments and have quite successfully resisted excessive state integration. The sharing of power in the central political system has been an incentive for integrating the Kurdish areas in the Iraqi state apparatus, but as of yet such a power-sharing formula has not been found.

The perception among the Kurdish population of their region being systematically exploited and underdeveloped by successive governments in Baghdad (structural discrimination, as termed by Williams), has been fostered by Kurdish nationalists, and in doing so have influenced the people into believing that their future will be indefinitely more prosperous if achieving independence. This would come about, they argue,<sup>121</sup> since prosperity and positive development would then be created from *within* the nation, rectifying

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<sup>118</sup>. Fine (1999), p. 150.

<sup>119</sup>. Tamir (1993), p. 79.

<sup>120</sup>. Cf. for instance the issue of Kirkuk in the non-sustainable peace agreement of 1970.

<sup>121</sup>. A notion made obvious in a consultative conversation with a Iraqi Kurdish political activist (declined to be named) in Sanandaj, Iranian Kurdistan, on 19 March 2001, arguing for the long-term inevitability of a Kurdish independent state resulting from the current autonomous arrangement.

the current situation where it is denied from *without*.

With the demographic changes that have taken place in Northern Iraq through forcible resettlements of the population, the Kurds have reasons to fear and try to resist further population transfers instigated by Baghdad. The tendency to resist 'outsiders' from settling in Kurdistan, which would adversely affect the Kurdish majority in key (oil-producing) areas is an indication of Kurdish nationalists adopting further traits of minority nationalism. It is mainly through similar population transfers that the Kurds have come to fear losing their local dominance, already undermined by the strategic advantage gained by the Baathists, exemplified in the construction of military use nuclear power plants on several locations in the heart of Kurdistan.<sup>122</sup>

The Kurds have made their dissent well known over the years and in light of the apparently self-sustainable culture of violence that dominates Iraq, ambitiously engineered by Saddam Hussein, Kurdish nationalist aspirations as expressed through violent ethnic minority dissent could prove impossible to bring to an end until absolute independence is achieved.

As elaborated on above, Kurdish intelligentsia has reconstructed historical discourses, largely to restore the Kurds to their rightful place in the history of the Middle East, but in all likelihood also in an attempt to explain contemporary inequalities in view of major historical oppression. The Kurdish national movement in Iraq has time and again questioned the political legitimacy of the regime in Baghdad and has, like many other minority nationalists, initiated political action against the state hoping to contribute to a new basis for legitimacy in which they would be key players.

Minority nationalism is not a straightforward analytical phenomenon. In the context of colonialism, for instance, nationalism is quite an uncomplicated

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<sup>122</sup>. For an overview of where dangerous and regime-sustaining industries of military nature have been strategically built throughout Iraq, see the detailed map on Iraqi weapons plants p. xv in

concept (with the world divided into colonisers and the colonised), but it becomes more complex in a minority community, where it indicates cultural identity and uniqueness, often strengthened by linguistic distinctiveness that unites the population inspiring a nationalist movement.

Since Kurdish nationalism can be coupled with so many of the classifications of nationalism provided above, it might be viewed as a 'superideology'<sup>123</sup> with great potential for mobilisation among the population, a capability not to be underestimated. In order to succeed in the post-modern world, however, it has to deal with the issue of 'how to combine civic patriotism with cosmopolitanism, national pride with respect for other nations, and national belonging with individual rights and freedoms',<sup>124</sup> a challenge difficult to meet, highlighting the conflicting and cross-cutting nature of Kurdish nationalism.

Another challenge difficult for Kurdish nationalism to meet, and one also mentioned throughout the current section, is that of the regional nationalisms, and how to accommodate Kurdish aspirations in the regional system without upsetting its powerful neighbours. This will be looked at in the following chapter.

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Kenneth R. Timmerman, (1992), *The Death Lobby: How the West armed Iraq*, London: Fourth Estate Limited.

<sup>123</sup> Concept borrowed from Tägil (1995b), p. 24.

<sup>124</sup> Fine (1999), p. 149.

## Chapter 6: Iraqi Kurdistan on the Regional Scene

### 6.1 Co-operation and rivalry on the Middle Eastern scene

As a new state is being formed, the actions of other states, particularly neighbouring countries, but also greater world powers, are of immense significance for its development. Appreciating the dynamics of relations when appraising Iraqi Kurdistan (as illustrated in Figure 7.1: *The Dynamics of Relations over Iraqi Kurdistan*, incorporating both regional and global countries) is crucial for understanding the broader implications of the creation of a semi-independent Kurdish political entity in the region. It is frequently also the case that the boundaries (political as well as cultural) dividing the internal from the external are vague. The area of self-rule of Northern Iraq is admittedly not a nation-as-state, but ever since the very idea of an autonomous Kurdish entity in Iraqi Kurdistan was conceived by the international community, external influences from the neighbouring states have been overwhelming in scope and intensity. In a volatile area such as the Middle East, one state's security is practically by definition another state's insecurity, a state of affairs that translates into the regional states' security being the Kurds' insecurity. Insecurity, moreover, produces a power struggle, which not uncommonly results in war.<sup>1</sup> In order to safeguard their security, the regional states have been forced to accept Northern Iraq becoming the focal points of many of their key concerns, producing policies that the current chapter will attempt an analysis of.

To some analysts, the fighting between the KDP and PUK witnessed in the 1990s is in essence to be blamed on tribal conflicts. The stereotypical belligerent character of the Kurd has been perceivably well-maintained by the Kurds themselves (particularly manifested throughout the four-year conflict in the 1990s), but without the enthusiastic encouragement from the neighbouring countries this conflict might have been shorter and less intense.

The conventional theory of balance of power with its focus on the need of the state to deal with external threats from other states<sup>2</sup> does not fully suffice when addressing the behaviour of the regional states and their policies towards Northern Iraq. The threat perception is not one-dimensional, but highly diverse in that external threats are coupled with *internal* pressures, which both have to be addressed. Not only is it necessary to balance against other states to prevent the emergence of actual and/or potentially dominant, divisive ambitions, but in order to safeguard the state's own survival there is also a need to pacify actors and groupings in the domestic political environment. For such circumstances, where balancing is of equal importance in domestic as well as international politics, Steven David's theory of 'omnibalancing' is suitable. Omnibalancing proposes that 'rather than just balance against threats or power, leaders of states will ... align with secondary adversaries so that they can focus their resources on prime adversaries', in other words, 'the threatened leadership ... must align with one threat to address the other'.<sup>3</sup> This appears to aptly explain the considerations of the Middle Eastern states concerned.

The balances made up by Syria, Turkey and Iran in the early 1990s neatly illustrate the point of omnibalancing. Those countries had little more than the Kurdish threat in common: stemming from Northern Iraq but reinforced by the internal Kurdish element in each of the states. This type of balancing behaviour is not considered by the balance of power theory. The complex and multifaceted nature of the threat means that when faced with an array of threats from many sources, 'the lesser challenges must be appeased in order to resist the principal ones'.<sup>4</sup> Hence, omnibalancing could also explain Barzani's 1996 alignment with Saddam - demonstrating a case of appeasing a secondary adversary (with the PUK at the time superseding Baghdad as the principal foe)- since any ideological explanation for his action would appear to be beyond credibility.

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<sup>1</sup>. For a relevant discussion on this, see Buzan, (1983), *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations*, Brighton: Wheatsheaf.

<sup>2</sup>. See Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* (1979), Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.

<sup>3</sup>. David (1991), p. 235.

### 6.1.1 Iranian-Turkish-Syrian co-operation

*In shotor dar-e khane-ye hame mikhabad.*<sup>5</sup>

In the aftermath of the events following the Kuwait War in 1991, a general Kurdish policy prevailed in Iran as well as Syria and Turkey, which, to all intents and purposes, aimed at preventing the Kurds from asserting themselves on the regional scene. The countries' unconstructive attitudes were strengthened after the Kurdish people for the first time held free general elections in May 1992 and established an assembly as well as a regional government to administer the affairs of their autonomous region. Following these parliamentary elections, events in Northern Iraq were followed with even greater scepticism and discomfort, and President Rafsanjani of Iran, for one, declared that elections could not be tolerated if they led to the disintegration of the Iraqi state.<sup>6</sup>

Tehran was joined by Ankara and Damascus in condemning any action, which might have led to the creation of an independent Kurdish state in Northern Iraq. When facing the possibility of international recognition of Kurdish aspirations, the regional states made it clear that they would go to great lengths to make sure that the international borders would not be compromised.

Despite the Kurds' clearly articulated aim of operating within the framework of the Iraqi constitution,<sup>7</sup> Turkey, Iran and Syria were alarmed by what they saw as the likely formation of a Kurdish sovereign state in Northern Iraq, and perceived such a development as a threat to their national security. Notwithstanding these countries' historical contradictions and conflicting interests, the developments in

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 245.

<sup>5</sup> A Persian proverb – 'this camel sleeps on everybody's doorstep' – a perfect metaphor describing the manner in which the Kurdish question is perceived in the countries 'hosting' Kurdistan.

<sup>6</sup> *Tehran Times*, 17-18 May 1992 (author unknown).

<sup>7</sup> Even though having most of the necessary attributes of a state and being in full control of its territory (and can therefore be termed a 'pseudo-state'), 'Free Kurdistan', unlike Chechnya, Somaliland and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, has not declared sovereignty, and, it would appear, has not been seriously tempted to do so. For a relevant discussion on 'pseudo-states', see Kolossov, Vladimir and O'Loughlin, John (1999), 'Pseudo-States as Harbingers of a New Geopolitics: The Example of the Trans-Dniester Moldovan Republic (TMR)' in Newman, David *Boundaries, Territory and Postmodernity*, Frank Cass: London, pp. 151-176.

Northern Iraq carried such significance that it was deemed necessary to monitor the Kurdish efforts at state-building through a regional alliance. In an unusual realignment, the Turkish, Iranian and Syrian foreign ministers convened, issuing security protocols stating that they would cooperate against Kurdish self-determination in Northern Iraq.<sup>8</sup> Such regional cooperation is something the Kurds always have had to fear, and quite possibly always will have to. Portrayed as a sound security measure, there was an attempt to establish a framework for regional co-operation, and high-profiled tripartite meetings between the foreign ministers of Iran, Turkey and Syria were held on a six-month basis in the early 1990s, initiated by Iran's foreign minister at the time, Ali Akbar Velayati. With the first security protocol signed in Ankara in November 1993,<sup>9</sup> the venue for these meetings alternated between Ankara/Istanbul, Damascus and Tehran, and addressed the joint concerns about a possible break-up of Iraq.

Iran was the motivator of these talks, but became increasingly frustrated as it found itself mediating between Turkey and Syria who were at loggerheads over water problems, in addition to the issue over the PKK (whom the latter supported). Iran tried to move beyond Turkish-Syrian differences, but as the issue of Northern Iraq frequently was put on the back burner, the Iranians eventually felt that it was not worth their efforts to pursue regional co-operation on this issue.<sup>10</sup>

The alliance cohesion began to weaken when internal fighting broke out between the KDP and the PUK, and since 1995 no more tripartite meetings have been held. Syria withdrew into political obscurity as Turkey and Iran came to discuss the matter on a bilateral level amidst their increasing support for the opposing factions in the Iraqi Kurdish civil war, in a constant dispute about where to draw the lines of their respective spheres of influence.

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<sup>8</sup>. Pope, H. *MEI*, No 438, 20 November 1992.

<sup>9</sup>. Olson (2001), p. 16.

<sup>10</sup>. As explained by Dr. Jawad-e Zarif, Tehran, 2000.

### 6.1.2 Regional competition for influence in 'Free Kurdistan'

In the competition for influence in Northern Iraq, the neighbouring countries (particularly the main regional powers Iran and Turkey) contributed significantly to the disorder that came to characterise the area in the mid-1990s. The key interests each country has in Iraqi Kurdistan relate to their concerns about their own Kurdish populations becoming affected by the developments across the border.

For each regime, there is to a greater or lesser extent the perception of a 'double threat', manifested in external aggression from a hegemonic power but also internal revolts based on the revolutionary nationalist principle. The Kurdish threat could in fact be perceived as both: an independent Kurdish state in Northern Iraq could be an external threat to Iran/Turkey, through expansionist policies snatching a large chunk of Iranian/Turkish territory. There could also be a scenario where the Iranian/Turkish Kurds do not lean on their eastern/southern brethren but stage an internal revolt demanding sovereignty for Iranian/Turkish Kurdistan. Hence with the developments in Northern Iraq, the Kurdish question may, in addition to being an external threat, also create an internal problem for mainly Iran and Turkey.

For the countries in the region, an intact Iraq remains a non-negotiable issue, as the consequences of the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime from power may be too unpleasant even to contemplate and there is a frequent reiteration of the need for Iraq's territorial integrity to be respected and maintained. Turkey's greatest fear would appear to be the Iraqi Kurds advancing their claims for independence if Iraq disintegrates, which could possibly result in neighbouring Syria being surrounded by pro-USA governments. Wahhabi Saudi Arabia may well worry about southern Shiite Iraq being absorbed by Iran,<sup>11</sup> whereas the latter could have a new regime in Baghdad strongly allied to Washington to fear.

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<sup>11</sup>. In spite of the general thrust of Iranian foreign policy, certain Iranian officials have indeed encouraged some Iraqi opposition groups residing in Iran to work towards the separation of the Shiite South from the Iraqi state, with a view to turn the area into an Iranian protectorate: a safe haven in the south for Shiite Arabs, similar to the one set up in the Kurdish north of the country.

During the regional tripartite meetings of 1992 and 1993, disapproval of the INC (Iraqi National Congress – the then reasonably coherent and united Iraqi opposition) was also voiced, amidst desires for the establishment of a democratically elected government in Baghdad. The foreign ministers were all discontent with the disorder perceived to be prevailing in Northern Iraq, worries that supposedly more reflected their concerns of the Iraqi Kurdish experiment proving successful and the repercussions this would have on their own states. Disorder in the area was, however, indirectly spread by the very same governments whose foreign ministers called for the cessation of the same. The PKK, for instance, was, with support from Damascus, gradually establishing itself in the northernmost areas of the autonomous region, the effects of which were chaotic for the fledgling democracy of ‘Free Kurdistan’. Moreover, if the replacement of the regime in Baghdad was really sought and the fear of what may ensue not overriding the wish to have Saddam Hussein forced out of office, the Islamic Republic would have ceased permitting the illegal transport of Iraqi oil across its territorial waters, an activity that through the vast revenues generated has contributed greatly to keep Saddam’s regime securely in power.

As previously mentioned, the regional states have long utilised the politicisation of Kurdish identity as a foreign policy tool. A Kurdish national identity is denied by Arab Ba’thism, as well as Turkish Kemalism and Iranian Khomeini’ism, who all view it as disturbing to their national sovereignty. The lack of uniformity in a Kurdish national identity characterised by multiplicity has been seized upon by political opportunists in the regional capitals in devising arrays of specific policies targeting various identities among the Kurds, since the degree of external pressure and influence may well determine the level of ethnic, religious and tribal awareness, to mention a few. One could for instance choose to draw heavily on tribal identities in a particular area, play the religious card to those individuals most receptive or place great emphasis on economic aspects appealing to the upper classes in Kurdish society of Northern Iraq - all policies that have been utilised by the neighbouring countries.

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See for example Eamad Mazouri, ‘The Viability of an Independent Kurdish State’,

External forces in the region could also have another impact on Iraqi Kurdistan, in the area of political linguistics. If all restrictions on the Kurdish language are lifted in Turkey, it may, coupled with the advances made by Kurmanji-speaking intellectuals in the Kurdish diaspora, have a (long-term) profound effect on politics in Northern Iraq, insofar as Kurmanji (and its speakers) could gain (and claim) greater prestige and weight in the power play with Sorani.<sup>12</sup>

There will now follow a closer look at each of the countries relevant to this discussion of Iraqi Kurdistan in its regional context. Iran will receive the greatest attention, due to the fact that it is a regional power whose dealings with the Iraqi Kurds has not been much examined since the end of the Iran-Iraq War. While a great deal has been written about Turkey and its actions in the area,<sup>13</sup> the more recent conduct of the Islamic Republic has not received the same degree of interest. Moreover, considering the progress made by Iran in the past few years in its efforts to end its isolation and re-enter the international community, it appears feasible to envisage Iran in the foreseeable future assuming a leading position in the Muslim world - a potential that warrants close scrutiny of its regional policies. Following the account of Iran and Turkey, other regional states of importance (first and foremost Iraq itself) will also be considered as regards their policies towards Central Kurdistan.

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*www.KurdishMedia.com*, June 26 2001.

<sup>12</sup>. Hassanpour (1992) touches upon such a scenario: see p. 437.

<sup>13</sup>. This stems from Ankara's proactive approach to developments in Northern Iraq, much related to its fight against the PKK. Turkey has never been far from the spotlight since the crisis of the spring of 1991 and every Turkish troop movement and political statements alike have been reported on a wide scale.

## **6.2 The major regional powers**

Due to the strict limitations imposed on Iraq by the international community with regard to its Kurdish north, Iran and Turkey emerged as the major powers in Northern Iraq following the Kuwait war. With Saddam Hussein's forces consigned to the periphery, Tehran and Ankara came to dominate the non-Kurdish presence in the area of self-rule, which, by the mid-1990s, was effectively divided into Iranian and Turkish spheres of influence. As key players in the region, the influence of Tehran and Ankara has been central to the direction the political developments in Northern Iraq has taken in the past decade and will take in the future.

### 6.2.1 Iran

Despite Iran's Persian culture being distinct from the Arab Middle East, a shared history, basic tenets of religion and, not the least, geography, constitute weighty factors as to why events in Iran have a considerable effect on policies and politics throughout the region. Positioned in such a geostrategic location, Iran is indeed well-suited to play a constructive role in the future of the Middle East. Since the election of the reformist Mohammad Khatami as Iran's president in 1997, the country has undergone significant changes in terms of democratic development in comparison with its Arab neighbours, (in spite of the setbacks later suffered by the reformists). Consequently, the country's international standing has increased significantly. Its position within the Islamic world has also been strengthened as a result of Tehran's commendable handling of Iran's presidency of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), held between 1997-2000. Moreover, with regard to the local municipality elections that were organised in January 1999, Iran has set an example of political reform in the Middle East. Worth noting is that power in Iran, as opposed to many of the regional states, is held neither by a specific group or individual, nor a particular

institution. The authoritarian state constituting Saddam's Iraq, to take one example, stands in sharp contrast to the Iranian political system.<sup>14</sup>

Iranian foreign policy has passed through many phases since the change of regime in 1979. One of the slogans of the Islamic Revolution regarding relations with other states was *na sharghi, na gharbi, jomhuri-e eslami* ('neither East nor West – an Islamic Republic'), a message conveying the intent of the new republic not to support or to be supported by any major world power – in other words, to establish a policy of non-alignment. However, with the passing of years and the Islamic Republic rooting itself all the firmer in Persian soil, this policy has naturally developed. Notably the Caspian Sea region alongside the Persian Gulf has come to assume all the greater importance in Iran's foreign policy concerns.<sup>15</sup> In the 1990s, the Islamic Republic sought to find ways out of the isolation it found itself in during its first ten years, and there was a pronounced desire to regain its previous position as a regional power. In the words of Ehteshami, a new 'geopolitical assertiveness' became evident.<sup>16</sup> Indeed:

the Islamic Republic has demonstrated the potential to move away from being a major regional *actor*, which had been its status ... throughout the 1980s, and towards becoming a major regional *power* in the 1990s.<sup>17</sup>

During Mohammad Khatami's time in office, the efforts made in foreign policy-making have been aimed at the easing of tensions in the region, and the success and clarity with which these policies have been pursued has calmed fears concerning Iranian expansionist ambitions and its spread of Islamic

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<sup>14</sup>. Cf. Makiya (1999), pp. 3-45 and 73-109.

<sup>15</sup>. A notion R. K. Ramazani elaborated on in his article 'Iran's Foreign Policy: Both North and South', *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 446, No. 3, Summer 1992, pp. 393-412. Moreover, Former Foreign Minister Dr. Velayati in his address at a 1996 seminar stated that 'the Islamic Republic of Iran is convinced that her security lies in preservation of peace and tranquillity in the region and it is in this context that her policies vis-à-vis the Persian Gulf, the neighbouring countries, and Central Asia evolve'. The inaugural speech by Dr. Velayati at the seminar 'Security and Foreign Policy in Central Asia and the Caucasus', held at the IPIS, Tehran, January 14-16, 1996. For the text of the speech, see 'The constructive role of the Islamic Republic of Iran in maintaining regional security', *Amu Darya* 1,2 (1997), pp. 183-189.

<sup>16</sup>. Ehteshami (1995), p. 160.

<sup>17</sup>. Ibid. p. 145.

revolutionary ideas – rhetoric admittedly halted by previous president Rafsanjani, though he was unsuccessful in his efforts to remove the doubts among Iran’s Arab neighbours about Tehran’s genuine intentions.

Reflecting Iran’s concern of the pattern of disintegration, which prevailed in various places at the end of the Cold War, one of the key issues of Iran’s Middle Eastern policies is the threat of the disintegration of Iraq and the fate of the Kurds in Iraqi Kurdistan,<sup>18</sup> with whom Iranian involvement has been ongoing, since the latter began their armed struggle against the Baathists in Baghdad. The Kurdish question has indeed always been a source of friction between Iran and Iraq, but as Graham Fuller points out, the ‘Kurdish card’ can be and has been utilised to greater effect by Iran than its foe Iraq:

By virtue of population size and the location of the Kurdish population in the key oil-producing zones of Iraq, Iranian manipulation of the Iraqi Kurds is vastly more costly to Iraq than the converse: Iraqi manipulation of Iranian Kurds.<sup>19</sup>

As indicated in this thesis’ first chapter, Iranian assistance to the Iraqi Kurds proved most intense in the early 1970s - a time when Iran was heavily influenced by Washington – with the military aid reaching its height in 1974/75 when all-out war raged between the Kurds and Baghdad. This vital military support was abruptly cut off through the Treaty of Algiers in March 1975. Throughout the Iran-Iraq war, Tehran actively encouraged the Kurds across their Western border to challenge the Iraqi authorities, which resulted in several divisions of the Iraqi army being preoccupied fighting its own Kurds. Moreover, the horrific gas bombings of Halabja became known to the world largely due to its propaganda value for Iran, who in depicting the true face of its ruthless enemy enthusiastically shipped foreign journalists to the area in order to document the atrocities.

Following the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the consequences it had on the rest of the region, Iranian policy toward the Kurds of

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<sup>18</sup>. See Table 2 in Lotfian (1998-1999).

<sup>19</sup>. Fuller (1991), p. 45.

Northern Iraq has been subject to change, the scope of which becomes clear when the focus shifts to developments in the 1990s. This changed Iranian policy is to a certain extent reflected in the transformations that have taken place in Iran's domestic political arena during the second half of the past decade.

#### 6.2.1.1 Iranian unilateral activities in Iraqi Kurdistan

In the crisis of the spring of 1991, the Iraqi Kurds' relationship with the Iranian government, which initially during the mass exodus of March and April had been characterised by delicate co-operation, quickly deteriorated as a result of the Kurds entering negotiations with the Iraqi government. In the process, the Kurds were also turning more and more towards Turkey and the Western powers. Tehran did not look favourably upon this development and contemplated various measures to isolate the Kurds in Northern Iraq. However, it appears to have been a realisation on behalf of the Iranians that by keeping the border open, they could maintain a power-position with regard to the Iraqi Kurds and a presence on Iraqi territory. Simultaneously, Tehran could profit from the cross-border trade operations bypassing the UN sanctions against Iraq.

The state formation in Northern Iraq soon became a haven for many outlawed regional political organisations, which attracted the attention of various national security services. Also the intelligence section of Iran's Revolutionary Guards was quick to establish itself in the autonomous region following its establishment.<sup>20</sup> The Iranians took advantage of the prevailing conditions of weak authority in the area and made large-scale attempts to weaken its enemies positioned in the area of self-rule. The Iranian military was heavily engaged in 'Free Kurdistan' throughout the summer and autumn of 1993 where it attacked Kurdish towns and villages below as well as above the no-fly zone, the 36<sup>th</sup> parallel, i.e. territories under the control of both Baghdad and the Kurdish groupings.<sup>21</sup> The focus of the operation was the opposition group *Mojahedin-e*

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<sup>20</sup>. As frankly stated by Dr. Velayati, Tehran, 2000.

<sup>21</sup>. Olson (1994), p. 58.

*Khalq Organisation* (MKO) as well as the KDP-I. The latter was acting from the Kurdish controlled territories, those run by the PUK.

Iran may well have embarked upon these 1993 military actions on the assumption that the attacks directed at Iran by the KDP-I were in fact instigated by Washington attempting to destabilize the Iranian government. This can be put against American sympathy for Iranian opposition groups challenging the legitimacy of the Islamic regime in Tehran. Whether or not this was the case, it shows that Iran would willingly resort to military action targeting the Iraqi Kurdish autonomous entity if Tehran had reasons to suspect its leadership of deciding to 'support or tolerate attacks intended to intimidate, challenge or threaten the survivability of the Iranian government'.<sup>22</sup> Tehran may also have wanted to show its strength in the face of Washington's attempts to gain another foothold in the region, as the Iranians viewed the establishment of the US-led relief efforts in Northern Iraq.<sup>23</sup>

In order to aptly monitor events closely on the ground, it was imperative for Iran to maintain actively engaged in the affairs of the Kurdish Administration in the area of self-rule. This was mainly done through strengthening its ties with the PUK. Although the KDP co-operated significantly with Tehran against the KDP-I during the early 1980s,<sup>24</sup> the PUK is the Iraqi Kurdish party that traditionally has been reasonably well connected with Tehran. Talabani's party has been officially present in Iran since 1986, when it established an office in Kermanshah, and a year later was allowed to set up a head-office in the capital. Between 1992 and 1994 there was no representation at all in Iran, which reflected the peaceful conditions that prevailed in the area of self-rule at that time, but significantly from 1994 onwards (when the fratricidal hostilities broke out in Northern Iraq), the PUK has maintained an office in Tehran with several sub-offices in the Iran/Iraq border area.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>. Id. (2001), pp. 14-15.

<sup>24</sup>. As examined by Sheikhmous (1999), p. 57.

<sup>25</sup>. A well-informed politically active Kurd (declined to be identified), consulted in Tehran in February 2000.

When relations resumed between the PUK and the Iranian government in 1994, the PUK was forced to tolerate a great deal of pressure from its benefactor - pressure aimed at Iranian Kurdish groups residing in Northern Iraq. Iran saw its co-operation with the PUK as an opportunity to settle scores with its own troublesome Kurds, particularly the KDP-I. The Iraqi Kurds were for example forced to close radio stations of Iranian Kurdish political groups stationed in their area.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the need to balance the KDP-Turkey alliance (analysed below) seems to have been a strong reason for Tehran to expand its relations with the PUK. Also, given the regional powers' apprehension about one political party being in domination of the rest, such considerations are likely to have played a part in Tehran's decision to strengthen the ties to the PUK. However, this has not been a relationship free of friction. For instance, Iran must have been disappointed when the PUK fought and defeated the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (IMK) from late 1993 through early 1994, as the latter was funded and equipped by Tehran.<sup>27</sup> Talabani was instrumental in putting down these Iraqi Kurdish Islamists, fighting that led to the outbreak of the protracted KDP-PUK armed conflict.

As the inter-Kurdish hostilities begun in 1994 steadily intensified, many actors, notably the United States, tried to mediate between the warring factions, without much success. In October 1995 Iran made an attempt at mediation but failed. A new Iranian mediation attempt was undertaken in January 1996.<sup>28</sup> Tehran may well have felt a need to counter American influence in Northern Iraq and raise its profile as a regional power. Iranian involvement was, however, to change in nature as the military section of the Revolutionary Guards in July 1996 crossed the border and made an incursion deep into PUK-controlled territory. This was a short but conspicuous visit by Iranian troops in pursuit of KDPI-*peshmergas*, aiming at the KDP-I headquarters in Koi Sanjaq.<sup>29</sup> The Iranians were permitted to operate in areas controlled by Talabani's forces, but as the KDP refused entry of the Iranian army into the northern parts of 'Free

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<sup>26</sup> Natali (1999), p. 37.

<sup>27</sup> Olson (1994), pp. 62-63.

<sup>28</sup> Dr. Velayati, Tehran, 2000.

<sup>29</sup> Dr Rashid, London, 1999.

Kurdistan' where the sought after guerrillas were supposedly hiding,<sup>30</sup> the Iranian offensive has to be regarded as rather unsuccessful. However, Tehran had accomplished one thing, namely exercising further military influence in Iraqi Kurdistan. The intention with this exercise might seem obvious, but it cannot be ruled out that the main aim of the attack may not have been to destroy the headquarters of the Iranian Kurdish party. The Islamic Republic was much concerned with weakening the Kurdish Administration in Northern Iraq, and by taking military action the Iranians demonstrated that they were able to invade the Iraqi Kurdish autonomous region when they found reasons to do so.

#### 6.2.1.2 Iran's regional policies in transformation: its effects on Northern Iraq

Iran under President Khatami has shown positive signs of its willingness to pursue a more balanced foreign policy with the aim to radically improve relations with the countries in its neighbourhood. This has yielded certain results, although it has to be emphasised that the power of the president is very limited, particularly in the area of foreign policy,<sup>31</sup> where the Supreme Leader Khamene'i, representing the strongest power centre in the Islamic Republic, determines general guidelines as well as particular policies.<sup>32</sup> Despite this, the promotion of Iranian interests in the autonomous Iraqi Kurdish region underwent notable changes after 1997, when Mohammad Khatami was elected president.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>. Dabrowska, *MEI*, No 532, 16 August 1996.

<sup>31</sup>. As regards foreign policy, Iran's National Security Council (NSC), created by a constitutional amendment in 1989 to co-ordinate the various agencies responsible for both external and internal security, shapes the agenda. For the functions of the NSC, see 'Foreign policy decisions in Iran: three institutions' constitutional powers', *Iran Focus*, March 2000 (Esfand -Farvardin 1378/9) Vol. 14, No. 3, and chapter XIII of *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*.

<sup>32</sup>. This duality of power explains the complex foreign-policy making of Iran, the deeper understanding of which demands an in-depth knowledge of the state's internal political structures. For an excellent introduction and analysis of these power structures, see Wilfried Buchta (2000), *Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*, Washington DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

<sup>33</sup>. In the 'Guidelines and Priorities for Iran's foreign policy under President Khatami' - spelled out in *The Viewpoints, Positions, Guidelines and Priorities in the Grand Strategy of Hojjatoleslam va al-Muslemin Mohammad Khatami for Socio-economic, Political and Cultural Development*, prior to the Presidential elections in May 1997 - one finds highly prioritised the 'maintaining the security of Iran's borders through expanding and reinforcing bilateral and multilateral cooperation with neighbouring countries'. See Table 1 in Lotfian (1998-1999).

During the presidency of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in the 1990s, a policy characterised by intervention and active involvement in Iraqi Kurdistan was promoted, which resulted in military engagement in the Iraqi Kurdish region. In contrast, the current government has opted for a less confrontational policy, and is also showing signs of being interested in using its contacts with the PUK in order to establish a connection with the KDP-I. There have been reports about Iranian attempts to negotiate with the Iranian Kurdish political grouping, negotiations that were allegedly held in Suleymaniya, with the PUK acting as mediator.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, Iran's official attitude towards the Iraqi Kurds over the past four years has been characterised by a conciliatory tone, with the focus on making the PUK and the KDP co-operate with each other.<sup>35</sup> This is in tune with Iran's general foreign policy of reconciliation and normalisation of relations. The general change in foreign policy-making of the Islamic Republic can indeed be detected in the way it deals with the Kurdish state formation on its northeastern border. As long as the Iraqi Kurds are not encouraging anti-Iranian movements or making moves towards an independent status, Tehran is not excessively hostile to the Kurdish Administration. If there are no attacks on Iran, the Iranians do not permeate the area with armed Revolutionary Guards in pursuit of Iranian Kurds.<sup>36</sup>

The Iraqi Kurds themselves admit that Tehran has indeed altered its policies and now holds a position, which is very different from that held in the early and mid-1990s. It is true that Iran promotes the respect for and preservation of the territorial integrity of Iraq with the same intensity as before, but the difference now is that the current Administration signals no interest in interfering directly in Iraqi Kurdish politics, as was the case up until a few years ago.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>. For instance, see Bill Samii, (2000), 'Tehran works with Kurdish parties', *RFE/RL Iran Report*, Vol. 3, No. 32, 21 August and Shamal 'Aqrabi, *Al-Zaman*, 30 March 2000.

<sup>35</sup>. Outlined by Dr. Araghchi, Tehran, 1999.

<sup>36</sup>. Indeed, 'the Iranian government is happy if they are not attacked, ... [whereas] Turkey wants you to be part of an agreement to say I am going to fight the PKK to the last man'. Dr. Rashid, London, 1999.

<sup>37</sup>. Ibid.

In this context it is also of interest to examine how the Muslim identity affects the policy-making of Iran with regard to the self-ruled Iraqi Kurdish areas. Muslim identity versus national interest is a rather complex issue, and while acknowledging that Islam is an 'infrastructural element of [its] foreign policy',<sup>38</sup> national interests do tend to come first,<sup>39</sup> particularly with regard to Iraqi Kurdistan. If the Kurdish autonomous entity is ever perceived as a threat, it is not to the *Islamic Republic* but to *Iran* - it is a question of territory, the preservation of borders.<sup>40</sup> In the 1990s there has been a general drive to de-ideologise the foreign policy,<sup>41</sup> and Iran has significantly proved itself having a largely non-ideological approach towards the Kurdish area of self-rule in Northern Iraq.

Iran's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Kamal Kharrazi in a speech before the 52<sup>nd</sup> session of the United Nations Assembly New York September 22, 1997, spoke compassionately about the promotion of human rights when outlining his doctrine of a Global Civil Society:

It is evident that priority must be accorded to the most fundamental human rights such as the right to life, the right to self-determination and the right to development, and special attention must be given to addressing their massive and systematic violation.<sup>42</sup>

These words of the Foreign Minister might well be interpreted as if the Islamic Republic supports the Kurds' aspiration for self-determination. However, as has been previously suggested in many different ways, the promotion of Kurdish self-determination in Northern Iraq is hardly to the liking of the Islamic Republic, which has time and again reiterated its stance of opposition to the

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<sup>38</sup>. Ehteshami (1995), p. 144.

<sup>39</sup>. As expressed by Dr. Jawad-e Zarif in Tehran, 2000: 'national interests come first in reformers' view of truism', but at the same time stressed that ideological considerations in the Islamic world always work in the background. For more on Iran's foreign policy that in the 1990s largely ceased to be ideological, see Oliver Roy's analysis about the Shiite factor in Iran's foreign policy, pp. 183-193 in his *The Failure of Political Islam* (1994), London: I.B. Tauris.

<sup>40</sup>. A point stressed by Dr. Araghchi, Tehran, 1999.

<sup>41</sup>. The triumph of Iran's national interest over its ideology is interestingly examined by David Menashri in his *Post-revolutionary politics in Iran. Religion, Society and Power*, (2001), London: Frank Cass, pp. 227-37.

creation of a Kurdish independent state in the region – the likely result of advocating Kurdish self-determination.<sup>43</sup>

In the early 1990s the Islamic Republic, as well as Saudi Arabia, tried to establish Islamic political groupings in the Iraqi Kurdish autonomous region, and the competition between these two regional powers can be compared to their previous rivalry in Afghanistan for control of the Islamic agenda.<sup>44</sup> However, these Iranian- and Saudi-financed new Islamist movements were not able to establish themselves firmly in Northern Iraq, as the support they gained from the Kurds there was minimal. As tactfully expressed by the PUK London-spokesman, 'they are not the dominating political groups'. These new groups were unable to influence the religious thinking of the Iraqi Kurds, especially the villagers in the countryside.<sup>45</sup> Thus Iranian ideologically motivated Islamisation-efforts largely failed, and it would be an exaggeration to state that religion has been the dominating political force in the 1990s Iraqi Kurdistan.

A glance at Iran's approach towards the dissolution of the Soviet Union further illuminates the issue of ideology versus national interest. Tehran was until the very end hoping that the political entity constituting the Soviet Union would remain intact, highlighting the fact that the national political interests received higher priorities than the religious ideology, despite all the rhetoric pointing in the opposite direction. What Iran feared the most was the 'Great Satan' being the only super power in Central Asia and the Middle East in face of a collapse of the Soviet entity - hence Iran was eager to see Moscow maintaining its authority in Central Asia. As was the case during the Pahlavi era during much of the twentieth century, Iran has focused its foreign policy on the West and South (i.e. the Middle East and the Persian Gulf), with a desire to 'freeze' the situation at its northern and eastern borders. However, as new republics emerged on its northern borders, Iran has had to refocus its efforts to that area, although it would be inaccurate to view the sponsorship of Islamic fundamentalism as the

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<sup>42</sup>. For this quote and his full speech, see the website of the Iranian Foreign Ministry: <http://www.salamiran.org/Iraninformation/Government/Foreign/statement.html>.

<sup>43</sup>. For instance Adnan Çağlayan in *TDN*, February 12 1994.

<sup>44</sup>. For an account of the new Saudi- and Iranian-financed groupings, see Sheikmous (1999), pp. 59-60.

driving force behind Iranian diplomacy in the Caucasus and Central Asia. To try to acquire political dominance through a religious offensive in the 1990s, let alone in the 2000s, appears unlikely, in particular since the peoples in this region adhere to the Sunni branch of Islam. Rather, Iran's policy may be denoted as defensive, seeking to prevent ethnic nationalisms from gaining a foothold in the area, spilling over into Iranian territory, and also to thwart Turkish hegemonic ambitions in Caucasus and Central Asia.

Also with regard to the situation in Iraqi Kurdistan, the cordial Israeli-Turkish relations have caused concern in Iran,<sup>46</sup> where it is claimed that such close links are vastly detrimental to all Muslim people of the Middle East.<sup>47</sup> The effects such an alliance could have on the power balance in Northern Iraq with the presence of Israel in an area bordering Iran is weighing heavily on the minds of those formulating the foreign and security policy of the Islamic Republic. There is anxiety about Israeli attempts to establish itself in countries surrounding Iran, a policy for which Iraqi Kurdistan is a primary target.<sup>48</sup> Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Asia and Oceania with obvious reference to the state of affairs in Northern Iraq stated:

I take the question of NATO and its relations with Israel, *as well as the related topics*, as highly important matters, which must be viewed as a new development and phenomenon.<sup>49</sup>

Tehran views the Kurdish problem in Northern Iraq as part of the problem with Iraq. However, in dealing with its western neighbour, Tehran feels the need to separate different issues from each other. Out of several issues related to Iraq, the major ones concern the post-war problems, namely the POWs, the disputed border and river demarcation lines, all of which need resolving before

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<sup>45</sup>. As stated by Mr. Rahman, London, 1999.

<sup>46</sup>. Not only Iranians but also Arabs have voiced disapproval of the increased co-operation between the Turks and Israelis, particularly in view of the official American backing: see *Asharq al-Awsat*, 5 May 2001.

<sup>47</sup>. As emphasised by Dr. Velayati, Tehran, 2000.

<sup>48</sup>. Dr. Jawad-e Zarif, Tehran, 2000.

<sup>49</sup>. Aminzadeh (1999) p. 18-19 (italics added).

attempting a serious discussion about the Kurdish issue.<sup>50</sup> The issue of the Kurdish autonomous entity in the north of the country rather has to be solved within the framework of the future of the Iraqi state, free from UN sanctions. Such an assessment would naturally be subject to major adjustments should developments in Iraqi Kurdistan move in the direction of secession.

Sentiments voiced by President Khatami are not allowed to dominate the policy-making of the Islamic Republic. However, there are grounds for optimism that his next three years in office will produce and advance a lasting legacy of reformation in Iranian politics, on a domestic as well as a regional and an international level. Khatami's many speeches have revealed sensible political thinking and if translated into concrete policies, with particular reference to the Kurdish question, a genuine change may be brought about. Witness his comments during his autumn 1999 state visit to France:

While the 20th century was centred on the force of the sword, leaving winners and losers, the main axis of the next century must be that of dialogue, otherwise the sword will become a cutting blade, from which no one will be safe.<sup>51</sup>

### 6.2.2 Turkey

As shown in the first chapter's political history of Iraqi Kurdistan, during the 1980s, Iran was the regional player with whom the Iraqi Kurds mainly had their dealings and were exploited by. In the following decade, however, Iran assumed a less transparent role in developments of Central Kurdistan, while the country emerging as the most visible external power to the autonomous region was Turkey. The political influence of Turkey is of particular significance in Northern Iraq, since Turkey is a NATO member and could be envisaged to enforce the will of Washington on Iraqi Kurds.

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<sup>50</sup>. Dr. Sariolqalam, Tehran, 1999.

<sup>51</sup>. 'Khatami offers "dialogue", warns against "force" in rare speech', *AFP*, October 29, 1999.

In the early 1990s, Turkey had to cope with several crises in its immediate neighbourhood. On its Western borders there was the Balkan war with the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, on the opposite border, in the East, the Nagorno-Karabakh-conflict raged between Azerbaijan and Armenia, whereas in the south, Turkey was confronted with the unstable situation constituting Iraq. In all of these conflict zones, ethno-nationalism was a dominating force, and naturally this produced fears of such ethnic unrest spilling over into areas within Turkey. Indeed, Turkey's 'insistence on maintaining Iraq's territorial integrity reflect[ed] Ankara's concern about the destabilising effects of ethnic and nationalist movements on Turkey and its regional environment'.<sup>52</sup>

Following Iraq's invasion and annexation of Kuwait, Turkey notably 'departed from its traditional policy of non-involvement in Middle Eastern conflicts [as it] became a key participant in the allied coalition against Iraq during the Gulf crisis',<sup>53</sup> the aftermath of which demanded close monitoring by Ankara. President Özal showed great visionary thinking for solving Turkey's Kurdish problem and the sheer novelty of the existence of such creative ideas among the top echelon of Turkey's Kurd-denying leadership coupled with its obvious connections to the Iraqi Kurdish question and the developments in the autonomous region, calls for an emphasis on Özal's ideas on the following few pages.

#### 6.2.2.1 Turkish-Kurdish politics in the aftermath of the Kuwait War

The EC-proposal in April 1991 of a UN-supervised safe haven to be established in Northern Iraq was, as noted above, an idea initiated by the Turkish president. Turgut Özal was the first statesman who officially spoke of a sanctuary for the Iraqi Kurds, many of whom had taken or attempted to take refuge within the borders of Turkey. This plan is likely to have been connected with Ankara's unexpected and sudden political move on 12 April, in which several anti-Kurdish laws were abrogated: the existence of 12 million Turkish Kurds was

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<sup>52</sup>. Sayari (1994), pp. 186-187.

dramatically recognised by the Turkish state and the cultural restraints for the former mountain-Turks eased slightly.<sup>54</sup>

The late President Özal was the initiator and promoter of Turkey's new initiatives in the foreign policy arena. In the aftermath of the Kuwait War there was great anticipation of the role Turkey was to play in the new regional order emerging. Possibly the most unexpected policy-change was the radical easing of the restrictions on the use of the Kurdish language, the liberalisation of the 1983 language law, which was significantly amended. The decision to allow Turkey's own Kurds greater space to express their Kurdishness, as well as Ankara speaking on behalf of the Iraqi Kurdish refugees, could not be regarded as a sudden understanding of the Kurdish plight. Rather, it was a result of *realpolitik*, further motivated by the country's interest in membership of the EC, perhaps accentuated by the desire to be a respected member of the NATO. Further, Ankara feared developments spiralling out of control creating a chaotic situation if the large number of Iraqi Kurds at its borders were allowed to enter Turkey. Should that happen, those uninvited masses could well have sympathised with the PKK and provided the latter with their support in seeking to establish some sort of political formation on Turkish territory, an unfavourable scenario to be avoided at all costs by the Turkish government. However, when the Western powers later in the spring of 1991 began constructing what came to develop into the semi-independent entity of 'Free Kurdistan', many liberal figures in the Turkish establishment including Özal himself, were likely to have got cold feet, however, determined to make the influence of Turkey felt in any decision-making circles.

Özal most likely launched the idea of a safe haven when he realised something of the sort was the only solution short of allowing hundreds of thousands of refugees to cross Turkey's border. Ankara suspected Baghdad of seeking a 'final solution' to the Kurdish issue, namely to force the Kurds out of Iraqi territory, in the process creating disastrous consequences for Turkey. Therefore it was vital for the Turks that the refugees stayed within Iraqi territory, as Ankara feared a

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<sup>53</sup>. Ibid. p. 176.

repeat of events of 1988, when large numbers of Iraqi Kurdish refugees had poured into Turkey following the Halabja-bombings. At that time the West, after its initial interest had waned, had left Turkey with less aid than considered necessary by Ankara to adequately deal with the situation.

Özal also appeared to have placed the unprecedented circumstances in a larger perspective, interpreting the situation as a unique chance for Turkey to manifest its aspirations for and seize the leading role in the future discussions on the Kurdish issue: i.e. he would gain a key role in regional politics but also break the deadlock that for so long has characterised Turkish-Kurdish relations. On a regional level, such Turkish overtures to safeguard Kurdish rights – in suggesting a federal status for the Kurds of Northern Iraq – could also be understood as a desire to in the long run seek control of the strategically oil-rich areas of the north of the country: in other words, a re-surfacing of the Mosul-syndrome. Such an emergence of renewed Turkish hegemonic ambitions in the region may well have spurred on Turkish encouragement to the international community to suspend Baghdad's control over large parts of Iraqi Kurdistan. Turkey's powerful generals might have held hopes for a safe haven in Iraqi Kurdistan to bring them a chance of incorporating the Mosul-district, i.e. Northern Iraq, into the Turkish Republic.<sup>55</sup> In May 1995 President Demirel even spoke of rectifying the border and place Northern Iraq, the Mosul district, under Turkish control, a proposal strongly opposed by Arabs and Iranians alike. It is still felt in Turkey that Mosul is rightfully theirs and that the new Turkish Republic in its weak position vis-à-vis the British in 1925 had not been able to forcefully argue the righteousness of its territorial claim to the area should not conceal this fact.<sup>56</sup> Desires for expanding Turkey's role in the geopolitically related areas of Caucasus and Central Asia (where Ankara undoubtedly sees a great potential for economic and political influence), and a modified view on

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<sup>54</sup>. Bergkvist, *SvD*, 10 April, 1991.

<sup>55</sup>. What an annexation of Northern Iraq could mean for Turkey is elaborated on by Heinrich Lummer in his 'Das Verhältnis zwischen irkischen Kurden und türkischer Regierung' ['Relations between the Iraqi Kurds and the Turkish Government'] in *Kurdisches Forum in Deutschland* (1999), *Irakisch-Kurdistan: Status und Pespektiven. Ergebnisse einer Internationalen Tagung 1999 in Berlin* [*Iraqi Kurdistan: Status and Perspectives. Proceedings from an International Conference in 1999 in Berlin*], Berlin: Awadani, pp. 81-84.

<sup>56</sup>. Daniel Pipes examines this issue in his "Hot Spot: Turkey, Iraq and Mosul", *Middle East Quarterly* 2, Sept 1995, pp. 65-68.

how the issue of regional security ought to be approached, are moreover likely to have the element of Northern Iraq attached to it.

Özal's novel initiatives on such a sensitive issue were not well-received nationwide, and he was criticised for incapability and naïveté, acting against Turkey's national interest and encouraging separatist tendencies. The conventions of the establishment clearly clashed with Özal's desires to ventilate new, highly controversial ideas. When the president made his unexpected initiative, proposing radio- and tv-broadcasts in Kurdish, Premier Minister Demirel reacted disapprovingly, stating that it would be unconstitutional, a view shared by the military.<sup>57</sup> Özal accordingly appeared to be a rather lonely advocate for a dynamic and advanced foreign policy, as his proposed measures were subject to substantial criticism by Kemalists defending the indivisibility of the state.

Özal, who passed away suddenly in March 1993,<sup>58</sup> is likely to have thought it an appropriate approach to solve the country's Kurdish problem in stages and could even have envisaged the Turkish Republic assuming more of a Turkish-Kurdish character. He undoubtedly foresaw swift geopolitical changes in the region and realised that if the Kurdish language was not freed in such a crucial regional crisis, Turkey would face increased problems later on. It is noteworthy, however, that the president's visionary initiatives in an area where domestic politics were intertwined with foreign policy-making, were largely characterised by insinuations, non-commitments and unclear guidelines. He ventilated possibilities with the intention to obtain the best possible results as developments unfolded, hence rendering it unnecessary to prepare lines of retreat.

#### 6.2.2.2 Turkish unilateral activities in Iraqi Kurdistan

For the Iraqi Kurds, it has from the start of their exercise in political autonomy been of vital importance to keep Turkey favourably disposed towards them, as Turkish co-operation is absolutely vital for the economic survival of the self-

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<sup>57</sup>. McDowall, *MEI*, No 397, 5 April 1991.

ruling area. A problematic issue all along has been the presence of the PKK in 'Free Kurdistan'. Particularly the KDP, the traditional authority in the northernmost areas of Iraqi Kurdistan utilised by the Turkish Kurdish grouping, has been forced to take action and fight its Kurdish brothers in order to satisfy the powerful northern neighbour. Turkey thus succeeded in driving a political wedge between the Turkish Kurds and the Iraqi Kurds when forcing the Iraqi-Kurdish parties to actively fight against their northern Kurdish counterparts in order to secure the vital border-trade with Turkey.

In October 1992, the Turks decided to take charge of the small-scale offensive against the PKK commenced by the Iraqi Kurds, and a considerable number of heavily armed Turkish troops marched across the border. After a few weeks of fighting an agreement between the PKK and the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government was signed.<sup>59</sup> However, Turkish air strikes soon reoccurred at regular intervals with the aim to hunt down PKK-guerrillas, but also having the character of warning the Iraqi Kurds not to become too ambitious in aspiring towards greater recognition regionally as well as internationally. In this sense, the Turkish army used the conflicts in Northern Iraq as a pretext to justify its military presence in the area. As Olson writes, 'after the 1992 campaign, Turkey stationed up to 5,000 soldiers in Northern Iraq along with substantial numbers of other security and intelligence personnel'.<sup>60</sup> This military presence has, however, very much been perceived as a provocation, serving to increase rather than stabilise the conflict and regional tension.

In 1995 Turkey stated the aim to 'once and for all' destroy the PKK-bases in Northern Iraq, and in late March, with the aim to 'cause as much destruction as possible' (to the guerrillas),<sup>61</sup> some 35,000 Turkish soldiers with heavy artillery entered Northern Iraq.<sup>62</sup> This created an almost absurd situation, in which the coalition air surveillance-planes were flying at 30,000 feet above the security zone to prevent the Iraqi air force from venturing north of latitude 36°N, while

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<sup>58</sup>. Id. (1996), p. 437.

<sup>59</sup>. Laizer (1996), p. 68.

<sup>60</sup>. Olson (2001), p. 14.

<sup>61</sup>. Pope, N., *MEI*, No 497, 31 March 1995.

the Turks dropped bombs from 5,000 feet on the Kurdish villages the former forces were assigned to protect.<sup>63</sup> At the same time, this and other Turkish incursions were paradoxically facilitated just because of Turkey's direct connection with the maintenance of the no-fly zone over Northern Iraq. The European Union as well as the USA appealed to Turkey to withdraw its excessive killing machine from the Iraqi Kurdish areas, and in the summer the Turkish army heeded the wishes of the West, leaving destruction and terrorised civilians behind.

Turkey's massive offensive was far from successful. The obvious military build-up of the Turkish army in northern Kurdistan weeks before the incursion gave the PKK-guerrillas sufficient time to move their units far into Northern Iraq, away from the 40 km deep and 290 km long raiding zone employed by the Turkish troops.<sup>64</sup> The bases of the *peshmergas* claimed by the Turks to have been completely destroyed, mainly consisted of caves in the Kurdish mountains, used to stock weapons and food, easily recreated at any time with a minimal effort by the fighters.<sup>65</sup> However, the political aspect of the invasion must be emphasised, insofar as the Turks unambiguously sought to get the message across to the outer world that an independent Kurdish state in the region would not be accepted. However, it is equally important to point out that neither regional nor international powers accepted the Turkish ambition to establish a buffer zone in Northern Iraq, similar to the one Israel created in southern Lebanon in 1982.

Turkey's May 1996 invasion of Northern Iraq was followed by further Turkish attacks on PKK bases in 'Free Kurdistan'. Despite Ankara's firm belief that all Turkish-Kurdish guerrillas had been exterminated in the spring 1996 assault, there must have been a few *peshmergas* left in the area, since the Turkish government deemed it necessary to invade the Kurdish security zone over and over again. According to the official Turkish account, there have been 57

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<sup>62</sup>. For sake of comparison, this was a larger force than that employed by the Turks in the 1974 invasion of Cyprus. Pamuk, *Kurdistan Rapport*, May 1995.

<sup>63</sup>. Kutschera, *The Middle East*, November 1995.

<sup>64</sup>. Serrill, *Time*, 24 April, 1995.

<sup>65</sup>. Zaman, *The Middle East*, April 1995.

military interventions in Northern Iraq since the early 1980s, a figure that one is inclined to believe is a rather conservative estimate.<sup>66</sup>

Ethnicity is an important element shaping Turkey's foreign policy. Apart from the massive interest in the new Turkic republics emerging in the post-Soviet period, the Turkmens of Iraq are seriously considered and utilised by Ankara as a way of seeking influence over politics in the autonomous region. Being in a minority position, the Turkmens are also looking to the Turkish Republic for inspiration and leadership. In the event of a viable Kurdish state emerging in Northern Iraq, Ankara would be certain to utilise the Turkmen element in order to enhance its political presence in the 'state of Mosul', as they might choose to term it.

The air surveillance system *Operation Provide Comfort* and the ensuing observation operations (as described in the following chapter) have been rather controversial in Turkey. Ankara provides its support, but the relief operation is viewed as a double-edged sword. While it does protect Turkey from another mass exodus of Kurdish refugees from Northern Iraq by preventing the Iraqi army from accessing its northern regions, it also produces fears that the autonomous political entity may constitute the embryo of an independent Kurdish state. Moreover, when it became clear that the PKK with such ease and swiftness had established bases in the autonomous region from where it launched attacks on Turkey, the whole operation came into question. The coalition mandate was nonetheless prolonged by the parliament in Ankara on a semi-annual basis until the end of 1996, when disapproving voices in the Turkish establishment grew too powerful.<sup>67</sup> One advantage the unprecedented circumstances presented to the Turks was that with the abolition of Iraqi central control over the north of the country, Turkey became relatively free to make military incursions into Northern Iraq whenever it so desired. All Baghdad could do was loudly protest the violation of its territorial integrity. The long-running coalition operation was, however, brought to an end, and in January 1997

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<sup>66</sup>. 'A Plethora of Reports Rattles Nerves', Briefing (Ankara), June 8, 1998, p. 7 - a reference provided by Gunter (1999), p. 126.

<sup>67</sup>. Braconier, *SvD*, 31 July, 1996.

replaced by a less inclusive surveillance system, by which the Turks, Americans and British provided air cover alone, leaving out the important element of the provision of humanitarian aid.<sup>68</sup>

By its gradual upgrading of diplomatic relations with Iraq, Turkey has, however, showed independence from Washington and Tel Aviv in forming its regional foreign policy, which its alliance with the two may have put into question. With improvements in relations with Saddam's regime, Ankara confirmed its deep concern about the continuing development towards an independent status of the Kurdish entity in Northern Iraq - a concern that neither the USA nor Israel could alleviate.

### 6.2.3 Iranian-Turkish relations concerning Northern Iraq

Considered the two major powers external to the autonomous Kurdish region, the relations between Iran and Turkey have a noticeable impact on developments in Northern Iraq. In fact, upon close scrutiny it becomes clear that the issue of the autonomous Kurdish region occupies a central place in the two countries' many key concerns. Since the main focus in the current chapter is on Iranian involvement in Iraqi Kurdistan, this section will look at the relevance of Iranian-Turkish relations for Northern Iraq from mainly an Iranian perspective.

One of the geopolitical advantages Iran has over Turkey with regard to Iraqi Kurdistan is that Iran is in a better position to deal with the Kurdish issue and can more easily move towards some kind of reasonable autonomy solution.<sup>69</sup> This also reflects its ability to engage in constructive discussions of the future of the Kurds of Iraq, provided the positive domestic political development in Iran under the influence of President Khatami continues and the negative trends driven by the conservatives are overcome.

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<sup>68</sup>. Hilterman (1997).

<sup>69</sup>. E.g. Fuller (1991), pp. 46-47.

Being a country essentially consisting of minorities, Iran's general tolerance towards minority groups is in the regional context relatively satisfactory. However, the opposite is true if Tehran considers the state threatened. The considerable number of Azeri Turks living in north-western Iran are relatively well integrated in Iranian society,<sup>70</sup> but since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the creation of the independent state of Azerbaijan, Iran's worries about the emergence of a strong Azeri separatist movement in the northwest has greatly increased. Such concerns were certainly instrumental when the province in the early 1990s was divided into East and West Azerbaijan, in order to monitor and control such tendencies.<sup>71</sup>

Teheran possesses a certain unease about the occasionally very obvious Turkish military presence in a weakened Iraq (in spite of Turkish assurances about its army only responding to the challenge posed by the PKK) and fears that such Turkish presence will affect Iranian geostrategic and geopolitical interests in Azerbaijan and in the Gulf. Such fears are held due to the fact that in addition to the Kurdish element, there is the issue of Azeri Turks in the Islamic Republic that concerns the Iranian authorities. Between these two minority-problems in Iran there is a connection, and one in which Turkey and its regional policy-making is heavily represented. The combination of Turkish efforts in the Caucasus and Central Asia and the existence of the independent state of Azerbaijan and its influence on the Azeri populations of Iran's northwestern provinces are issues unsettling authorities in Tehran.<sup>72</sup> At first glance, there seems to be no apparent link between these issues and developments in Northern Iraq. Upon closer examination, however, one can detect a pattern of intertwined issues and events, and causes for fluctuations in Iranian-Turkish relations, which can often be detected in developments in Northern Iraq.

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<sup>70</sup>. This is examined in Mehrdad Izady's article 'Persian carrot and Turkish stick: contrasting policies targeted at gaining state loyalty from Azeris and Kurds', *Kurdish Times*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Fall 1990, pp. 30-47.

<sup>71</sup>. This issue is dealt with by Touraj Atabaki, *Azerbaijan. Ethnicity and Autonomy in Twentieth-century Iran*, (1993), London: St Martin's Press.

<sup>72</sup>. For a clear overview of the region and the positioning of Armenia and Azerbaijan in relation to Iran (and Turkey), see Figure 1.1.2: *Kurdistan in the Context of the Middle East*.

The collapse of the Soviet Union created a general political atmosphere in which ethnic separatist movements could emerge and prosper. The prospect of Iranian Azerbaijan producing strong separatist sentiments appeared quite remote in the past, but in the 1990s seemed less unlikely to occur, as the existence of the independent state of Azerbaijan provided the incentive for aspirations to join the fellow sovereign Azerbaijanis.<sup>73</sup> If such a threat to Iran's territorial integrity becomes acute (a development that will indisputably also bring about desires for separation of Iranian Kurdistan), Tehran will probably accuse Turkey of being the driving force behind those developments and react accordingly. Iran's 'chief resource', as Fuller puts it, to destabilise Turkey would most notably constitute active encouragement and assistance to the separatist Kurds of Turkey.<sup>74</sup> Internal threats are indeed 'an ideal vehicle for advancing the interests of outside states', and 'providing aid to or against insurgent groups ... is a relatively inexpensive and effective means of asserting one's power'.<sup>75</sup> This is how Iran exerts pressure on Turkey by providing bases for the PKK on Iranian territory, or encouraging the Islamist tendencies in Turkish domestic politics. In fact the two are interrelated since 'the greatest threat facing [Turkey] was not the PKK itself but the co-operation between the PKK and the Islamists'.<sup>76</sup>

One example, which serves to highlight Tehran's extreme sensitivity to the relationship between the Kurdish problem in Iran, its own Azerbaijani question, and the delicate balance of influence in Iraqi Kurdistan, is the military conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh that kept Armenia and Azerbaijan at loggerheads for a considerable time. In the summer of 1993 Armenia engaged its military forces in attacks on neighbouring Azerbaijan, for which Iran, initially at least, gave Armenia its political support - in all probability an attempt to balance Turkey and Baku's pan-Turkish rhetoric. Turkey was firmly positioned behind Baku, who enjoyed Turkey's support of its NATO-partner the USA. Iran regarded Azerbaijan's pan-Turkish rhetoric as unnecessarily challenging to its own population of Azeri Turks, and had reasons to fear an upsurge of Kurdish

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<sup>73</sup>. For a recent analysis of the ethnic identity and autonomous movement of Iran's Azeri minority, see Touraj Atabaki (2001), *Azerbaijan. Ethnicity and the Struggle for Power in Iran*, London: I.B. Tauris.

<sup>74</sup>. Fuller (1994), p. 36.

<sup>75</sup>. David (1991), p. 241.

nationalism should the Azeris of Iran become dangerously influenced by Turkish nationalism. If such a scenario materialised, Turkey could be envisaged as seizing the opportunity to gain control over the Kurdish areas in Northern Iraq in an attempt to establish an adjoining security zone with Iran's population of Azeri Turks. Acting to avert such ambitions, Iran discarded the notion of Muslim brotherhood and aligned itself with Christian Armenia opposing the Muslim country Azerbaijan.<sup>77</sup>

One of the main causes for concern for Tehran that emerged in the mid-1990s is the Turkish-Israeli alliance and a fear that even closer relations between the two will also increase ties between Baku and Tel Aviv. Tehran believes that the Turkey-Israel alliance will give Israel an entrance to the Caucasus and especially to Azerbaijan. As expressed by Robert Olson, 'the last thing Iran wants is Israel meddling, in co-operation with Turkey, in Azerbaijan and in its own Azeri question'.<sup>78</sup> This brings back memories of the Ottoman Azerbaijani policy, which 'produced in Iran the fear of Turkism as the major danger to the state's unity'.<sup>79</sup> Should Turkey advocate any antagonistic policies along these lines Iran can respond by using 'the PKK-card', further encourage Islamist currents in Turkey, and in alliance with Syria affect developments on Turkey's western flank, such as the Cyprus-issue and developments in the Aegean Sea. In this respect, the Greek-Armenian-Iranian relations that during the 1990s became much stronger are significant. In light of a reformed Greek foreign policy and Turkish capture of the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in February 1999, this co-operation, however, may bear less relevance. Having said that, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that

there appears to be much closer connection between both Iran's and Turkey's eastern Mediterranean and Caucasus-Central Asian policies than many analysts acknowledge. The one area in which both countries have some manoeuvrability is

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<sup>76</sup>. Olson (2001), p. 34.

<sup>77</sup>. Id. (1994), p. 59.

<sup>78</sup>. Id. (1998b), p. 19.

<sup>79</sup>. Swietochowski (1994), p. 121. The author also elaborates on the 'the specifically Azerbaijani dilemma: historical and religious bonds to Iran, ethnic, linguistic, intellectual and, increasingly, political links with Turkey'.

in northern Iraq and that is the reason the jockeying for position and power there is quite vigorous.<sup>80</sup>

Iranian fears of Turkish-Azeri co-operation with its potential for bringing serious repercussions for Iran do not appear to be unwarranted. On a visit to Turkey in March 2001 Azeri president Aliyev called for the establishment of a Turkish military base in Azerbaijan. Although Azerbaijani officials had previously voiced similar requests, it was, significantly, the first time such a proclamation came from the president himself.<sup>81</sup>

Considering the larger picture of geopolitical and geostrategic concerns facing Iran and Turkey, it becomes clear what impels the interests both countries have in Northern Iraq and how developments in the Kurdish region of self-rule affect their bilateral relations. A high-ranking Turkish security team headed by the Deputy Turkish Interior Minister arrived in Tehran in late April 2001 for security talks with Iranian officials. These discussions concerning 'mutual cooperation and extraterritorial crimes' (with clear reference to the PKK nuisance) resulted in Turkey's Interior Minister Tantan's follow-up visit to Tehran where he signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with his Iranian counterpart Moussavi-Lari. The memorandum notably targeted 'specific acts of terrorism', and the Iran-Turkey High Security Commission set up was charged with overseeing joint operations in each other's territories.<sup>82</sup> Such developments indicate that these two big regional powers are intent on maintaining cordial relations, since such a policy will best serve their respective interests. These two powers are, however, not the only countries with an interest in the affairs of the Iraqi Kurdish self-ruling area, and the following section will touch upon the most relevant aspects of the interest of other regional actors in the area.

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<sup>80</sup>. Olson (1998b), p. 20.

<sup>81</sup>. *Tehran Times*, 17 March 2001 (author unknown).

<sup>82</sup>. See for instance *Iran News*, 10 and 12 May 2001 and *Iran Daily*, 12 May 2001.

## 6.3 Other important actors

### 6.3.1 Iraq

Those who are part of a state like Iraq are much more esteemed and honoured than those who live on a tiny and humble part ... Only a small-minded person would abandon a big clean sea for the sake of a corner or a stagnant canal that is controlled by foreigners who can deprive him of water whenever they wish.

Saddam Hussein, speaking on Iraqi TV, July 2001

The above statement by the Iraqi president illustrates a frustration with an odd situation through which a considerable part of the country remains beyond the control of the central government. As a result of the war over Kuwait, Iraq became severely restricted by the international community in its ability to exercise power and influence over the Kurdish north. The much greater manoeuvrability of Iran and Turkey as regards the area of self-rule shows that Baghdad's role after unilaterally having withdrawn its administration from Iraqi Kurdistan in late 1991 has been reduced to such a degree that Iraq could not compete at the same level as its eastern and northern neighbours concerning the exercise of power over 'Free Kurdistan'. Hence, Iraq, despite it being the geographical (and arguably political) framework within which the Iraqi Kurds operate, will be treated as a minor, although important actor in this analysis.

Iraqi responses to Kurdish nationalism have ranged from genocide, forcible resettlements and assimilation but also some positive elements of certain cultural autonomy and political decentralisation have been discernible. All these strategies were in one shape or another evident in the turbulent months of post-Gulf crisis. Despite losing control over three of its northern governates following the forced retreat from Kuwait in 1991, Iraq has not wished to take a back seat to developments in the autonomous region of Central Kurdistan. Reminiscent of the two main powers in the region, Baghdad has kept a close eye on the Kurds. However, in contrast to Iran and especially Turkey, due to the restrictions set by the international community, Iraq's army and its government have been severely

limited to intervene in 'Free Kurdistan', knowing heavy retaliation would be the response to any Iraqi interference in the north.

At an early stage, even when the return of the Iraqi Kurdish refugees was still far from complete, Saddam Hussein attempted to regain the initiative as he invited a Kurdish delegation consisting of KDP- as well as PUK-delegates to Baghdad for negotiations on the future status of Iraqi Kurdistan.<sup>83</sup> This also coincided with discussions in the United Nations on how to create and maintain secure conditions for the Kurds within Iraq. The talks in Baghdad, based on the autonomy agreement of 1970,<sup>84</sup> initially appeared to bear fruit, as it was announced that President Hussein had agreed in principle to implement the provisions of the previous peace plan. However, the issue of the frontiers of the autonomous region remained unresolved, which was the main reason for Kurdish suspension of further negotiations in the late summer of 1991. The severance of Kurdish-Iraqi relations generated the Iraqi response of withdrawing all services from the northern part of the country in October 1991, and in doing so Baghdad effectively subjected the Kurds to a severe economic blockade.<sup>85</sup> This resulted in a situation whereby the Kurds found themselves living under the economic hardship brought about by a double embargo: the UN embargo on Iraq coupled with the Iraqi embargo of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Unable to reach his own Kurds, Saddam Hussein adopted the strategy of supporting the Turkish-Kurdish guerrillas in their struggle against Ankara. The PKK, which had come to operate largely from the autonomous region, appears to have been used by Baghdad to pressurise the Turks into closing the border to 'Free Kurdistan', thus isolating the Iraqi Kurds completely. As free and fair parliamentary elections got under way in the autonomous region, the reaction generated by such 'illegal' activities was, in Iraq proper, one of fury. Thus when the democratic process later collapsed amidst intense Kurdish infighting, it was to the clear delight of Saddam. Throughout the year of 1994, the Iraqi National Congress, INC, provided mediation and several agreements were reached,

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<sup>83</sup>. Mallet, *FT*, 26 April, 1991.

<sup>84</sup>. As outlined in the first chapter, section 1.3.2.

<sup>85</sup>. Laizer, (1996), p. 46.

however, they were succeeded by renewed fratricidal fighting. The short-lived peace accords even impelled Saddam Hussein to action, in offering help from Baghdad to settle the dispute,<sup>86</sup> supposedly with the underlying aim of reasserting central control over the northern parts of his country.

Not allowed to access the area, the Iraqi army nevertheless marched in, responding to the unlikely invitation of one of the Kurdish leaders, Masoud Barzani, in August 1996. Unable to successfully counter the forces of the PUK, backed by Iranian military power, the KDP requested Iraqi army assistance, which complicated the situation for the international community on how to react. International pressure nonetheless made the Iraqis withdraw after only three days, but even such a brief incursion was sufficient to achieve certain objectives. A major purpose with the Iraqi invasion was indisputably to destroy the INC based in 'Free Kurdistan' and the quick, but effective Iraqi attack indeed constituted a severe blow to the Iraqi opposition groups. These were forced to flee the region, and the invading army was reported to have held public executions in Arbil of nearly 100 members of the INC.<sup>87</sup> The short military alliance also served Baghdad's need to keep the roads and oil-pipelines open between Iraq proper and Turkey. As for the needs of the KDP later in the summer of 1996, they were twofold: in addition to the Iran-supported PUK advancing rapidly on KDP-held areas from the south, Barzani faced Turkish PKK-motivated plans of extending its border up to 15 miles into Northern Iraq (incidentally KDP-controlled territory), similar to Israel's security-zone in southern Lebanon. In the words of Olson, there was risk that 'the Turks would try to limit the KDP to only a token presence',<sup>88</sup> something that the brief but forceful military intervention from Baghdad may have helped prevent.

As this and previous analyses have shown, the central government of Iraq has time and again found it necessary to counter the autonomist threat from the Kurds in order to remain in power, a trend likely to continue should Northern Iraq be regained by an oppressive Arab regime in Baghdad. Such military

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<sup>86</sup>. Jarrah, *MEI*, No 492, 20 January 1995.

<sup>87</sup>. *SvD*, 8 September, 1996, (author unknown).

<sup>88</sup>. Olson (2001), p. 20.

engagement has many times required confronting Iran as the main supporter of the Iraqi Kurds. Iran alone posed a considerable but manageable external threat to Iraq. What has made the Iranian forces dangerously unmanageable at times and may have caused the Iraqis defeat in the Iran-Iraq war had the West not decisively supported Iraq was Iranian power *combined* with the massive internal threat mounted by the Iraqi Kurds. Hence, an external threat may become pressing if internal factors affect the magnitude of the external threat, which again proves the point of omnibalancing.

Since Iraqi Kurdistan broke away from the Iraqi body in 1991, Baghdad has many a time invited the Kurds to renew the dialogue with the central government and succumb to the leadership of Saddam Hussein.<sup>89</sup> The Iraqi president frequently addresses ‘the abnormal situation’ of the autonomous entity in the north, and voices desires to bring the break-away region under the control of Baghdad. In July 2001, the Iraqi president spoke extensively of the people in the area of self-rule before his self-appointed Legislative Council of the Kurdistan Autonomous Region.<sup>90</sup> The president was adamant that if the Kurds of the north would determine their political and national future ‘their choice will not be anything but a genuine Iraqi nationalist choice ... because the state of affairs of our people in Iraq is one, be they Arab or Kurds’. Moreover, his capability ‘resolving any situation that befalls Iraq’ has clear implications for the Kurdish issue, and Saddam regularly stresses Iraqi nationhood remaining the overriding principle, since ‘Basra belongs to the Kurdish people as much as Al-Sulaymaniyah belongs to people from Al-Najaf’. The unity of the country was, according to the president, in fact served when the three northern governates were in all but name separated from the Iraqi body in 1991, as ‘we wanted the Kurdish people to go through this experience so that they can come to realize who represents them in his conscience, mind, and policies’. In view of this, there appears to be no doubt that the regime of Saddam Hussein bides its time and will act when the time is right.

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<sup>89</sup>. E.g. *AFP*, 10 March 2000.

<sup>90</sup>. All the following quotes are from *Iraq News*, 16 July, 2001, ‘Saddam Threatens Kurds, Iraq TV, July 15’, (FBIS Translated Excerpt).

### 6.3.2 Syria

Syria's role in the political development of Northern Iraq has not been particularly pronounced and the country has been a minor actor despite its geographical location of bordering the autonomous region. It has, however, had certain leverage, as it since the mid-1990s from time to time has been the only route in and out of landlocked 'Free Kurdistan'.

In the 1990s, access to water became one of the most pressing political issues for Damascus, a state of affairs which compelled the Syrians to use the Kurdish card, i.e. the PKK, in an attempt to force Ankara to adopt a more cooperative stance on the sharing of the Euphrates-water. As such, coupled with the issue of water, the regional Kurdish question *per se* has not stood out in Syrian politics. In command of its own Kurdish question, Syria has, however, been in a position to utilise the Kurdish card more freely than Iran and Turkey. Such Syrian backing of the PKK has naturally impacted on developments in Northern Iraq as that support has contributed to instability in the area, but any direct Syrian involvement in the region of self-rule has reached no great heights. Syria may well have advocated co-operation between the PKK and the KDP as this, in Olsons's phrase, would have 'provide[d] a potential corridor via northern Iraq between Syria and [its long-time ally] Iran',<sup>91</sup> a vision Turkey, however, would not have shared.

Syria may be characterised as a middle ranking power in a penetrated regional system, as do Ehteshami and Hinnebush (who in this definition also include Iran), suggesting that it is classed as a middle power in the global system but represents a key actor in the regional system. Syria is indeed 'distinguishable from lesser regional powers by ... [its] centrality to the regional power balance',<sup>92</sup> for instance illustrated by its requested participation in the attempted framework of regional co-operation following the establishment of the Iraqi Kurdish autonomous entity 1991. However, in the late 1990s, largely as a result of the consolidation of the alliance between Turkey and Israel (and the role

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<sup>91</sup>. Olson (2001), p. 25.

played therein by the USA), Syria's position weakened significantly as in October 1998 it was forced to expel Abdullah Öcalan in order to avoid a Turkish declaration of war. President Hafiz al-Asad had ventured to Tehran a few months earlier in an attempt to reinvigorate his country's ties with the Islamic Republic,<sup>93</sup> in possible preparation for more challenging times, but Iran's own problems with the Taliban next-door<sup>94</sup> meant no tangible support was forthcoming as Damascus found itself in difficulties in its relations with Ankara.

As it lost its PKK-card, Damascus also lost its foremost political lever against its powerful northern neighbour, and as a result its position as a middle ranking power, a key actor in the region, came into question. Indeed, this corresponds with Olson's concluding remark that 'it wreaks havoc with Syria's ability to be a major player in the politics of northern Iraq and it lessens Syria's usefulness to Iran as an ally in the eastern Mediterranean'.<sup>95</sup> Syria's seeking of an improvement in relations with Iraq<sup>96</sup> can be seen as an attempt to regain some of its lost regional influence, and such policies may have implications for the situation in Iraqi Kurdistan.

### 6.3.3 Israel

Small in size but a political heavyweight on the regional scene, Israel greeted the post-Kuwait war partitioning of its greatest foe Iraq with profound satisfaction. Not having such a strong, centralised power in its vicinity holding such exceptional levels of hostility towards the Jewish state was very much in the interest of Tel Aviv. In fact, Israel may be the only regional country that has

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<sup>92</sup>. Ehteshami and Hinnebusch (1997), pp. 6-7.

<sup>93</sup>. Olson (1998b), p. 19.

<sup>94</sup>. The killing of eight Iranian diplomats and one journalist at the Iranian consulate in Mazar-e Sharif by advancing Talabani troops brought the two countries to the brink of war in the autumn of 1998. See Barzin, *MEI*, No 583, 18 September 1998.

<sup>95</sup>. Olson (2001), p. 157. An interesting account of Syrian-Iranian relations, characterised by political rivalry and pragmatic co-operation, is Hussein J. Agha's and Ahmad S. Khalidi's study *Syria and Iran. Rivalry and Cooperation*, (1995) London: Pinter (The Royal Institute of International Affairs).

<sup>96</sup>. The borders were reopened in 1997. The second Arab head of government to visit Iraq since 1991 (after Jordan in November 2000), Syrian Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa Miro arrived

anything to gain from the dissolution of Iraq and the creation of an independent Kurdistan.<sup>97</sup> Therefore Israeli activities in the autonomous region were not unexpected.

Similar to other countries involved in the autonomous region, the policy of Israel is neither clear nor transparent, but that the Kurdish self-ruling region in Northern Iraq interests Israel in a multi-dimensional way is unmistakable. Supporting the Kurdish nationalist movement in Northern Iraq consequentially represents a policy of weakening Iraq and by extension the Arabs. Apart from these obvious desires to militarily incapacitate Iraq, or at least to severely decrease the capability of Iraqi Baathists, politically and militarily, a further reason for Israeli interest in the region may well be gaining access to the Persian Gulf and its oil resources, and for this purpose the easiest penetration point would be the semi-independent Iraqi Kurdistan. Iraq is certainly the weak point in order to gain access to the Persian Gulf, particularly since Jordan is close to Israel in relations.

The issue of Northern Iraq has clear links to the ties between Israel and Turkey and with the increased domain of Israel's influence, which has wider implications. With the expansion of relations between Turkey and Israel, the latter can easily through the Turkish security service MIT closely follow and possibly also influence developments in the autonomous region. In other words, Israel is certainly present but perhaps not directly.

The Israelis assisted the Iraqi Kurds throughout the 1960s and 1970s,<sup>98</sup> and following the establishment of the autonomous region in 1991, Israeli intelligence Mossad was in all likelihood establishing itself there, although no official contacts have been forged since mid-1970s. Such strategic thinking goes back to the first years of the establishment of the Jewish state. The first president

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in Baghdad in early August 2001, in addition being the first Syrian prime minister to visit Iraq in 20 years. *AP*, August 11 2001.

<sup>97</sup>. Russia may also favour such a development, in view of the Soviet support that brought about and sustained the Iranian-Kurdish Mahabad Republic in 1946.

<sup>98</sup>. For an interesting and illuminating account of Israel's activities Iraqi Kurdistan during the 1960s and 1970s, see chs 7 and 8 in Jonathan Randal, (1998), *Kurdistan. After such knowledge, what forgiveness?*, London: Bloomsbury. See also McDowall (1996), p. 320.

of Israel, Ben Gurion, advocated strong relations with the non-Arabs in the region and in the 1960s, good relations characterised Iranian and Israeli interaction, as well as Israeli-Iraqi Kurdish communications.<sup>99</sup> However, with the inevitable changes in relations that followed the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Israeli policy was reformulated to destabilise Iran, just as it had sought the destabilisation of Arab countries. It must be emphasised here that it is *ideologically* in the interest of Israel to dismember a Muslim state, although ideology when pitted against national interest, as discussed in Iran's foreign policy-making with regard to Iraqi Kurdistan, often loses out.

The Islamic Republic would accordingly feature in the anti-Muslim strategy of Israel, and alongside the objective of contributing to the demise of the current regime in Iraq, Tel Aviv may also use the Kurdish region of self-rule (alongside Turkish-inhabited Caucasus and Central Asia) as a base from which to monitor and assess developments in neighbouring Iran. Such Israeli policy of destabilisation should be seen against the background of the triangular relationship that has in later years developed between the USA, Turkey and Israel.<sup>100</sup> The 'Kurdish card' is important in this alliance in its capacity as a political lever to be used against Iraq but conceivably also Iran. Presently, as the good ties with Turkey indicate, Israel's policies of developing strong relations with non-Arabs in region apply to Turkey, seen for instance in the role Israel supposedly played in finding and capturing PKK-leader Öcalan in late 1999.<sup>101</sup>

As Israel sought investment in the Middle East, Turkey with its GAP project provided great potential, but in exchange for the water Israel was offered, Tel Aviv had to assist Ankara in its fight against the PKK. Because of its involvement in the Turkish Kurdish question, Israel landed itself in difficulties following the February 1999 capture of Öcalan, for which Israeli and American intelligence services allegedly had been hard at work. When Israeli diplomatic

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<sup>99</sup>. Ofra Bengio has written extensively about this in her *The Kurdish Rebellion in Iraq*, (1998), Tel Aviv (publisher unknown).

<sup>100</sup>. See for instance Jonathan Marcus' analysis 'Middle East's 'phantom alliance'', *BBC*, February 18, 1999.

<sup>101</sup>. Due to their strong military alliance, Israel and Turkey have reportedly provided each other with intelligence on militant groups - co-operation that suggests Mossad's assistance in tracing Öcalan. See for instance *AP*, February 18 1999, and *AFP*, 19 February 1999.

missions across Europe were targeted by angry Kurdish mobs with three Kurdish demonstrators being shot dead at the Israeli consulate in Berlin, such 'unexpected by-products of its improving relations with Turkey'<sup>102</sup> produced feelings of distress and disbelief in Tel Aviv, as such consequences for the Jewish state had not been anticipated. The alliance with Turkey certainly made Israel a present-day actor in Kurdish politics, and the Israelis seemingly have more to win than lose in this renewed role.<sup>103</sup>

#### 6.3.4 Russia

A former super power but still a major power in the region, Russia's influence and interests in the Middle East are significant. Russia has good relations with Iran, Iraq and Syria - all countries with Kurdish populations. The issue of the Caspian Sea and its gas-deposits with the geostrategic interests it generates, is of course important, and in seeking a renewed role in the Middle East Russia does not overlook the autonomous region of Northern Iraq.

For the Russians, the Kurdish card has in the first instance related to the Turkish Kurds, but as events unfolded, the main arena for Kurdish-related politics, has indeed been Central Kurdistan. As Turkey militarily as well as politically has supported the Chechen insurgents in their struggle for independence from Russia in the early 1990s, Moscow provided the PKK with similar aid - i.e. the Chechen card pit against the Kurdish card served to bring the Russians into Northern Iraq.<sup>104</sup> Russia's 'near abroad' foreign policy (denoting Moscow's efforts to reassert Russian dominance over the former Soviet Union's territories in Central Asia and the Caucasus)<sup>105</sup> can thus be seen to connect to Northern Iraq through Russian support of the PKK.

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<sup>102</sup> Robins (2000), p 77.

<sup>103</sup> This is discussed at length by Olson (2001), pp. 152-55.

<sup>104</sup> Id. (1998a), p. 6. Olson further discusses this in his book of 2001, pp. 180-181.

<sup>105</sup> This concept is examined in Maxim Shashenkov's *Security issues of the ex-Soviet Central Asian Republics*, (1992), London: Brassey's (for the Centre for Defence Studies). Tiouline also deals with this issue in his 'Russian Diplomacy: the Problems of Transition' in M. Mozaffari (ed.), *Security Politics in the Commonwealth of Independent States* (1997), London: Macmillan, pp. 35-52, as does Philip Roeder (1997), 'From Hierarchy to Hegemony: The Post-Soviet Security Complex', in David Lake and Patrick Morgan (eds.), *Regional Orders: Building*

An indication of Moscow's interest in the wider geopolitical importance of the Kurdish question is the following statement of a Russian general in the spring of 1996:

An independent Kurdish state must be created. If we are able to settle the differences between Armenia and Azerbaijan and draw them to our side, we would be able to provide the Kurds arms via Armenia: by helping the Kurds, we help ourselves. ... Turkey within the framework of NATO could control the Caucasus with an aircraft carrier in the Black Sea. Thanks to the Kurds, we can prevent this.<sup>106</sup>

The policy of actively curtailing Turkish expansionist ambitions became more nuanced towards the end of 1996 when Turkey's Tancu Ciller in the capacity of Minister of Foreign Affairs, during a trip to Moscow agreed to a 'Protocol of Co-operation against Terrorism', which in effect meant the cessation of both countries' military support to the Chechen and Kurdish nationalist causes.<sup>107</sup> A further sign of Russia forsaking its Kurdish card in order to focus on co-operative measures regarding the Caspian Sea basin's oil and gas resources, came when Moscow in late 1998 refused granting Abdullah Öcalan political asylum.<sup>108</sup>

On the issue of Iraq as a whole, Russia has for some time proclaimed that it is now appropriate to lift the sanctions on Iraq,<sup>109</sup> which, Moscow envisages, should be done under international supervision and in line with relevant UN Security Council resolutions.<sup>110</sup> Eager to revive previous Russian-Iraqi co-operation, Moscow has called for a cessation of the air raids conducted by the UK and USA in the north and south of the country, and supports the removal of

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*Security in a New World*, University Park Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, pp. 219-244.

<sup>106</sup> Quoted in Olson (2001), pp. 182-83.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. p. 186.

<sup>108</sup> An analysis of which is provided by Olson (2001), pp. 201-3.

<sup>109</sup> Russia began as early as 1994 to show its support for Iraq, as examined by Anthony Cordesman and Ahmed Hashim (1997), *Iraq. Sanctions and Beyond*, Boulder, Co: Westview Press pp. 206-7.

<sup>110</sup> In July 2001, for instance, Moscow used its veto to block the UN Security Council decision on new 'smart sanctions' against Iraq. This may not be unrelated to Russia having been offered

the no-fly zones. The Russians are not advocates of a pro-Kurdish policy with regard to the Iraqi Kurds, and a trip to the north by the Russian ambassador to Iraq in the late 1990s, offering mediation between Baghdad and the Kurds, was quite likely to have been undertaken at the request of the Iraqi President.<sup>111</sup>

### 6.3.5 The main non-Iraqi Kurdish political groups

The ever-present issue of conflicting interests on an inter-Kurdish level poses problems, which are difficult to manage for the Iraqi Kurdish leadership. Inter-Kurdish relations have in fact throughout Kurdish history been fraught with difficulties. Back in the 1960s Mullah Mustafa Barzani sought the mobilisation of Kurdish organisations all over Kurdistan, to use as a 'strategic resource', while he at the same time had to control the various groupings from adopting and promoting their own political agendas and challenging the Iraqi Kurds to the leadership of the Kurdish national movement.<sup>112</sup> Such rivalry is still very much part of Kurdish politics.

With developments in the decade of the post-Kuwait crisis, a new dimension has added to the overall complexity of the Kurdish problem in Iraq. Until the early 1990s, the 'bipolar' Kurdish conflict of two main opponents, the KDP and the PUK, was, with the PKK's arrival in 'Free Kurdistan', transformed into a 'three-cornered conflict'.<sup>113</sup> As the KDP-I also seized the opportunity to operate from the central power vacuum constituting Northern Iraq, the notion could even be extended to a 'four-cornered conflict'.

Since the Kurds of the safe haven had to keep the ties with Tehran and Ankara as intact as they possibly could, friction in political relations with both Iranian

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Iraqi oil-deals on very favourable conditions once the sanctions are lifted. See e.g. Hussain Hindawi, *UPI*, 10 July 2001 and *Jordan Times*, July 16 2001.

<sup>111</sup>. Gunter (1999), p. 97.

<sup>112</sup>. Discussed by Ferhad Ibrahim in his paper 'The Dynamics of Kurdish-Kurdish Relations and their Relevance for Developments in the 1990s: PKK, PUK and KDP' presented at the *Kurdological Conference Between Imagination & Denial. Kurds as subjects and objects of political and social processes*, May 29-31, Berlin 9 (1998).

<sup>113</sup>. Kutschera, *The Middle East*, November 1995.

and Turkish Kurds became unavoidable. However, the PKK during the 1990s was more powerful and assertive than its Iranian counterpart, as the PKK and the Iraqi Kurds 'each consider themselves to be the leading force in the struggle for the Kurdish liberation'.<sup>114</sup> The Kurdistan's Workers Party never recognised the authority of the regional government in Arbil, an attitude that may, in the words of Sheikmous, either be 'a result of their narrowminded sectarianism and immaturity or ... [the PKK being] incited by Iran and Syria to destabilise the situation in Iraqi Kurdistan'.<sup>115</sup> Reacting to such a stance, the Iraqi Kurds have no wish to jeopardise the very existence of self-rule by taking the side of the PKK and militarily confronting the Turkish army. With the aim to neutralise the PKK – at least in military terms, the parliament in Arbil early on made plans for a coherent Iraqi Kurdish military operation. The PKK was put on the defensive in Northern Iraq, but Öcalan made progress during 1993 when relations with the PUK became cordial. As the conflict between the KDP and the PUK exploded into full-scale warfare, the PKK remained close to the PUK.<sup>116</sup>

The Iraqi-Kurdish infighting in the mid-1990s had the effect of the PKK cementing its positions in the area, bringing the wrath of the Turkish army upon the fragile autonomous entity, which, as previously examined, happened on a massive scale in the spring of 1995. Although the KDP and frequently also the PUK consider the PKK a terrorist organisation that should not be allowed to roam freely in Iraqi Kurdistan, it is the KDP that has had to tackle the problem head on in its capacity of controlling the northernmost areas of the autonomous region, i.e. the Turkish borders. This has caused violent clashes with the PKK on a number of occasions.

The PKK was the main loser when the Iraqi Kurds finally agreed to put an end to their war, and the PUK, as a result of the Washington Agreement in 1998, closed down offices and bases of its former ally in the southern parts of the autonomous region. Turkish army officers were even allowed into PUK-

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<sup>114</sup> Id. (1994).

<sup>115</sup> Sheikmous (1999), p. 62.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. pp. 63-64.

controlled territory in order to inspect the results of the operations.<sup>117</sup> Yet, the agreement reached in Washington did not resolve the PKK-issue between the two Iraqi Kurdish antagonists.<sup>118</sup>

The near dissolution of the PKK after the capture and imprisonment of its leader in 1999 had effects also on developments in Northern Iraq. Following the surrender of most the movement's militia on the orders of the imprisoned Abdullah Öcalan, a remaining group of a few thousand zealous PKK fighters in the borderlands of Turkish/Iranian/Iraqi Kurdistan came to represent a true Jacobin movement, determined to impose their aims at whatever cost, in line with the conviction that the end justifies the means. The response of the Turkish government, on the other hand, to former PKK-members pursuing cultural rights for the Kurds of Turkey through political approaches has been repeating its mantra that it intends not to negotiate with the PKK. Instead the Turkish forces were to intensify their efforts to neutralise the Kurdistan Workers' Party, and military operations involving the KDP, the PUK and the Turkish army have continued into the new decade, largely on the territory of Iraqi Kurdistan.<sup>119</sup>

The KDP-I has for geopolitical reasons enjoyed closer relations with the PUK than the KDP, predictably as the latter over long periods of time in the 1980s co-operated with the Iranian forces in Tehran's fight against the insurgents in Iranian Kurdistan. The PUK then sympathetically provided the KDP-I's leadership with a safe haven within its territory where the latter also put up bases.<sup>120</sup> The protection offered by the PUK did, however, have its limits and when the Iranian army made its military incursions into Northern Iraq in the early and mid-1990s, the KDP-I was again left vulnerable to Iranian military might.

After having examined the actions of these different players on the regional scene, the focus will now shift to actors on the global level, and there will be an

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<sup>117</sup>. Owen Bowcott, *The Guardian*, February 14 1999.

<sup>118</sup>. The KDP claims that the PUK failed to properly close all the PKK offices in Suleymaniya: in the words of Mr Rahman 'they just took off the banners, and the people are still there' (London, 1999).

<sup>119</sup>. As for instance in the late summer of 2001, see Reuters, 27 August, 2001.

attempt to examine how the policies of such international powers and bodies as the European Union, the USA and the United Nations have shaped the Kurdish scene in Northern Iraq.

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<sup>120</sup>. As explained by Mr. Valadbeighi, Tehran, 2001.

## Chapter 7: Iraqi Kurdistan in the Global Arena

### 7.1 The dynamics of relations

As established in the previous chapter, regional stability and the preservation of the state system are primary goals for most actors in the Middle East. A system-destabilising confrontation in the region is likely to serve Kurdish interests rather than those of the remaining superpower, the international community or the regional powers. Moreover, internal politics in the countries surrounding the Iraqi Kurdish self-ruling area have often had a direct effect on the autonomous region. As an issue embedded in the characteristically conflictual relationships between Turks, Persians, and Arabs, its permanent settlement is likely to depend heavily on progress in relations between these countries, in combination with interests of global powers. As history bears witness, any solution would be highly vulnerable to interference if the neighbours or other influential countries were at odds.

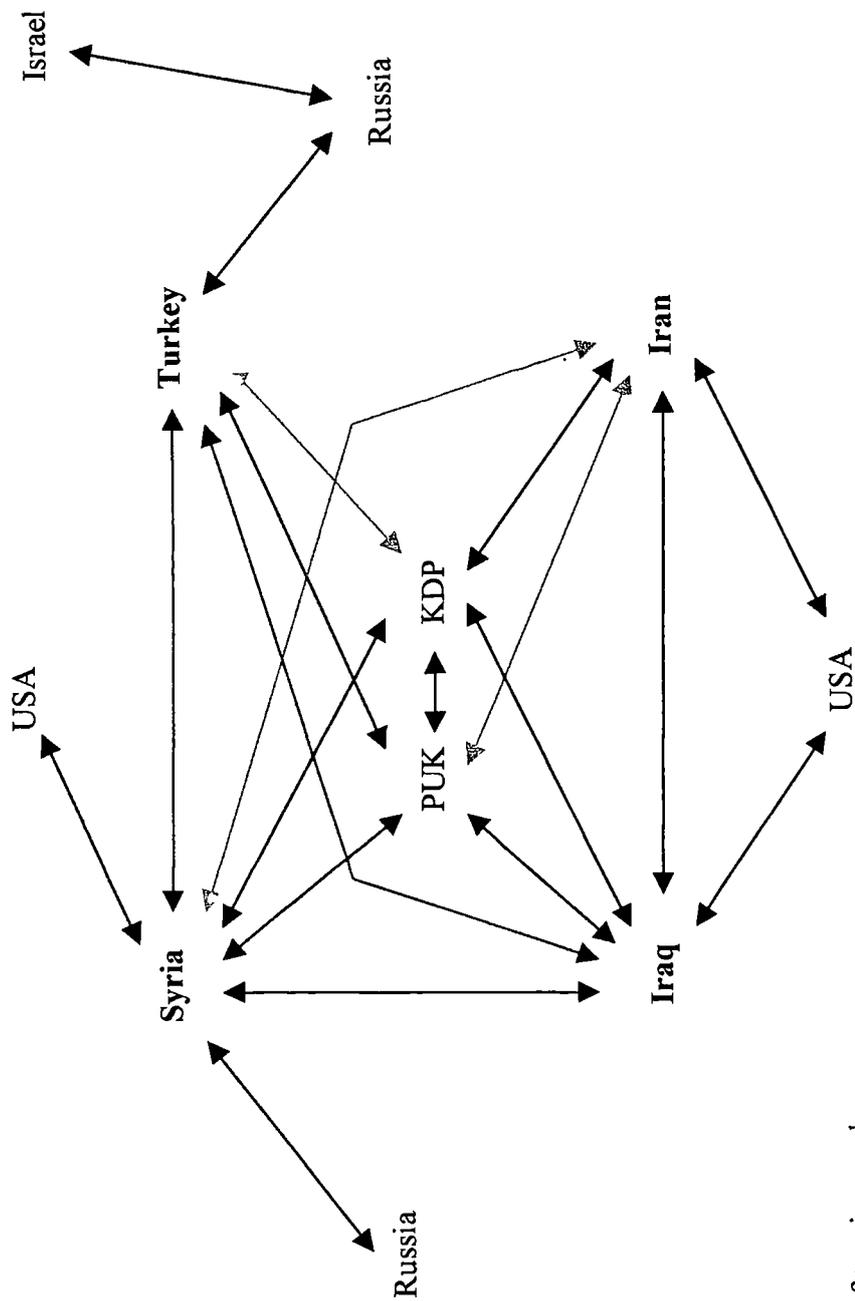
With Iraqi Kurdistan as the focal point, Figure 7.1 - *The Dynamics of Relations over Iraqi Kurdistan* - attempts to establish the present lines of tension and co-operation in the region, with an emphasis on a constant fluctuation in relations. As previously indicated, regional relations are not represented by static formations of alliances and rigid policies. The chart features inter-Kurdish relations at the centre (only the two main actors in Iraqi Kurdish politics are considered here) surrounded by regional as well as global powers. While the PUK and the KDP alike try to maintain cordial relations with Iran and Turkey respectively, in addition to keeping Damascus well disposed towards the Kurdish self-ruling area, Baghdad never becomes discarded as a negotiating partner. All these relationships are, however, as the chart indicates, delicately balanced and easily disturbed by conflicts. Israel certainly is a regional player, but since it does not border the autonomous region and hence does not *directly* affect developments there, the Jewish state is in this figure pictured as an external player, along with the USA and Russia. Another reason for Israel's external position is that it has no direct dealings with either the PUK or the KDP,

and it enjoys positive relations with only one regional state in this chart, namely Turkey. The EU has been allowed to take a neutral position.

The chart further shows how the external actor the USA, through its entering into a collaborative arrangement with the regional actors Turkey and Israel, affects and influences the political development of Northern Iraq. This alliance often reinforces Turkey's position vis-à-vis the Iraqi Kurds, but it also appears that Ankara occasionally is at the receiving end of American pressure in enforcing the will of Washington on the Kurds of Northern Iraq. Syrian-American relations are far from cordial, but it is mainly Iraq and Iran with whom the US maintains adversarial relationships – both seeking dominant positions in the region. Meanwhile, Russia (with the perceived ambition to step into the shoes of the former USSR) is anxious to counter US policies in the Middle East and energetically tries to balance the American presence, most notably in and around the Caspian Sea basin. As elaborated on above, there are clear parallels to the situation in Northern Iraq, and the strategic importance of the Kurdish area of self-rule to a certain extent lies in how it can best be utilised in order exert influence in the wider region and control of the valuable natural resources.

As Figure 7.1 clearly shows, the autonomous region in Northern Iraq is largely characterised by political instability, and it represents a situation where a conflict in the centre tends to exacerbate others in the immediate neighbourhood. There are numerous examples presented above to support this theory: briefly, the outbreak of KDP-PUK hostilities in mid-1994 served to increase the presence of the PKK in the area of self-rule, which invited many Turkish invasions of the autonomous region. Iran invaded Northern Iraq most notably in 1996 in pursuit of KDP-I Kurds who were acting from Iraqi Kurdish territory. Moreover, when the KDP needed backing in face of Iranian military assistance to PUK, the Iraqi army was invited in – action that Baghdad was subsequently disciplined for, as Washington retaliated by bombing southern Iraq. Political developments in Iraqi Kurdistan never fail to produce reverberations in the surrounding area and therefore the ensuing dynamics of relations, in alternating between tension and co-operation, are fascinating to observe. One may even draw the conclusion that Iraqi Kurdistan in its current form is a conflict enhancer.

7.1 The dynamics of relations over Iraqi Kurdistan



Lines of tension: red  
 Lines of co-operation:  
 Lines of fluctuating relations: blue

EU: neutral player, balancing actor between USA and Russia

## **7.2 The remaining superpower**

Ever since President Woodrow Wilson in the aftermath of the First World War presented his 'Fourteen Points', which incorporated pledges for Kurdish autonomy, the Kurds have looked to the USA to deliver a solution to injustices inflicted in the past.

US policy-making on the Kurdish issue in Iraq is particularly interesting when evaluating Kurdish politics over the past four decades. The role of the US was a prominent factor in the 1970s revolt as well as the 1990s' uprising, in so far as vital support was withdrawn in 1975 and military assistance was not forthcoming in 1991. After 1975 the Kurds were hardly recognised up until the 1990s, when the USA needed a power base in the Middle East. The good relations previously enjoyed with Iran were abruptly brought to an end with the Islamic Revolution in 1979, and with that an important political and military outpost for the Americans in the region disappeared. Following this, Washington largely supported Iraq, a relationship in which certain influence was exerted in return for substantial financial support for the war with Iran. When seeking an oppositional foothold in the region, Northern Iraq provided an ideal venue for extra-regional forces, as it was utilised by the USA until 1996 when Washington withdrew its large intelligence operation from the area of self-rule.

### 7.2.1 American policies regarding Northern Iraq

At the end of the Kuwait War the USA made itself unpopular among the people of Iraq when it failed to prevent Baghdad's crack down on the Iraqi insurgents heeding America's call to overthrow the dictatorial Baathist regime. Washington's shifting policy-making on the issue is remarkable. The policy of the US government appeared to have been rapidly altered in a profound way: preventing the disintegration of Iraq came to supersede the initial aim of ousting Saddam Hussein from power. It was claimed that active support for the

rebellions would have constituted unjustified interference in the internal affairs of Iraq, signifying American acquiescence of the Iraqi military operations.<sup>1</sup>

Following the announcement of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 688, Washington took charge of the nascent *Operation Provide Comfort* (OPC), a protective shield formed in order to provide aid to the refugees (named in a positive fashion in a conventional effort to legitimise the intervention). This initiative was, however, regarded as too little too late, and as Frelick states, 'the assistance that did arrive was as much to shore up U.S. alliances with friendly governments as to assist the refugees'.<sup>2</sup> The UNSC did not formally decide on such humanitarian intervention in Northern Iraq in favour of the Kurdish refugees. Western powers, in referring to Resolution 688 as the legal foundation, intervened on their own initiative, and the UNSC never took the legality of the intervention under consideration.

The OPC coalition withdrew from Northern Iraq in mid-July 1991, and despite Washington's previous reservations regarding interference in Iraq's internal affairs, the United States began promoting the idea of a no-fly zone in Northern Iraq. While providing part of the rationale for the no-fly zones, it is debateable whether Resolution 688, as interpreted by the United States approved of military intervention in Northern Iraq in order to protect the Kurds from 'the repression in all its forms inflicted by the Iraqi authorities'.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, acting under Resolution 688, a new security regime - *Operation Poised Hammer* (OPH) - an air patrolling operation above the 36<sup>th</sup> parallel, was established, amidst serious criticism from several members of the UN.<sup>4</sup> This no-fly zone had been formulated in tight co-operation with Turkey, from whose soil the air surveillance operations were carried out. In view of the opposition from the UN to Washington's actions in Northern Iraq, it is worth noting in passing that the

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<sup>1</sup>. Rather, the reason appears to have been Washington's fear of the break-up of the country amidst an Islamic radicalisation of the Iraqi Shiites promoted by Iran. See Faleh 'Abd al-Jabbar's 'Why the Intifada failed' in Fran Hazelton (ed.) (1994), *Iraq Since the Gulf War. Prospects for Democracy*, London: Zed Books, pp. 97-117.

<sup>2</sup>. Frelick (1993), pp. 33-34.

<sup>3</sup>. Paragraph 4 of UNSC Resolution 688, 5 April 1991. For the full text of all UNSC Resolutions, see the UN Documentation Centre at <http://www.un.org/documents/>.

<sup>4</sup>. O'Balance (1996), p. 193.

remaining superpower has had far from a relationship free of friction with the world organisation, particularly in the post-Cold War era. America has often given the impression that while Washington is the decision-maker, the UN, at best, is there to serve as its parliament.<sup>5</sup>

The dependence on Turkish permission made the OPH vulnerable from the start, since it 'subordinate[d] US policy towards the Iraqi Kurds to short-term Turkish domestic considerations'.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, as a former Secretary of State noted, without producing a genuine strategy with a clear political framework 'America was ... building its anti-Saddam base on shaky foundations, because it had not reached a political understanding with Turkey about autonomy for northern Iraq'.<sup>7</sup> This favourable arrangement for Ankara enabled the Turkish generals to impose conditions on specific military operations.

Mainly due to the KDP's short-lived alliance with Baghdad,<sup>8</sup> the OPH was brought to an end in December 1996. The fact that Barzani had proved willing to invite Saddam Hussein and his army back into their self-rule was a severe blow to the allied commitment to protect the Kurds, and for Washington it provided the pretext to scale down the operation, as long argued for by its main ally Turkey. The fate of the OPH certainly does not appear to have been unrelated to the American failure to take decisive action to safeguard its interests on the ground when the Iraqi army invaded in August 1996, and the Iraqis had little trouble finding the CIA-financed Arbil-based Iraqi opposition.

The OPH was replaced by a new surveillance system in January 1997, *Operation Northern Watch*, restricted to aerial reconnaissance at Ankara's insistence and operated by the Americans and Turks with only symbolic European participation from Britain.<sup>9</sup> Whether in its current shape or possibly replaced by yet another system of monitoring and protecting the north of Iraq, such an undertaking is

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<sup>5</sup> The adversarial US-UN relations of the first half of the 1990s are dealt with in detail by former Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in his book *Unvanquished. A U.S. - U.N. Saga*, London: I.B. Tauris (1999).

<sup>6</sup> Whitely (1995), p. 145.

<sup>7</sup> Kissinger, H., *The Daily Telegraph*, 8 October, 1996.

<sup>8</sup> As outlined in chapter one, section 1.5.3.

<sup>9</sup> Gunter (1999), p. 88.

expected to continue for some time to come. This is underlined by Washington's continued insistence on the implementation of its interpretation of Resolution 688.<sup>10</sup>

Events of the 1990s clearly indicated that the US had struck a deal with Turkey over the Kurdish question, in which it makes the distinction between 'good Kurds' (with reference to the Iraqi Kurds) and 'bad Kurds' (denoting the Kurds of Turkey). Because of American animosity against Saddam Hussein's regime, and its continued air surveillance protection over Central Kurdistan, the Iraqi Kurds have come to enjoy a certain amount of US support. However, throughout the 1990s, Washington was one of very few countries giving Ankara support for the frequent Turkish incursions into Northern Iraq, outside intervention the Americans with their presence essentially were supposed to be protecting the Kurds from. With such selective application of the no-fly zone, the Iraqi Kurds were not as protected as previously led to believe. Moreover, in exchange for assisting Turkey in the capture of Öcalan 1999 and standing firm in its condemnation of the Kurdish terrorist leader,<sup>11</sup> the US surely secured further access to the Incirlik airbase in southeastern Turkey from which it directs its surveillance flights over Northern Iraq.<sup>12</sup>

Washington organised several peace conferences during the mid-1990s attempting to reconcile Barzani and Talabani, but a permanent cessation of fighting was not achieved until September 1998. Such American efforts to reconcile Barzani and Talabani could in all probability be attributed to Washington's desire for both leaders to pose a fresh united challenge to Saddam Hussein's regime.

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<sup>10</sup>. Ibid. p. 108.

<sup>11</sup>. Although 'direct involvement' in the capture of the PKK-leader was denied, Washington acknowledged engaging in 'extensive diplomatic efforts' to secure Ocalan's arrest and transfer to Turkey. See Arshad Mohammed for *Reuters*, February 16 1999.

<sup>12</sup>. See *MEI*, No 594, 26 February 1999.

### 7.2.2 The policy of 'dual containment' and the Iraqi Kurds

A major element of Washington's Middle East policies has been that of 'dual containment' of Iraq and Iran (the two states in the Gulf area that present a perceived threat to US interests), a policy in which the Iraqi Kurds naturally feature. Although the United States has engaged in containment politics since the middle of the twentieth century (with the most prominent feature of post-1945 American foreign policy being the containment of communism), the US practice of 'dual containment' came to signify a new phase of American foreign policy-making in the Middle East. Meant to be an 'offensive' containment in neutralising Iran and Iraq - using instruments such as economic sanctions, arms embargoes and political isolation - it was product of the Clinton Administration, announced in May 1993.<sup>13</sup> Previous attempts to try to balance these two regional powers against each other had been both venturesome and had demanded a high level of military capacity, insofar as one was built up in order to counter the other. Such policies were now replaced by a new formula, where simultaneously containing the threats posed by Iran and Iraq would facilitate the promoting of peace between Israel and its Arab neighbours. This policy was supposedly also meant to be in conformity with UNSC resolutions.

This policy has not been without flaws. Since Iraq was heavily sanctioned at the time when US 'dual containment' came into effect, Iran grew progressively stronger in relation to its neighbour, much to American dismay. In order to regulate this unsatisfactory state of affairs - namely an imbalance in favour of Iran - the United States implemented an extensive trade ban in May 1995, the D'Amato Law, in order to isolate Iran to virtually the same degree as Iraq. In other words, the US sought to establish a power balance in which Iran's status was conditioned by that of Iraq.

It is questionable whether the US in its efforts to preserve regional stability has been addressing the right problem. Although stronger than Iraq, Iran does not seem to possess the strategic capabilities needed to present a clear danger to

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<sup>13</sup>. Drake (1994).

America's interests in the area, regardless of how radical its policies might have been. One could argue in favour of the 'dual containment' policy, since Iran's influence in North Africa and the Arab Middle East during this period has declined. However, such an assessment is most likely a misconception, because on closer examination it appears to be rather the result of a change in Tehran's strategic priorities, that is, shifting its foreign and economic policy-making priorities towards Asia, and away from the Arab lands.

Clearly this US policy of dually containing Iran and Iraq has not proved to be satisfactory in offering a solution to the problems faced by the Americans in the Gulf region. Even senior policy-makers in high-level government services have acknowledged that a more nuanced approach is seriously needed.<sup>14</sup> However, despite criticism both domestically and internationally, 'dual containment' may go on for some time to come, although the policy has lost most of its previous (although limited) impact. George W. Bush recently renewed the trade and investment ban on Iran,<sup>15</sup> but the Islamic Republic, clearly in the process of reasserting itself in the Gulf region, has for all intents and purposes escaped Washington's containment politics through its improvement of relations with Saudi Arabia and many Gulf states.

Although the current Administration does not use the term 'dual containment', it is equally committed to it, as was former Democrat President Clinton. In his State of Union address in late January 2002, President Bush singled out three countries as constituting threats to the international system, two of which have been targeted for almost a decade through policies of containment.<sup>16</sup>

'Dual containment' has provided much of the framework for US policies in the region, including the Kurdish situation in Northern Iraq. For instance, when America perceived Iran trying to break out of its regional isolation brought about by 'dual containment', for instance by brokering peace between the warring

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<sup>14</sup>. Brzezinsky, Scowcroft and Murphy (1997).

<sup>15</sup>. This law, the Iran Libya Sanctions Act, was widely expected to have come to an end in August 2001 as reported by Beverly Rudy, among others: 'Fresh thinking on Capitol Hill', *MEED*, 6 April 2001.

<sup>16</sup>. George W. Bush's State of the Union address can be found at

Iraqi Kurdish factions in the summer of 1995, Washington stepped in to counter Iranian influence and organised (what proved to be) unsuccessful peace talks in Ireland in August 1995. These were followed up a year later in London, arguably largely a response to the brief Iranian incursion into Northern Iraq in July 1996. Responding to Iraqi disobedience in violating the non-trespassable 36<sup>th</sup> parallel in August 1996 and in doing so disrupting its containment, the US launched a series of air missile attacks against military targets in southern Iraq the following month. The relatively minor nature of this attack, however, did not do much to diminish the considerable success of the Iraqi military operation. The fact that the USA had been unable to shore up support for military action against Iraq from its former allies, particularly in the Arab World, was moreover seen as a great victory for Baghdad, and a diplomatic humiliation for the superpower.

The failure of 'dual containment' can in part be attributed to developments in Central Kurdistan. As stated above, Turkey found itself forced to collaborate with Iran in order to regain its full capacity to deal effectively with the PKK and Kurdish nationalism. Hence 'Ankara's geopolitic need to contain the PKK ... thus allowed Iran to put a dent in the "dual containment" policy that the US was implementing to restrain it'.<sup>17</sup> Washington had to accept that its geostrategic policies were disrupted by a middle level regional power opting for cooperation with its regional competitor over the Kurdish issue.

Today's world is one in which polarisation is extremely hazardous and where isolation can easily lead to an even more adverse development. In order to be effective, an isolation policy requires the international community to be firmly united, in itself exceedingly difficult. Consequently, the best solution may be to try to combine more severe measures with flexibility, perhaps promoting a two-way model: to decide upon sanctions, but delay in executing them, which can act as a deterrent. After all, 'in a globalised world sanctions have only a limited effect'.<sup>18</sup>

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<http://www.time.com/time/2002/stateoftheunion/index.html>.

<sup>17</sup>. Olson (2001), p. 21.

<sup>18</sup>. Schäfer (1996).

## 7.3 The European Union

The European Union has a desire to assert its identity on the international political scene, and, as established in the first chapter, it was the Europeans, led by Britain,<sup>19</sup> acting on a Turkish proposal, who advocated the establishment of an UN-supervised region for the Kurds in Northern Iraq following the exodus in the spring of 1991. This reflects a recognition of the fact that in geopolitical and geostrategic terms it is vital for the EU to stay engaged in many issues of the Middle East, since it is not a remote region for the Europeans, but one that is historically, politically and economically linked to Europe.

### 7.3.1 Toward a common foreign policy - conflict and compromise

The institutional framework of the Union naturally lacks the solid base of legitimacy and authority on which a national policy process normally rests, and its multicultural and multilevel character has throughout the years constituted an obstacle in formulating and implementing decisions on a European level. The two institutions in the European Union that play dominant policy roles are the Commission and the Council of Ministers. The former handles preparation of proposals, whereas the latter serves as a forum for negotiation and legislation. The European Parliament has only restricted powers in the policy-making process, but it does have the ability to influence the policy choices made at higher levels.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>. With Iraq being its post-WW1 Mandate, Britain has a special connection to its former client state of Iraq. Stephen Pelletiere has vividly described London's historical role in dealing with the Kurds of Mosul velayat: what later became Northern Iraq. See (1984), pp. 58-68.

<sup>20</sup>. Wallace (1996), pp. 54-57. Moreover, for an account of the European Parliament's position on the Kurds, see Ozan Ceyhun's 'Die EU und die Kurdenfrage' ['The EU and the Kurdish question] *in* *Kurdisches Forum in Deutschland* (1999), *Irakisch-Kurdistan: Status und Perspektiven. Ergebnisse einer Internationalen Tagung 1999 in Berlin [Iraqi Kurdistan: Status and Perspectives. Proceedings from an International Conference in 1999 in Berlin]*, Berlin: Awadani, pp. 137-139.

Interests and self-interests are important factors in the EU policy process and the concept of a *European interest* is very pragmatic and flexible. There have always been considerable disagreements on which kinds of interests carry the greater importance and how and why interests are defined in certain ways. A European regional interest is compounded of the national interests of the member states, and due to its different nature and character, it cannot be defined in the same way as the traditional national interest. The European policy arena symbolises a metaphorical tussle between the self-interests of the member states and pressures for the desired overall European sphere of influence, and 'it is rarely certain that the outcome of the policy dialogue will produce a clear and consistent line of policy amenable to a sustained collective regime'.<sup>21</sup> It seems that in politically uncertain times or when internal problems become too complicated for a member state to solve on its own, there is a tendency to identify more closely with a common interest, an overall European regional interest.<sup>22</sup> A European-level group interest is therefore neither continuous nor permanent in nature.

The European Union conducts a large share of world trade and is an economic giant. In spite of that, it was for a long time not able, or willing, to match this economic power in the political sphere, where it is still very much a pygmy.<sup>23</sup> This antithesis may to a certain degree be explained by the reality that until fairly recently, foreign policy did not form part of the Union's area of responsibility. The occasional co-ordination of foreign policies of individual member states, however, developed into a growing awareness of the general interest in converging positions and establishing joint action on foreign policy matters.

The intergovernmental mechanism constituting the European Political Cooperation (EPC) as found in the provisions of the Single European Act represented the first European attempt to provide an overall direction to the member countries' foreign policies. With its focus on 'quiet, long-term,

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<sup>21</sup>. Wallace (1996), p. 28.

<sup>22</sup>. Ifestos (1987) elaborates on this: p. 112.

<sup>23</sup>. Using Wistricht's antonyms: (1994), p. 142.

preventive diplomacy', the EPC demonstrated considerable shortcomings when dealing with critical situations, although it tended to 'exhibit an action-reaction cycle in which setbacks bring forth renewed efforts at cooperation'.<sup>24</sup> The Middle East was a most important policy area within EPC, as demonstrated by the October War of 1973, which led to the first common declaration being issued. The outbreak of the war produced an EPC response that was initially both vague and fragmented. A common declaration was, however, eventually announced: a call for a ceasefire, followed by an appeal to Israel to withdraw to pre-1967 borders and respect the rights of the Palestinians.<sup>25</sup> This EPC initiative came to pave the way for the subsequent Euro-Arab Dialogue, initiated in late 1973 in response to Arab requests.

As the EPC, in the words of Christopher Hill, was not 'particularly well-suited to handling international crises',<sup>26</sup> the need for a more comprehensive policy became all too clear during the Gulf crisis from August 1990 to February 1991, when the member states were individually active but collectively passive. The idea to co-ordinate national foreign policies of individual member states has been thoroughly debated and was finally incorporated in the 1991 Treaty on European Union (aka the Maastricht Treaty), entered into force in 1993. Its Article J affirmed the establishment of a common foreign and security policy (CFSP) intended to mould the 12 (now 15) individual sets of foreign and security policies into one. Instead of seeking the coordination of member states' foreign policies as the EPC did, the CFSP emphasises the definition of a common policy. As a result, the member states became obliged to conform to the common positions taken in relevant foreign and security matters, which were to be defined by the Council of Ministers.<sup>27</sup>

The proposed objectives of the CFSP as set forward in the Maastricht Treaty included safeguarding common values, fundamental interests and independence of the European Union, strengthening the security of the Union and its Member States, preserving peace and reinforce international security, promoting

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<sup>24</sup>. Hill (1992), pp. 135-136.

<sup>25</sup>. Soetendorp (1999), pp. 101-102.

<sup>26</sup>. Hill (1992), p. 145.

international co-operation, developing and consolidating democracy and the rule of law, the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.<sup>28</sup> These objectives were to be pursued ‘by establishing systematic co-operation between Member States in the conduct of policy ... [and] gradually implementing ... joint action in the areas in which the Member States have essential interests in common’.<sup>29</sup> It is debatable whether this constitutes a solid framework within which a credible policy-making process can progressively develop, and indeed, the progress made in regard to the development of the CFSP is slow. The 15 member states of the Union often differ in deciding which attitudes and policies are most suitable to pursue, and harmonising these various and sometimes incompatible views to formulate a sound and sustainable EU policy is a formidable challenge. In spite of the difficulties, Maastricht’s CFSP marked a promising start to the EU’s future ambitions.<sup>30</sup>

Steps towards a European federation have been taken rather carefully since efforts to maximise influence through common action inevitably clash with concern for the preservation of national sovereignty. A common foreign policy by definition entails a loss of sovereignty on behalf of the member states concerned, and the Union thus faces difficulties on several levels in its foreign policy-making. Attempting to reach a compromise with a degree of substance when negotiating a common position on an important issue is a challenging task, and one that is made more difficult when coupled with the desire to define its political role in a precise and clear manner. Given the fact that considerable time and effort has to be devoted by all member states merely to reach the first stage, the end product emerging may be that of instead of speaking with one voice, Europe has been left without any voice at all. Indeed, under certain circumstances, the Europeans proved most resourceful when they acted separately, although such resourcefulness was not always a result of constructive approaches. In the early days of the CFSP there may also have been an

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<sup>27</sup>. For a presentation on the CFSP see <http://ue.eu.int/pesc/default.asp>.

<sup>28</sup>. Rummel (1992), p. 326.

<sup>29</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>. For an interesting discussion on the CFSP see Charlotte Bretherton and John Vogler (1999), *The European Union as a Global Actor*, London: Routledge, pp. 179-193.

underlying desire of each member state to give the appearance of being resourceful in the absence of a united front on issues of European interest.

Despite the fact that the EU is not speaking unambiguously with one voice, the policy of 'critical/comprehensive dialogue' as pursued in relation to Iran has shown that the EU member states are capable of international dealings as a European unit and have the ability to act in a unified manner. Nevertheless, the joint declarations have always been preceded by considerable negotiation and compromise - predictably the result of attempts to merge several strong opinions into a single posture. Consequently, the voice of the European Union has not always managed to resound more forcefully than individual voices of member states. However, as mentioned earlier in this thesis, the past alone does not determine the future, and the European Union has great potential in the foreign policy arena, which is far from fully explored.

It is encouraging that in recent times the EU has shown determination and forged ahead with its CFSP. In the spring of 2001, for instance, the Union spoke forcefully with one voice and made a considerable contribution to defuse the explosive situation in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), through long-term engagement characterised by a combination of preventive diplomacy and regional integration.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, in January 2002, the EU was considering employing 'targeted sanctions' against Zimbabwe, whose president Robert Mugabe was acting in a manner inconsistent with international norms. The Europeans also sought to co-ordinate action with Washington, an unusual display of concerted political action by the EU member states.<sup>32</sup> These signs are promising and signify a positive trend for the further development of the CFSP.

### 7.3.2 The EU in the Middle East

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<sup>31</sup>. Press release issued following the EU Foreign Minister General Affairs Council meeting on 11 June 2001 on [www.eu2001.se](http://www.eu2001.se).

<sup>32</sup>. See for instance BBC interview with Foreign Office Minister Peter Hain 27 January 2001 at [http://www.bbc.co.uk/otr/intext/20000409\\_int\\_2.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/otr/intext/20000409_int_2.html).

West European security and prosperity are largely dependent on political developments in the Middle East. However, it is important to stress that some EU states are less vulnerable than others in economic terms. Great Britain, for instance, because of the North Sea oil production and reserves, is less dependent than, say, Germany and France, who continue to rely heavily on Middle East oil. This has inevitably led to tensions and disagreements when it comes to coordinating a common EU policy towards the region, and introducing a multi-lateral dimension in relations between the parties.

When elaborating on future EU action on the Kurdish question, it may be useful to make a reference to former policies in the region, such as the 'Euro-Arab dialogue', in which the Arab side constituted the Arab League's twenty-one member states. Within the framework of the EPC with its main capacity to issue declarations and initiate dialogues, this specific discourse was initiated in the early 1970s in order to improve relations between Europe and the Arab world and to promote mutual understanding. Co-operation between the two sides was also promoted in areas such as development, trade and culture - some basic characteristics shared with the EU dialogue policy with the Islamic Republic of Iran of the 1990s. The Euro-Arab dialogue carried on throughout the 1970s, but inter-Arab rivalries largely resulting from Egypt's exclusion from the League after signing the Camp David Peace Treaty with Israel brought it to a standstill in the following decade. Eventually the Europeans sought more rewarding and worthwhile talks among other organisations, like the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC).

In addition to the Euro-Arab Dialogue, there have been bilateral and multilateral co-operation agreements, e.g. the Mediterranean polices, as well as multilevel relations between EU member states and regional states, e.g. the Conference on Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean (CSCM). The latter is closely linked to the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE). Proposed in 1990 by North African and east Mediterranean countries, its central

concern is to establish a stable system of regional co-operation through which it aims to maintain Mediterranean security.<sup>33</sup>

The first EC attempts to formalise its relations with the Arab countries of the Mediterranean date back to the early 1970s, when the EC initiated a series of wide-ranging co-operation agreements with North African and east Mediterranean countries. Aiming to create a free trade zone, these pacts were based on a series of preferential tariff concessions of both industrial and agricultural items. Included were also provisions for EC aid.<sup>34</sup> Building on this, in 1995 the Euro-Mediterranean partnership project was launched, tying the EU's 15 member states to 12 southern Mediterranean countries. In order to preserve peace, security and stability in the region, the aim is to create a new political and economic area by 2010 based on free trade and closer co-operation in areas of energy, water and immigration, but also on the level of regional politics.<sup>35</sup>

For long it appeared that issues of foreign policy relevance dividing the EU were of greater significance than issues leading to a common attitude. However, in contrast, EU relations with Iran, as mentioned above, are particularly interesting, since despite occasional outbursts of dissension from various member states, it has proved to be one of few major issues on which the Union has managed to adopt a joint and unified position. Indeed, the EU's policy of constructive engagement with Iran, which began as a 'critical dialogue' and was later transformed into a 'comprehensive dialogue', is likely to in the long-term future prove positive for the Kurds, as this rapprochement encourages democracy in Iran, a development that is likely to affect the rest of a region in which the Kurds would be main beneficiaries.

The Kurdish question has indeed been recognised by the EU, and it is mainly in Brussels' relations with Turkey, who for long has sought membership in the European Union, that the Kurds constitute an important factor. In 1999 the EU

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<sup>33</sup> Niblock (1993), pp. 251-255.

<sup>34</sup> Islam (1988), p. 69.

<sup>35</sup> Marks (1995), p. 2.

granted Turkey candidate status, on the condition that Ankara meets the political and human rights requirements for E.U. membership – the so-called Copenhagen criteria - before actual negotiations for membership begin. The implementation of a great deal of social reforms is deemed necessary, and when the EU demand measures to guarantee democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities, the Kurds are the first to benefit. In fact, granting greater cultural rights to the Kurds of Turkey is one of the prerequisites set by the EU to start accession talks with Ankara.<sup>36</sup> However, relations have not been free of friction. EU plans to fund a newspaper in Kurdish has angered the Turks as has Brussels' refusal to brand the PKK a terrorist organisation, which Turkish pressure brought about in Britain and the USA.<sup>37</sup> It is, however, much due to EU involvement and insistence that 80 years of Kemalist policies now show signs of changing. Teaching and broadcasting in Kurdish could not have been brought up for discussion prior to the signing of the 'Accession Partnership Agreement' document three years ago. Now there are unprecedented levels of public debate on the issue, which even include suggestions from the liberal wing of the Turkish political establishment that the PKK should be allowed to transform into a political party.<sup>38</sup>

The EU has indeed had a significant role in championing Kurdish rights and concerning Northern Iraq, the EU could gradually deepen its engagement beyond that of provision of aid. Brussels role has been mainly that of providing funding – through principally the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO) and the European Agency for Reconstruction- for the many NGOs that are active in the area of self-rule, while abstaining from taking any political initiatives.

In a post-Saddam Iraq the EU has an important role to fill as it more than many other international organisations or group of countries, could present itself as an honest broker in a post-Saddam Iraq. The EU is a model for regional co-operation and integration, and as such represents a model for peace-making.

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<sup>36</sup>. Jean-Christophe Peuch, *Radio Free Europe*, 15 March 2002.

<sup>37</sup>. Nicholas Birch, *Christian Science Monitor*, March 21, 2002.

<sup>38</sup>. Mohammad Nouredine, *Daily Star* (Beirut), March 12, 2002.

Even though European integration is somewhat different from the type of integration necessary to be undertaken in Iraq between Kurds and Arabs,<sup>39</sup> the Europeans are nevertheless useful in the capacity of promoting their experiences in integration in the process of achieving a sustainable peaceful co-existence between the two nations-as-people constituting Iraq.

Notably, the Euro-Arab dialogue was not established as being a framework for solving the Arab-Israeli issue, although it was intended to serve also as a forum on political matters. Just as the Arabs hoped the dialogue would encourage the Europeans to a greater involvement and understanding of the Palestine problem, a Euro-Kurdish dialogue may bring the Europeans closer to the core of the Kurdish issue. The Kurds admittedly suffer politically from a lack of internal unity, but with an initial focus on Iraqi Kurdistan, the EU may find it beneficial to proceed more proactively and make the political gesture to approach the Kurds as an important unit.

Reaching a settlement to a question such as the Kurdish in a region such as the Middle East requires the presence of a balancing power in the mediating and/or negotiating position, preferably one that is detached from the parties to the conflict.<sup>40</sup> The European Union with its unique combination of supranational and intergovernmental structures appears to be a power establishment well suited to playing a leading role in conflict-resolution concerning Iraq and its Kurds. As a distinctive formation that combines the two concepts of sovereignty and federalism, the influence of the EU is bound to grow, however, slowly. Considering its strategic and important position, the EU certainly has a greater role to play in the Middle East, and as opposed to the Americans, the Europeans could successfully capitalise on their perceived neutrality in dealing with issues of an explosive character in the region. However, it is not realistic to leave the remaining superpower out of the equation. Indeed, transatlantic relations were discussed at length at the summit of the European Council in June 2001,

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<sup>39</sup>. This is further elaborated on in the ensuing concluding chapter 8, *Prospects*.

<sup>40</sup>. Countering American acquiescence on the matter, there have been many EU declarations on Turkish interventions in Northern Iraq in the 1990s in which the EU has stressed that a solution to the Kurdish problem can only be achieved politically, not militarily. See e.g. Press Release Nr:

whereby the Middle East was identified as a region for further cooperation or joint foreign policy action, an area, which is also the focus for reinforced co-operation with the United Nations.<sup>41</sup>

The manner in which the Kurds made their presence felt in the global arena, when the plight of Abdullah Öcalan caused the massive mobilisation of Kurds in the diaspora, was perhaps most noticeable on European soil. The fact that the EU neglected an opportunity to make a difference in 1998/1999 when it failed to act on the PKK leader's quest for political asylum and through concerted action to try him before a neutral court in The Hague. This was unfortunate.<sup>42</sup> However, it should not make the EU refrain from getting involved in future aspects of the Kurdish question. The political contribution of the EU and its capacity to influence is often underestimated. The Europeans are already deeply involved in the issue of Northern Iraq, and if the member states harmonise their views and policies, the Union, with its range of policy instruments, could make a noticeable difference in the politics of Kurdish presence on the regional scene. Perhaps the Union and its CFSP needs to mature so as to realise that the considerable effort required in order to achieve a common position on the Kurdish question is indeed justified. It also needs to ensure that the political will is there for the implementation of a policy designed to maximise its leverage in a region in which it has such a significant stake.

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8136/97, 16-05-1997: Press Release Nr: 6323/95, 11-04-1995; Press Release Nr: 6314/95, 05-04-1995; Press Release Nr: 6726/95, 09-05-1995 at <http://ue.eu.int/Pesc/default.asp?lang=en>.

<sup>41</sup>. *Presidency Conclusions*, Göteborg European Council, 15-16 June 2001, p. 13.

<sup>42</sup>. The EU restricted itself to a statement on a fair trial of Öcalan once the PKK-leader had been captured and back in Turkey. See Press Release Nr: 6214/99, 22-02-1999 at <http://ue.eu.int/Pesc/default.asp?lang=en>.

### 7.3.3 Different approach and potential: the EU vs. the USA

Does the EU have the capacity to rival the USA in world affairs? Being of the same opinion as Bretherton and Vogler, who argue that in certain matters the European organisation ranks with the USA as a force in world affairs,<sup>43</sup> it is argued that the EU can and should explore its role in the Middle East, with particular emphasis on the Kurdish question in Northern Iraq.

There are no doubts that the European Union and its allies, especially the United States, share the same basic values of what is generally perceived as acceptable international behaviour - where they disagree is how best to achieve a desirable change in the dealings of a country which does not conform to these rules of conventional behaviour. For instance, the EU argues that Iran's need for Western investment is a political opportunity as well as a commercial one because it opens up the possibilities for dialogue, an opinion strongly opposed by the United States. As a result, an emphasis has often been put on the Union's need to pursue a policy independent from the United States, based on European economic and strategic interests. In an effort to distance themselves from American policies, in the present as well as in the past, the Europeans often stress that the Middle East/North Africa and Europe throughout history have been more closely tied to one another than to many other regions of the world. It is felt that the potential for instability in the Middle East, often challenged by American attitudes and measures, requires a greater diplomatic effort to guard Europe's perceived interests, and to fill the occasional vacuum in American Middle East diplomacy.

The fundamental difference between EU and US policies on many Middle East issues stems basically from different interpretations over the nature of the threat to Western interests and the best means of protecting them. The American policy, formulated to restrain those Middle Eastern states perceived as constituting potential threats to US/Western interests, is manifested in the principle of economic sanctions. The EU takes up a diametrically differing

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<sup>43</sup>. See their *The European Union as a Global Actor*, London: Routledge (1999).

opinion on the matter and claims that a greater effect is likely to be felt by the country imposing the embargo than on the state targeted.<sup>44</sup> Another point worth acknowledging is that the American compliance towards domestic lobbies, which exercise great authority over the Middle East policy (i.e. the well-financed, greatly influential and highly organised Zionist lobby groups), is without parallel in European policy-making.<sup>45</sup> The more balanced EU policy on many issues concerning the Middle East can partly be understood in these terms.

Being the only remaining superpower, the United States is in a position to implement its own policies without having to adjust them considerably to suit other players in the field. This mentality may have been one of the key factors as to why sharp differences between the US and the EU emerged and not only continue to persist, but, in several cases also to increase, clearly displayed by the divergent policies on Iran, to take one example. Economic sanctions are perceived by the US government of being powerful foreign policy tools and are used to further American foreign policy and national security objectives. Much to the frustration of Washington, the EU refused to join the US in economic sanctions against Iran following the Iranian revolution, with reference to them being ineffectual and counterproductive. American policies were further contrasted by the EU efforts of the 1990s to make Iran an accepted actor in international politics.<sup>46</sup>

The policy of 'dual containment' put forward by the US did thus not at all appeal to the EU member states. The fact that the whole formula seemed almost tailored to suit the national interests of America's protégé Israel, by removing the strategically important and towards the Jewish state hostile nations, and thus strengthening the Israeli position towards its weaker Arab neighbours, did further alienate the Europeans. In a wider perspective, this hegemonic conduct by the superpower has angered the European Union member states, who believe that an isolated and increasingly frustrated Iran on one hand, and a much

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<sup>44</sup>. For an analysis on the 'Atlantic rift', see Michael Cox (1995), *US Foreign Policy after the Cold War. Superpower without a mission?*, London: Pinter, pp. 70-83.

<sup>45</sup>. See the general views of Findley (1985).

<sup>46</sup>. In a policy statement of August 1996, the EU 'noted with considerable concern' the enactment of the D'Amador Legislation. See Press Release Nr: 9535/96, 21-08-1996, at

disintegrated Iraq on the other hand, would be extraordinarily destabilising for the region. At least maintaining contact on several levels brings opportunities to influence the other side, which do not exist if a policy of isolation is pursued.

## 7.4 The United Nations

Since the Kurds, as opposed to the Palestinians, have no state in the Middle East willing to champion their cause, hopes for achieving an improvement of their situation have been pinned on the United Nations.<sup>47</sup> Towards the end of the twentieth century, the Kurdish question in Iraq came to receive more attention and interest internationally, which had consequences for the world organisation. In the late 1960s, the word 'Kurd' was virtually unknown in the international political vocabulary, but some 30 years later, it was on everybody's lips. The world has more than once during the past four decades witnessed the flight of Kurdish refugees from advancing Iraqi forces. Half a year after the gasbombings of Halabja, when an intensified *Anfal*-campaign entered its final phase, the enormous wave of refugees created was hardly acknowledged in international political circles. The disturbing lack of sympathy and unwillingness to help on behalf of the international community in 1988 forms a sharp contrast to the universal outcry over Kurdish sufferings three years later. Perhaps it is not so much the degree of suffering that matters, but from whom they are fleeing. In the late 1980s, the Kurds tried to escape an ally of the Western world. In the early 1990s, the situation had changed dramatically - the vulnerable Kurds were now fleeing from a man of recognised malevolence.

As previously established, the allied forces that liberated Kuwait from Iraqi occupation in 1991 were subsequently criticised for not advancing to Baghdad and bringing about the downfall of Saddam Hussein's regime. This lack of willingness to 'finish the job' was, however, attributed to the absence of a clear UNSC mandate to sanction such action.

The European proposal to create a Kurdish 'safe haven' under UN auspices was initially viewed with some caution by the international organisation, but despite it being a complicated issue of international law as well as political dynamite in

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<sup>47</sup>. As elaborated on by Hussein Saado: 'Document on the United Nations and the Kurdish Question' in Hochschule Bremen (1989), *Documentation of the International Conference on Human Rights in Kurdistan*, Bremen (publisher unknown) pp. 171-179.

a region where territorial disputes are as frequent elements in inter-state relations as in relations between countries, the UN elaborated on the idea. Considering the disadvantaged position in which Iraq found itself in the immediate aftermath of the Kuwait War, there was a legitimate fear in the organisation that unless intervention was undertaken, internal developments of such destabilising nature in an already volatile region might severely undermine the stability of the international political system.

Resolution 688, as adopted in April 1991, condemned and demanded an end to the repression of Iraqi civilians, with special mention of the country's Kurdish minority. It was highly significant for the Kurds, since it was the first time they received explicit recognition from the international community.<sup>48</sup> This extraordinary resolution was interpreted by globalists as 'a change in international norms ... reflect[ing] the expansion of the authority of the international community', whereas realists viewed Resolution 688 as nothing out of the ordinary, certainly not a justification for international intervention.<sup>49</sup> That the UNSC used its powers provided in Chapter VII of the UN Charter to assist the Kurds of Northern Iraq without obtaining permission from the central government was, however, unprecedented. Such action went against paragraph 7 of the Charter's Article 2, which states that 'nothing in the Charter authorises the United Nations to intervene in matters that are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state'.<sup>50</sup>

Through Resolution 688 did the UN eventually manage to negotiate a humanitarian agreement, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), with Baghdad in April 1991 regarding UN-organised assistance to Kurds and other Iraqis who had fled their homes.<sup>51</sup> The MoU also provided for some 500 unarmed UN-guards to guarantee the security of the UN humanitarian aid

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<sup>48</sup>. The view of Robert Jackson is fully endorsed in that 'the United Nations nowadays best represents the "international community" in formal organisational terms' (1995, p. 64).

<sup>49</sup>. Lyons and Mastanduno (1995), p. 15.

<sup>50</sup>. The Charter in its entirety is available at <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/index.html>.

<sup>51</sup>. MacDowall (1996), p. 376.

workers in Iraq, guards that also proved to have a general stabilising effect on the area.<sup>52</sup>

Resolution 986, often referred to as the United Nations-administered oil-for-food program, allows the Iraqi government to sell oil and buy food with the profits. The Kurds are entitled to 13 percent of those Iraqi oil revenues. The various UN relief agencies acting in the Kurdish area of self-rule, such as the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (HABITAT), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the World Food Program (WFP) have replaced the Iraqi authorities there and draw their mandates from the abovementioned MoU. The implementation of the projects they propose, however, requires the approval of the Iraqi government, although Baghdad has no influence over the distribution of goods.

The program, which initially focused on the implementation of food deals, later saw its operational framework expanded to include measures to improve the infrastructure, and it is reported to have channelled about \$4.4 billion into the area of self-rule since 1996. The oil-for-food is through various UN agencies 'paying for the repair of water and sewage pipes, the construction of electricity grids and the management of telephone networks ... small power stations, trucks, housing, schools, hospital repairs, medical training and vaccinations'.<sup>53</sup>

The UNDP has been criticised for unnecessarily delaying the implementation of various construction and development projects.<sup>54</sup> Criticism has also concerned the oil-for-food programme as a whole for the lack of provision of aid and relief services for the internally displaced people – the thousands Kurdish families subjected to Baghdad's ethnic cleansing campaign in the Iraqi-controlled parts of Kurdistan. The Iraqi Kurdish authorities in Northern Iraq have opened camps for these refugees, as the program does not address the needs of this needy category of the Kurdish population. Possibly in part to ease such concerns, in

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<sup>52</sup> This deployment has been examined by Oliver Ramsbotham and Tom Woodhouse in their *Humanitarian Intervention in Contemporary Conflict*, London: Polity Press (1996), p. 82.

<sup>53</sup> Hugh Pope, 'Iraqi Kurds, Flush With Aid, Lose Desire to Take On Hussein', *Wall Street Journal*, February 12, 2002.

<sup>54</sup> *Iraqi Kurdistan Dispatch*, 1 February 2002.

early 2002 the WFP launched a major census operation in the area of self-rule. The aim with such a population count is to facilitate the provision of aid and plans for development projects in the area, in face of the great demographic changes that have taken place recently.<sup>55</sup>

By way of Resolution 688, which had a clear humanitarian aim, the UNSC indicated its desire to seek, if necessary, an active role in a member state's internal affairs. It also established that under exceptional circumstances the organisation could and would intervene, with reference to state repression of a minority group constituting a threat to international peace and security, but also advocated intervention as a means to render humanitarian aid work possible.

As we have seen, attempting to stabilise trans-state conflicts, such as the Kurdish one, not only requires a transformation of the states in question so as to grant increased power to disadvantaged groups within the state and incorporating all sub-identities in the state structure. In addition, changes also have to be made in the world organisation to transform it into an institution not only of states but also of the peoples constituting them. Of the 189 states making up the UN only a few correspond to nations-as-people and this unsatisfactory state of affairs disregards those groups for whom a state of their own has been and is likely to remain unattainable. The United Nations needs to develop mechanisms that would enable it also to represent what Robert Jackson terms the 'community of humankind'<sup>56</sup> - those nations-as-people that have been left without any meaningful platform from which to assert their presence in world politics. Rather than exclusively being an organisation of states, as the name indicates, efforts should be made for the United Nations to properly represent existing nations.

The current Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, during his first mandate initiated an overhaul of the organisation, which was designed to

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<sup>55</sup> As reported by Iraq Press on February 5, 2002, the count will provide detailed data on living standards, and it will also include the number of Kurds who have left the area of self-rule, seeking asylum in Europe, America or Australia.

render the institution more efficient and capable of dealing effectively with the new types of conflicts erupting in the post-Cold War era.<sup>57</sup> Although his ambitions for natural reasons must be rather limited, a thorough restructuring of the world organisation is desperately needed in order to cope effectively with the challenges facing the world of today. Political sovereignty has for centuries been the condition 'that puts a people on the map'.<sup>58</sup> For the Kurds there is a massive hunger for international recognition, 'a need to exist as a people on the world stage',<sup>59</sup> which cannot be satisfied as long as the nation-state remains the elusive entrance ticket to the receiving of recognition from other actors in the international political arena. If separated from the state, nations-as-people may be given due recognition in terms of cultural representation in international fora,<sup>60</sup> for instance taking the shape of a Kurdish observer position in the United Nations, with a status similar to that granted the Palestinians. This would not change the boundaries of states, which will remain the fundamental units of societal organisation worldwide. Within and across state-boundaries, however, nations would be duly recognised, for which the creation of yet another state would be rendered unnecessary. It remains to be seen whether the UN, in its current structural make up, can meet the challenge of accommodating the Kurds in the global family of nations and directly address such a question as nations-as-people versus nations-as-state in the new millennium.

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<sup>56</sup>. A concept used throughout in his 'International Community beyond the Cold War' in Lyons and Mastanduno (eds.) (1995), *Beyond Westphalia? State Sovereignty and International Intervention*, London: The John Hopkins University Press, pp. 59-83.

<sup>57</sup>. A lengthy and enlightening article of the Secretary-General and his visions worthy of note is Joshua Cooper Ramo's 'The five virtues of Kofi Annan', *Time*, 4 September 2000.

<sup>58</sup>. Taylor (1993), p. 52.

<sup>59</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 53.

<sup>60</sup>. As argued by Gidon Gottlieb in his *Nation against State* (1993), New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press.

Part D  
Conclusion

## Chapter 8: Prospects

Modern history has dealt its hand with respect to the Kurds of Northern Iraq and an interpretation of the current situation has to take into consideration the great variety of factors that have been examined throughout this thesis. History has a tendency to repeat itself, and in the Kurdish case it has become the norm rather than the exception. The Kurds could be blamed for naïveté and short-term thinking when choosing negotiating partners and forming alliances, but they have often been forced to accept help from whoever has offered at the time. Their fate does not lie in their own hands.

As early as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (the period of the semi-independent Kurdish principalities) the seed of disunity among the Kurds was sown by powers external to the Kurdish areas. These principalities were in essence small states with few obligations towards the centre, but they were actively prevented from joining forces so as to frustrate ambitions to work towards the development of a centralised Kurdistan. This policy has to all intents and purposes continued in modern times. In 1975 as well as at the end of the Iran-Iraq war, the Kurdish movement suffered defeat as a direct result of agreements reached between two regional powers.

The Kurds seem geopolitically destined to be the primary card to be played by surrounding countries should relations become adversarial. The policy of externalising one's own internal threats, to use a phrase of Olson's,<sup>1</sup> has successfully been put into practice by the main regional powers, Iran and Turkey, as examined in part C. The Islamist and Kurdish issues of Turkey and Iran's concerns regarding its Azeri- and Kurd-minorities, have all had clear references to Northern Iraq and developments there. In this sense, Iraqi Kurdistan lives in a symbiotic relationship with the states surrounding the landlocked region of self-rule.

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<sup>1</sup>. Olson (2001), p. 43.

Since the establishment of Kurdish self-rule of Northern Iraq, no patterns of alliance have been crystallised, neither on local nor regional levels, although there has been an increased number of shifting alliances between different Kurdish political groupings.<sup>2</sup> Prominent examples are the coalition between the KDP and the IMK targeting the PUK in the early 1990s and the later cooperation between PUK and PKK against the KDP. The absence of a stable and solid link with a regional state has meant that the Kurdish leadership has a wide range of strategic options at its disposal, giving it ‘a considerable degree of autonomy in action’,<sup>3</sup> explaining the fluidity in the constant alignment and realignment. Above all, however, this state of affairs makes the Kurds vulnerable to the whims of the bigger actors on the political arena and impairs attempts to achieve Kurdish unity. Indeed, ‘the importance of localised identity among the Kurds appears to be the driving force behind their alliance behaviour at the expense of the broader benefits that could be gained if they acted as a cohesive national movement’.<sup>4</sup>

Identity-problems face people in many different societies, but for Iraqi Kurds to place their religious, ethnic, tribal, national and state loyalties in the right order at a given point in time is made more difficult due to the interference of outside forces with divide-and-rule-mentalities. As established in chapters three and four, the Kurds of Northern Iraq have multiple identities, and the impact this has on politics is compounded by the fact that many of these identities are shared with large regional powers, some of whom at one time or another have tried to exploit certain identities with the aim of achieving various objectives. Identity may also serve as a policy device to be utilised by extra-regional powers in order to divide certain communities.<sup>5</sup>

The Kurdish nation has admittedly ‘become less of a territorially defined social entity’,<sup>6</sup> but the substantial Kurdish diaspora has a notably important socio-

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<sup>2</sup> Instead of alliance, perhaps entente is the more appropriate term to use in this context. For a clarification of these concepts and their uses, see Robert Kann, ‘Alliances versus ententes’, *World Politics*, Vol. 28, July 1974, pp. 611-621.

<sup>3</sup> Ehteshami (1995), p. 164.

<sup>4</sup> Yousif Freij (1998), p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> Britain’s post-WW1 policies in the Middle East are examples of this.

<sup>6</sup> van Bruinessen (1998), p. 48.

political role in Kurdish politics: e.g. for being instrumental in the advances made in Kurdish literature and linguistics. The politically active Kurds from Iraq were the first to form the Kurdish diaspora, as they were forced into exile from the mid 1970s onwards. During the 1980s Iraqi Kurds dominated the diaspora's political scene, but with the establishment of 'Free Kurdistan', many of them returned to Northern Iraq and the Turkish Kurds became the politically dominant in the exile. Kurdish identity has been reinforced in the diaspora decisively due to the favourable conditions provided in the countries offering asylum. Tribal affiliations do not necessarily weaken in intensity the further away from Kurdistan proper individuals are living, since the social base is of particular importance when in a new country with its often alien culture. This is predominantly true if immigrants are not integrated into the new society, and in such circumstances traditions resume great importance - traditions many associate with tribal life.

The position about the withering away of the nation-state and the complete erosion of the international order based on its sovereignty, has largely been rejected in this study. The growing interdependence of states reduces the individual state's ability to formulate and execute its own policies in the areas of economics, military affairs and diplomacy, but since the dealings are on a governmental level, it paradoxically also serves to reinforce the concentration of state-power. Pressures for decentralisation and demands for extensive autonomy force the state to focus a substantial amount of attention on its areas of instability, but it does so in its capacity as the sole administrative body to assume full responsibility over the region and its people. This suggests that although its authority might be questioned in the domestic arena and it experiences decreased influence in its external capacities, the state appears unlikely to lose its grip on political matters. Indeed, nation-states have in many instances reasserted their authority, as the paradoxical circumstances in the European Union's federation-building shows: it is the national governments that dominate decision- as well as policy-making processes. The international political system, which still constitutes a society of territorial states, appears to have remained reasonably intact in comparison with the way the financial markets have merged to form the world economy that exists today. Hence the evidence presented above does not

point beyond Westphalia to a development where the state would lose its traditional position of being the central component of the international state system.

Viewing the state in a realist perspective implies an understanding of the international order as reflecting the independence and sovereignty of states. This is, however, not to apply pure realism and declare the system rigid and impregnable to change. Insofar as states link people to territory, they are regarded as necessary and lasting formations, but it is also important to point out that they do not monopolise sovereignty, simply because they no longer retain the full capacity to meet all the responsibilities that sovereignty requires of them. This argument does not extend to pure globalism, but remains somewhere in between those two concepts. International organisations and enterprises have indeed challenged the sovereign powers of the state but the principal agent of world politics, which for long has been the state, appears unlikely to be substituted by the multinational corporation.

Changes have indeed occurred as the evolution of the state system is an ongoing process, but essentially whatever the changes in their capacity to govern, states do matter. What has been arrived at is a somewhat modified view of the realist perspective. The idea of sovereignty is still holding, supported by major powers as well as those countries with precious little leverage on the international arena. Authority is being shared more and more, but neither inter-governmental nor non-governmental organisations have replaced or been able to replace the state system. In other words, the current system of states may be subjected to transformation but the basic structure is likely to stay intact. In view of the evolutionary process it is, however, conceivable that the modern state system would come to be the first structural arrangement of political and social organisation to be transformed by peace rather than by war. The implications of this on the Kurdish case is that a potential Kurdish state is unlikely to gain strict sovereignty, but, as has become clear, *absolute* sovereignty has become somewhat of a an elusive notion.

Another reason as to why the nation-state system has not and is unlikely to break down may be that the enduring concept of sovereignty serves to avoid superpower domination. A whole range of less dominant countries actively seeks the protection provided by the concept of sovereignty against the domination of the great powers, regional as well as international. However, since the collapse of the state system in general and of the nation-states of Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria in particular does not appear to be imminent, the task of transforming Kurdistan from an object in the Middle Eastern political arena to a subject, an actor with its own agenda, appears daunting.

It has been argued that the changes relating to globalisation (in the areas of technology, economy and military power) have both weakened and strengthened the state. State-authority has been weakened, as the boundaries of states no longer confine the flow of information, goods, money, and people - normally interpreted as generating the collapse of the nation-state. However, the process of globalisation not only reinforces regional identities and sub-regional structures, it also empowers elements to create something whole, and therein lays its strength. Hence there are two sides of the coin of globalisation undermining and/or reinforcing the state system. As for the Kurds, they have benefited greatly from globalisation. In the words of Sherko Bekas, the distinguished Kurdish poet: 'our enemies will not be able to oppress us as before; we just have to strike a balance between being part of the modern world and keeping our identity'.<sup>7</sup>

Gellner's firm conviction that nationalism is a product of industrialisation could be taken as a basis for arguing the gradual demise of the force of nationalism. As industry was transformed from a local to a national level by general economic developments, political loyalty was simultaneously elevated from localism to nationalism. With globalisation ever increasing in importance, industry has in many respects re-transformed onto an international level, which may lead to the conclusion that nationalism gradually will be supplanted by internationalism. However, nationalism does not seem to be a force on the decline, just as the

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<sup>7</sup>. Quoted from Hiwa Osman's 'Wired world of Iraqi Kurds', *BBC*, 15 August 2001.

nation-state looks unlikely to deteriorate beyond recognition.

Considering the deep fragmentation of Kurdish nationalism and the serious rifts between the leading proponents of Kurdish nationalist ideology, in practice there seems to be a more or less constant fluctuation between nationalism and ethnicism, since actions are often heavily influenced by short-term political objectives and a distinctive element of parochialism. Any transnational character of Kurdish nationalism has been undermined by the unbroken power of tribalism in the countryside and the less than fully developed social structures among the middle class in urban areas.<sup>8</sup> A settlement of the Kurdish problem in Iraq would not make the force of nationalism disappear, but it could well strengthen the cultural pan-Kurdism, denoting the promotion of cultural unity among all Kurds, and in all likelihood soften the destructive political pan-Kurdism, which sanctions irredentism.

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<sup>8</sup>. However, a distinctive feature about the Kurds' transnational nationalism is the globalising context in which it has come to operate, as highlighted by the simultaneous protests by Kurds in the diaspora when Abdullah Öcalan was captured by the Turks in February 1999. See Michael Humphrey's article 'Victim Diplomacy and Transnational Nationalism: Kurdish Diaspora Dilemmas', *Journal of Arabic, Islamic and Middle East Studies*, Special Issue, January 2000, pp. 1-16.

## 8.1 Prospects for Kurdish statehood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

The greatest challenge for new states is to gain international recognition and indeed 'recognition as members of the United Nations has been the major basis of their claim to legitimacy'.<sup>9</sup> Once that is achieved, usually through the use of the principle of self-determination, as outlined above, then its independent status may well be secured. Recast in a Kurdish mould, the devaluation of the nation-state concept discussed above means that a sovereign Kurdistan might be no less viable than many of the nation-states formed in the last decade. External inadequacy will not automatically incapacitate a new state in the present political climate, and as Gordon Smith states, it 'may even be able to profit from apparent weakness by operating at the critical margins of superpower interests'.<sup>10</sup>

Although not comparable to the long accumulation of political experience by nations in the west, Kurdish independence could neither be compared to the rush to statehood of many 'nations' in the Middle East. A look at history tells us that the emergence and evolution of each individual modern state, although the result of a set of interconnected internal and external forces characterised by the dynamic relationships between them, were in many cases largely conditioned by determinants external to it. As the political history of Kurdistan elucidates, particularly external factors would be crucial to the hypothetical rise of a Kurdish state. External influence may simply mean to follow in the footsteps of other states, as exemplified by the Russian revolutionaries, who took the French revolution as the model for their own revolution in 1917.<sup>11</sup> What the end of the Cold War brought about in terms of nations transforming themselves into states provides an array of external examples for the Kurds to duplicate and on which to mould their own struggle(s).

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<sup>9</sup>. Strange (1986), p. 303.

<sup>10</sup>. A. D. Smith (1981), p. 206.

<sup>11</sup>. For an account of this, see Adam Westoby 'Origins of the Bolshevik Party and Communist Statecraft' in James Anderson (ed.), *The Rise of the Modern State*, Brighton: Harvester Press, pp. 143-169.

The timing of an aspiring state's incorporation into the international state system heavily influences the subsequent form of the state. With the changes brought about by the Kuwait War, and the ensuing developments of the political structures of Northern Iraq, the twenty-first century may mark the beginning of a new era of Kurdish assertiveness, which could pave the way for the establishment of an independent, autonomous or separate Kurdish entity. A crucial shaper of such a state may not be another war, but the Kurds' ability to unite and the strength Kurdish unity will bring when faced with the pressures, constraints but also opportunities stemming from its geopolitical situation. In addition, the large Kurdish diaspora would give great impetus to an emerging Kurdish state. A majority of exiled Kurds may not return to their homeland, but strongly supports Kurdish independence – similar to the American Jewish backing of the state of Israel.

An independent Kurdish state may well experience a conflict between legal sovereignty and actual power, and its government's power to exert full sovereignty over its people and territory cannot be taken for granted. The central problem is that the idea of legal sovereignty does not always correspond with actual power, and the situation for the countries of Eastern Europe during the Cold War is a case in point. Just as these nation-states, sovereign in name, were incapable of forming their own policies independently of the Soviet Union in matters that were considered Soviet interests, a Kurdish state may find itself dependent on powerful neighbours.

An important factor to be taken into account whenever the creation of a new state is discussed is what effect it would have on the status quo of the immediate region, considering that such a development would by definition entail the loss of territory for at least one regional state to the possible detriment of regional stability. Such loss of territory may for a regional state involve a strategic deprivation of resources, but equally, if not even more harmful a development in a long-term perspective, may be the deterioration of internal political conditions resulting from a considerable alteration in the ethnic composition of the state. This brings the thoughts to Iran, where the loss of Iranian Kurdistan (through the expansion of a sovereign Iraqi Kurdish state towards a 'Greater Kurdistan' or

simply the secession of the Kurds of Iran) could have a domino effect prompting similar actions from Iran's other main minorities, e.g. Azeris, Turkmens, Baluchis and Arabs. Similarly, but with religious aspects, this would apply to the situation in Iraq, where the Sunni Kurds are needed to balance the Sunni-Shi'a imbalance.

Indeed, should 'Free Kurdistan' proclaim an independent Kurdish state, it would positively alienate Turkey and Iran to the point of intervention, whose open borders have been the lifeline of the Kurds of Northern Iraq. The regional states fear that the creation of an independent Kurdish state could fan separatist movements within their own borders and, as a previous chapter showed, therefore display unusually concerted efforts to achieve unity in condemning any action, which might lead to the creation of a sovereign Kurdistan and the almost certain break-up of Iraq. International borders are not to be changed in the Middle East, is the message frequently heard from Tehran, Ankara and Damascus when facing the prospect of the autonomous Kurdish entity challenging the present geopolitical situation in the region.

Building on the ideas discussed in a foregoing chapter on nationalism in its different forms, it may be interesting to point out that a Kurdish state may set an example in the region by adopting liberal as well as national ideas in organising its state-formation. Yael Tamir considers the 'ideal marriage' of these two schools of thought in saying that nationalism could supply 'parameters for demarcating state boundaries, buttressing the view of the state as a community characterised by the mutual responsibility and the internal cohesion ... while liberalism could ... [provide] the moral principles needed to guide personal and institutional behaviour'.<sup>12</sup>

Kurdish nationalism has traditionally emphasised the century-old claim that each of the world's nations has the right of self-determination, indeed self-rule - be it self-governing entities within existing nation-states or their own nation-state. One could argue that a factor favouring Kurdish statehood in Northern Iraq is the

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<sup>12</sup>. Tamir (1993), p. 140.

reasoning that the original state, i.e. Iraq, is defunct and can no longer provide a coherent, sustainable socio-political framework for Kurdish-Arab co-existence. Those with strong nationalist and separatist inclinations may in similar vein argue that the disparity between the autonomous Kurdish area and Iraq proper has grown so great over the past decade of separation that reuniting is an unattainable goal.

### 8.1.1 A Kurdish microstate

If sovereignty is intertwined with the national history of a country, the issue of calling this absolute authority into question assumes even greater proportions. This is particularly true in the case of Iraq, where religious affiliations and ethnic belonging constitute key components of the Iraqi state. An independent Kurdistan would jeopardise the accepted sovereignty of Iraq, but in view of the past decade of *de facto* independence, the sovereignty of Iraq has already been compromised. Is the creation of an independent Iraqi Kurdish state a mere formality? Are the Kurds now after a decade of self-rule strong enough to bring the long period of appeasement with Baghdad to an end?

With its Turkmen and Arab elements, an independent Iraqi Kurdistan would not quite fit a general definition of the nation-state, but unlike most countries in the region, it would very nearly constitute 'a polity of homogeneous people who share the same culture and the same language, and who are governed by some of their own number, who serve their interests'.<sup>13</sup> The last two components are perhaps of particular interest in view of the history of the Kurds.

Consequently, an independent Iraqi Kurdistan would not be a 'genuine' nation-state, since the boundaries of even a Kurdish micro-state's territory (as incorporating what is today autonomous Northern Iraq) would not correspond with the boundaries of a homogenous ethnic community. A Kurdish state created out of what is today Northern Iraq, would hence face the problem of 'national

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<sup>13</sup>. Navari (1981), p. 13.

congruence', to make state and nation coextensive.<sup>14</sup> There would of course be the Kurdish ethnic core, but reconciling other ethnic identities, most notably the Turkmen, with the Kurdish would require a great deal of effort by the new state.<sup>15</sup> The Turkmen in particular would impair the ethnic unity of a Kurdish state, and due to this heterogeneity in terms of ethnicity, even in a Kurdish state there will be a need for more specific nation-building-efforts. A Kurdish state with considerable Turkmen elements, however, could avoid falling in the same traps as other 'nation-states' before it, by building an enduring society formed around solidarity and community.<sup>16</sup>

Very few states indeed can hope to acquire the status of nation-state due to their 'plural' characters. Rather, they could aspire to become *national states* where heterogeneous populations could enjoy a common public culture.<sup>17</sup> Also a Kurdish state-formation would have to settle for a national state as opposed to a nation-state due to its many 'plural' elements.

The 'self' of the principle of self-determination discussed above may cause more internal friction in a sovereign Iraqi Kurdistan, the establishment of which may produce a domino-effect - a Kurdish state, which is unlikely to constitute purely Kurdish elements. Particularly Turkmen might choose to exercise their right to self-determination and demand further division of territory, enthusiastically encouraged by Turkey. If, therefore, regional stability is a main reason for the establishment of an independent 'Free Kurdistan', then that may well be as illusory as the myth about the single unitary state.

An independent Kurdish political entity in Northern Iraq may have to start off as a centralised state in order to establish its authority in all areas, as it certainly

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<sup>14</sup>. A. D. Smith (1986b), p. 262.

<sup>15</sup>. According to a 1957 population consensus, there are about 2 million Turkmen living in Iraq, most of them in and around Kirkuk city, with some 250,000 currently residing in areas under the control of the Kurdish Administration. Those Turkmen living in the Iraqi areas beyond the control of Baghdad did not take part in the Kurdish elections of 1992. Enjoying the full support of Turkey, they have often acted against the Kurds, but of the main two Kurdish parties, KDP is favoured due to its ties to Turkey. (Professor Nouri Talabany, an authority of Turkmen and Kurds, London, 1999.)

<sup>16</sup>. Such a society is eloquently argued by A. D. Smith (1986b), p. 230.

<sup>17</sup>. Concept that of A. D. Smith (1992), p. 61-62.

would have to deal with conflict regulation from within. The state would need to present itself as arbiter seeking to contain disruptive conflicts, likely to emerge between elites as well as the lower strata of society. This would be in addition to the obvious need to defend its territory from external incursions, perhaps most acutely physical, but also ideological. It is also likely to seek control over demographic movements, particularly in view of Baathist forced resettlement programs, to ensure its government is not undermined by actions from Baghdad.

A potentially serious problem in an independence-scenario is that of border disputes. In the part of Central Kurdistan still under the control of Baghdad, and particularly in and around the oil rich city of Kirkuk, the Iraqi regime has over a number of years implemented Arabisation- and dekurdisation-programs to alter the demography, originally that of a Kurdish majority. In order to return the large number of internally displaced people to their original place of habitation, the authorities would need to reverse this social engineering and encourage Arabs to return to the south of the country. Reclaiming Kurdish land and generally (re-)negotiating the Kurdish/Arab borders would not be a territorial dispute in the conventional sense. This highlights the long-term problem of Kirkuk should Kurdish political independence become reality: a scenario that would see border disputes likely to continue.

With regard to the discussion above relating to multinational corporations, these may well have great financial interests in a Kurdish state seceded from oil-rich Iraq. These companies would certainly be able to exert greater influence when dealing with a microstate, but the extractive nature of their business, however, would put the state in a more powerful position. With the geographical limitation to their operations – i.e. the oil companies cannot depart with the underground oil fields – control over the natural resources industry would give any Kurdish government considerable wealth that would translate into influence on a regional as well as international level.

Where the nation extends beyond the boundaries of the existing state, as would be the case for a sovereign Iraqi Kurdistan, such an entity, if under the influence of ethnic nationalism, could easily develop traits of irredentism by seeking ‘the

recovery of the “lost” territories’<sup>18</sup> - a likely implication of that type of nationalist expression. Of Horowitz’s suggested subtypes of irredentism, one, namely ‘attempts to detach land and people from one state in order to incorporate them in another’,<sup>19</sup> would be applicable to an independent Iraqi Kurdistan, which cultivated aspirations to incorporate other parts of the historical Kurdish homeland into its own sovereign structure. Irredentist policies in fact appear to be a modern expression of expansionism, in itself an ancient phenomenon<sup>20</sup> that in the Kurdish case may be termed ‘the need to create a “compact nation” and recover an historic homeland sliced up by rival colonial powers’.<sup>21</sup> Should a sovereign Iraqi Kurdistan stake irredentist claims to Iranian Kurdistan, for instance, Tehran would naturally perceive it as a threat to the territorial integrity and national security of the Islamic Republic, stepping up oppressive policies to restrain its Kurds from approving the actions of their ethnic brethren. Oppressive measures from the centre are, however, likely to play right into the hands of the irredentists, enabling them to develop stronger ties with the minority, fuelling a development that could escalate into a military conflict in which the irredentist state is actively involved. The minority is seldom the winner in such a conflict, but, if indeed absorbed by the irredentist state - its ‘mother country’ - the minority leadership may develop other concerns, such as having its influence and authority substantially reduced. Hence it appears more likely that the minority (here illustrated by the Iranian Kurds), would seek to engage in secessionist activities rather than supporting the irredentist movement (stemming from Iraqi Kurdistan).

Hayes’ discussion of ‘the feeling of superiority engendered by success’,<sup>22</sup> may apply to a future independent Iraqi Kurdistan. A scenario could emerge in which those with a liberal mindset, who struggled for the freedom of the entire Kurdish nation, once having achieved independence for their area, began to see the world with different eyes. Self-satisfaction resulting from having reached their goal

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<sup>18</sup>. A. D. Smith (1981), p. 188.

<sup>19</sup>. Horowitz (1992), p. 119.

<sup>20</sup>. For an analysis of this, see Ben-Israel, Hedva (1991), “Irredentism: Nationalism Reexamined” in N. Chazan (ed.) *Irredentism and International Politics*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, pp. 23-35.

<sup>21</sup>. A. D. Smith (1981), p. 198.

<sup>22</sup>. Hayes (1949), p. 227.

could cause them to regard fellow Kurds in the neighbouring countries with a superior attitude and seek to rule those areas and its 'backward' people in their newly acquired capacity of an independent Kurdish state.

### 8.1.2 A 'Greater Kurdistan'

The state-building experiment that has been ongoing in Northern Iraq since 1991 has placed the Iraqi Kurds in a more favourable position compared to the Kurds of Iran, Turkey and Syria as regards the prospects of achieving statehood. Perhaps the Kurdish areas of Northern Iraq could even be regarded as a pan-Kurdish sovereign state at an embryonic stage, with the Iraqi Kurds to play a crucial role in creating and maintaining this 'Greater Kurdistan'.

In order for a 'Greater Kurdistan' to come into being, the smaller Kurdish state carved out of Iraq must seek a pan-national sovereignty. Regarding the notion of a 'Greater Kurdistan', there are many different views to take into account, and it has only really been the Kurds of Turkey, or rather the PKK, that has upheld a pan-Kurdish claim. For them, Kurdish independence was during the 1980s the only acceptable solution to the long and bloody conflict with the Turkish Republic. The initial aim of the PKK - to establish a Kurdish state in south-eastern Turkey, which would be a first step towards the formation of a 'Greater Kurdistan' to include the Kurdish parts of neighbouring countries - was an ambition never quite shared by other Kurdish political bodies. The politically active Kurds of Iran have not portrayed themselves as ardent pan-Kurdistanists, but have since the Iranian revolution in 1979 put forward 'Democracy for Iran, autonomy for Kurdistan' as their goal. The Syrian Kurds, have never quite been in the limelight, but demand greater cultural rights.

A central question for the creation and maintenance of a 'Greater Kurdistan' is to assess how successful Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria have been in dividing the Kurdish nation. The apprehension shown by these regional states towards the perceived long-term ambitions of the Iraqi Kurds in particular may be interpreted as fear of a gigantic hegemonic project where the Kurds aim to seize

large swathes of land from each state. These sentiments would appear pre-Westphalian in nature and reflect one of the underlying causes of the European Thirty Years War: the tension between centralism and decentralism/a centrally-ruled region and the move towards a more decentralised political order where the nation-states could keep their autonomy towards all hegemonic ambitions. The regional states would naturally prefer the current order based on Westphalia to remain intact, which would counter any expansionist Kurdish plans. As in post-Westphalian Europe where France under Louis XIV in the second half of the seventeenth century developed hegemonic ambitions and was opposed by England and the Netherlands - who between themselves competed for power over the seas, the main trade routes - the Middle Eastern states put their differences aside and ally whenever the Kurdish threat surfaces. As in seventeenth century Europe, this represents a manifestation of pure realpolitik in order to keep the delicate power-balance intact.

Given the right conditions, a 'Greater Kurdistan' would become a major regional power and as it is situated at the crossroads of Turkish, Iranian and Arab lands, it could serve as a bridge between these cultures and civilisations. Moreover, the political strength of the Kurds would increase greatly if they were to present themselves as one unit in the political arena. Alternative arrangements of division into separate entities, 'the fragmentation of their political roofs',<sup>23</sup> would certainly not enhance their collective standing as a people on the world scene.

Building on the notion of Kurdishness as a means to incorporate the people of all Kurdish areas into an integrated political unit is not an easy task as that would entail battling with the major concepts of Arabism, Persianism and Turkishness that all meet in Kurdish territory. Another difficulty is the issue of the peshmerga and their role in a 'Greater Kurdistan'. Conventional wisdom would say about freedom fighters that the more they fight, the more nationalist they grow. However, under certain circumstances, such as those in Kurdistan, this does not easily apply. The Kurdish militant peshmergas could often be found to

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<sup>23</sup>. Gellner (1983a), p. 135.

fight primarily for their own tribe or party than for the Kurdish cause. Hence, the more they fight, the more loyal they become to their preferred political grouping, a fact that does not serve to strengthen Kurdish pan-nationalist activity.

Of all different types of nationalism mentioned in the classification earlier, that of unification is of greatest interest for a discussion of the future of Kurdish political independence, since a broadened Kurdish nationalism can be envisaged, which might acquire the attributes of a nationalist ideology of unification. If it achieved independence in its contemporary form, a strengthened movement might indulge in irredentist behaviour and mount expansionist claims against surrounding states, and eventually become the basis of a nationalism of unification of all the Kurds seeking to attain the political formation of a Great Kurdistan. If one or two, even three autonomist Kurdish administrative regions were to emerge alongside the one in Northern Iraq, a restructured Kurdish nationalism could materialise, characterised by unification sentiments. An essential characteristic of a successful unification nationalism, as Breuille points out, is that it has to achieve success both in the individual state - in this case the autonomous Northern Iraqi state-formation - and beyond it. The difficulty lies in that conditions may increasingly 'come to favour the development of the nationalist movement in one state rather than another', and so 'gradually the nationalist movement will come to mirror conditions in that state'.<sup>24</sup>

The events of 1991 disrupted the pattern that had been imposed on the region more than half a century earlier when a range of new Middle Eastern nation-states appeared on the map. Although there have not been attempts by regional powers to reconstitute the old pre-1991 geopolitical order, the policies have been formulated so as to contain the situation. However, the events of 1991 unleashed new forces that may well prove to dominate this new century. Nationalism could then, as it was in the German and Italian cases, serve as the justification to unite most of the Kurdish culture area under Kurdish leadership into a larger Kurdish nation-state, the 'Greater Kurdistan'.

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<sup>24</sup>. Breuille (1993), p. 121-22.

In relation to the discussion in the second chapter, the Kurdish nation could only achieve a *state-reinforcing* role if all parts of Kurdistan were joined into one organic whole making it coterminous with an existing state. Just as the Kurdish nation for much of the twentieth century has been *state-subverting*, constituting smaller entities within larger states, it could, in the case of independence for Iraqi Kurdistan, switch to a *state-creating* role, as it would then find itself bigger than an existing state. A *state-creating* nation would become *state-reinforcing* if an independent Iraqi Kurdistan succeeded in absorbing the other parts of the Kurdish nation. However, this presupposes feelings of national unity across all Kurdish areas - only then could a 'pan-state' role of the Kurdish nation develop.

The notion of a 'Greater Kurdistan' may also be interpreted as a loose federation of three to four Kurdish regions with extensive autonomy. Considering the vastness of the Kurdish nation, such a federation might, however, dissolve and result in the creation of entirely separate Kurdish states - developments that would not necessarily damage pan-Kurdism, as there could still be a Kurdish unity, but of peoples not of states. This unity already exists in its potential form in the customs and cultures of the people, though the institutions and rulers of those nation-states keep the people divided and exploitable.

### 8.1.3 Several Kurdish republics

The absence of a recent shared political history of all of Kurdistan coupled with the presence of tribalism as well as the until relatively recently abolished feudal system (which was in itself a huge obstacle in economic and social terms to efforts at strengthening and uniting the Kurdish nation), present unique problems for the large state structure of a 'Greater Kurdistan'. In addition, the achievement of the aim of pan-Kurdish unity of a 'Greater Kurdistan' would require each political group throughout Kurdistan to dismantle its power base within its own area, the materialisation of which is difficult to visualize. The fact that the power bases of the KDP and PUK alike were left intact when a unified Kurdish Administration was being constructed, and so prevented the efficient

functioning of the common governmental institutions, is not an encouraging experience when envisaging co-operation on a larger scale.

Hence, in view of the lack of political unity among the Kurds, and the absence of a shared political strategy, it might be inaccurate a claim that the Kurds would want just one independent state. Indeed, the twenty-first century might see more than one Kurdish state, just as there are many Arab states. Such a development may also be a consequence of geopolitics in the sense that the geographical obstacles (i.e. the mountainous character of Kurdistan) have impeded human interactions, and if these obstacles are not overcome, then separate state-formations may be envisaged. This is in line with the possibility that independence for Iraqi Kurdistan may well inspire similar action in other parts of Kurdistan, but instead of aiming for integration into the Iraqi-Kurdish state structure, these secessionist movements could aspire to autonomy.

As Baghdad gave up its authority in the three northern governates in 1991, the area became to all intents and purposes independent. This was, in the words of Rosenau, a “downward” relocation of authority’,<sup>25</sup> as the largest sub-national group in Iraq took over the running of affairs from the central government in the area where they constitute a clear majority. One could envisage such a ‘relocation process’ to become more encompassing in nature and transcend national boundaries, so as to enable the Kurds of Iran, Turkey and Syria to assume greater roles in the running of their affairs. They may not wish to join their national brothers across the border in their aspirations for a ‘Greater Kurdistan’ and as a result of the various directions in which authority may be relocated, they may end up aiming to establish their own independent entities. Through such decentralising efforts, which may not reflect deliberate policies on behalf of the central governments, but being a ‘by-product’ of the globalising trends and pressures, more than one Kurdish republic may see the light of day.

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<sup>25</sup>. Rosenau (1995), p. 208.

#### 8.1.4 The odds against Kurdish independence

Common for all Kurdish independence-scenarios as outlined above is how prominent a role geopolitics play. Kurdistan faces a very complex set of impediments to statehood: a rare combination of unfavourable factors that makes the notion of an independent Kurdish state likely to remain abstract.

According to Richard Falk, a small country may prove enduring only if its 'orientation [is] perceived as useful to reigning geopolitical forces'.<sup>26</sup> Such was the case with non-Arab, non-Islamic Israel, for instance. It is felt that only if the state system of the region were to collapse, a Kurdish state may emerge, as the 'end of wars are occasions for geopolitical restructuring'.<sup>27</sup> Falk admits that 'there are niches of opportunities that exist within the geopolitical situation of the region',<sup>28</sup> but they are not easily detected. The geopolitics of the Middle East in the aftermath of the war over Kuwait provided a window of opportunity for the Kurds of Iraq to establish an autonomous political community not quite at the state level, but an unprecedented formation nonetheless.

Only compelling international support and pressure is likely to sustain a new state in the Middle East, pressure that in all probability would be rooted in strong economic and strategic interests of the one remaining superpower. If a landlocked Kurdish state would emerge under these circumstances, it runs the risk of being unrecognised by its neighbours and isolated diplomatically on the regional level (again with reference to ostracized Israel). After all, the geopolitical realities are such that why would the regional countries recognise an independent Iraqi Kurdistan: what could the incentives or threats possibly be for such recognition to be granted? Hence, the seal of approval by extra-regional forces will not necessarily produce favourable conditions for the new state. In addition, the Kurdish experience of geopolitical betrayal by global powers is such that the Kurdish leadership is hesitant to entrust any outside forces with imposing a solution on reluctant neighbours. If considered unjust, the

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<sup>26</sup> Falk (1991), p. 383.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 385.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 392.

arrangement would be challenged and declared null and void as soon as one or more of the affected countries were powerful enough to do so, keeping the Kurds in a position of geopolitical objects rather than subjects.

Moreover, if independence is regarded as absolute freedom from dependence – economic, military or political - on any other country, a Kurdish state would hardly be viable due to the reality of dependency. Equipped with merely *de jure* independence, a sovereign Kurdistan might find itself in a position where it has nothing to it but its name. Political decisions might be taken in Washington DC, economic policy directed by the World Bank and IMF and Kurdish culture undermined by strong influences from Baghdad, Tehran and Ankara, which would generate a disempowering relationship.

Within regional politics, the Iraqi-Kurdish experience relates to the Palestinian state-building process, where representative institutions have been set up despite the fact that the embryonic Palestinian state remains within the territory of the “Big State” Israel. The developments in Palestine/Israel give a regional dimension to the political situation in Northern Iraq: namely, should a regional precedent be set with a Palestinian state coming into being, there might be hope for a Kurdish state. If Israel permanently lets go of territory, could Iran, Iraq and Turkey be envisaged to do the same? The answer to that may to a large extent lie in each state’s relations with the remaining super power, but it appears highly unlikely that even massive international pressure could coerce these countries into allowing the formation of a Kurdish state. The situation for the Kurds is far more complicated than that of the Palestinians.<sup>29</sup> Apart from being less unified and organised, the Kurds must deal with several countries in their quest for statehood. Rights to statehood in themselves are not enough in an era and region where geopolitics have come to matter so much.

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<sup>29</sup>. Analogies such as this one could be useful but one should bear in mind its limitations. There are admittedly similarities between the two experiences, but the differences are so much greater

## 8.2 A nation without a state

One monumental question arising from this discussion seems to be whether or not a nation needs its own state, i.e. whether the former can exist long-term without the latter. The earliest nationalists Herder and Rousseau argued that as long as their cultures were not threatened, nations could fare well without states of their own.<sup>30</sup> Fichte, however, launched more aggressive nationalist ideas in which he claimed that in order to be (and remain) a genuine nation, you have to possess your own state.<sup>31</sup> The question whether or not a nation needs its own state is often overshadowed by the issue of whether the nationalists are likely to achieve the ultimate goal of political independence for their nation. Desiring one's own nation-state is, according to the logic of the nation-state system, an ethically defensible claim, but nonetheless a claim that entails a substantial degree of conflict often leading to a fruitless and destructive quest for something unattainable.

The most common argument for a nation-as-people to be granted the status of a nation-as-state is that they either cannot be safe without their own state to live in, or that they are incapable of flourishing as a people if they remain a nation devoid of statehood 'because this is the only condition of its insulating itself from some powerful and pervasive foreign pressure'.<sup>32</sup> But is this true for the Kurds of Northern Iraq? In view of the analyses put forward in this study, does the Kurdish nation need a state in order to ensure its political as well as cultural survival? The answer would be affirmative if endorsing the view of Robert Fine, who argues that

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and the conditions so dissimilar that a comparison between the Kurds and the Palestinians demand a thesis of its own.

<sup>30</sup>. On Herder see F. Barnard (1965), *Herder's Social and Political Thought*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, and on Rousseau see A. Cohler (1970), *Rousseau and Nationalism*, New York: Basic Books.

<sup>31</sup>. See chapter three in John Holland Rose (1916), *Nationality as a factor in modern history*, London: Rivingtons.

<sup>32</sup>. Taylor (1993), p. 50.

The modern pariah – refugees and displaced persons who have no state – become the visible evidence that belonging to a nation which does have its own state is the condition of possessing those rights which enlightenment purports to grant to every individual by virtue to his or her humanity.<sup>33</sup>

Essentially the same sentiments are echoed by Michael Ignatieff in claiming that ‘the right to have any rights at all only inheres in those who have a state’.<sup>34</sup> However, one is inclined to argue that the process for a nation to be ‘fulfilled’ does not necessitate the establishment of a nation-state carrying its name, in other words, all nations do not have to become state-nations. Nations could be said to have lives of their own, as they are entities independent of statehood and hence do not rely on a state to ensure their survival. As became clear from the analysis in the second chapter, nations are not historically limited to the formation and development of the modern nation-state as created in Europe in the centuries following the French Revolution. Consequently they should not be regarded as exclusively depending on the state for their continued existence.

The narrow political issues of nation, state and nationalism indeed have particular complexities in the Middle East. As we have seen, in the post-colonial period, a great deal of social engineering was undertaken and the prevalent interpretation of the nation among the ‘nation-builders’ was the citizenry occupying the territory of the new states. In these processes there was no room for the Kurdish nation, conveniently overlooked by the dominant and successful national movements spurred on by powerful global powers. However, the nation of Kurds has not disappeared or been weakened beyond recognition.

Over a long period of time, this national community of Kurds with a great deal of territorial continuity and with a tradition of local autonomy (the earliest examples being the Kurdish principalities) has identified itself as a specific people, a nation, in various contexts, against different adversaries, being part of different states, in modern times having its own state (the Mahabad Republic -

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<sup>33</sup>. Fine (1999), p. 150.

<sup>34</sup>. Ignatieff (1999), pp. 142-143.

although on a very limited part of its territory and that being on Iranian not Iraqi territory), periodically seeking autonomy without challenging the territorial integrity of the state of Iraq, integrating immigrants (denoting forcibly resettled Shiite Arabs from the south), enduring humiliation and yet existing as Kurdistan. The difficulties and repression faced appeared only to strengthen the resolve of a nation that will not cease to exist. Favourable political conditions creating a safe environment may well see thriving national communities whose cultures face no restrictions in expressing themselves. It is just achieving those favourable conditions in order for the Kurdish nation to thrive that appears rather overwhelming in the current political climate.

Moreover, since the world we live in contains more nations than states it is not feasible to co-ordinate nations with states. A countless number of boundaries would have to be radically altered if there is to be any likelihood of peacefully resolving the nations-and-states-issue in such a way as to create a territorial state for each and every nation. Earlier in the last century the Kurds lost out in the battle for a Kurdish state in the region, but that did not entail the loss of the Kurdish nation. A nation may not find survival without a state all that difficult whereas a state without a corresponding nation may exist only with considerable difficulties. Nonetheless, the eternal longing for an independent state will presumably persist among Kurds, which in itself is perhaps an indicator of the enduring appeal of the nation-state concept. It might even be the combination of rationality and irrationality ingrained in the idea of the nation-state that so engages and attracts people, particularly those without a state to call their own.

However, the nation-state as such may not be the ultimate form of societal organisation for the Kurdish nation.<sup>35</sup> Problems inevitably arise when the European model of the nation-state is copied onto a different society without the socio-economic base being the same or at least similar in character. By not searching for a new state but fighting to preserve their nation and striving to accommodate it into new political constructions, Kurds may in a way find themselves returning to their origins as a people of borderless trade with a clear

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<sup>35</sup>. As Dr. Rashid puts it: 'it's a bit outdated for the Kurdish area'. London, 1999.

cultural/linguistic identity and flexible arrangements of authority - all features that seem to characterise the new information age we now live in.

Giddens' view of the nation only being significant insofar as its relation to the state is concerned- i.e. when it succeeds in attaining and maintaining state power - and outside that context having no independent status of its own, can now be discarded. If this were the case, the Scottish people, to take one of many examples, would not constitute a nation until the day Scotland broke away from the United Kingdom and formed its own nation-state. Clearly, cultural aspects of the nation are as important as political ones, and presumably even more critical to its long-term survival than the latter. As Kurdish culture becomes institutionalised, its cultural nationalism keeps the nation very much alive.

As emphasised in chapter two on nationalism, there needs to be a willingness on behalf of the people constituting the nation to grant their community a primary and persistent loyalty. As long as such loyalty is questionable, the nation is unable to move to the next stage, i.e. to utilise its right to organise itself as an independent state – even if the external conditions are favourable. Tribal loyalties are still strong and hence impair the advancement of Kurdish nationalism. The plurality of poles of identification in Kurdish society could, however, in Gellner's wording mean that 'a [partially] tribal nation may for a time be tribal internally and national externally'.<sup>36</sup> In other words, tribalism does not necessarily incapacitate a nation indefinitely.

If we do accept that tribalism is an inherent part of Kurdish society and one in which the continuity of tribal social and political structures appears likely to endure, this phenomenon has to be properly accommodated in a state structure. This can be accomplished by introducing measures of regionalism in governmental policies that could serve to pacify certain tribal units of a more belligerent nature. Such an arrangement would allow and encourage the development of indigenous cultural and political institutions and enable them to operate within their own separate areas of jurisdiction with powers exceeding

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<sup>36</sup>. Gellner (1983), p. 138.

that of simple administrative duties but excluding sovereign functions. This type of regional government may be regarded as the middle ground between federalism and devolution. These regions or regional administrations have to be created by the central government, who also retains the power to take over the running of affairs should the need arise. Tribal demands might be successfully dealt with under such an arrangement.

### **8.3 The Kurds in a post-Saddam Iraq**

Transitional arrangements can temporarily solve problems, as the creation of the autonomous region in 1991 proved, but the status quo in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan cannot be regarded as a lasting formation. The establishment of the area of self-rule was at the time regarded as a highly temporary solution to the chaotic situation prevailing at the end of the Kuwait War. Now, more than a decade later, the Iraqi Kurds continue to rule themselves with a little help from the United Nations, but still this is not to be regarded as a solution to a long-standing problem in Iraq.

The Kurdish question seems to be growing stronger in regional political importance, and may in this new century come to rival the Arab-Israeli conflict in magnitude. When political change does occur in Iraq, the stateless but self-ruling Kurds are likely to play a crucial role. It is also important to note the connection between the availability of water - the importance of which is hardly on the decrease - and the Kurds. Syria's use of the PKK-card was motivated by its fear of being deprived of water and Turkey has entered the new decade as one of the strongest players in regional politics, particularly on the water-front, much due to the success in curbing the activities of its militant Kurds. With its network of dams, the Ataturk project, nearly finished, incidentally located in northern Kurdistan, Ankara is in virtual control of the water market of the Middle East, similar to OPEC's power over the oil market in the 1970s. But, and this is highly significant, Turkey can only attempt to regulate the political behaviour of the Arabs by stopping the flow of water southwards if the Kurds do not disturb the operation of the dams. It may well be the Kurdish question that determines whether or not Turkey will remain strong throughout the first decade of the new century, a Kurdish question that is much centred around Iraqi Kurdistan and the development there.

The instability characterising the political situation in Northern Iraq owes a great deal to the longstanding power struggle between the two main Iraqi Kurdish parties and the personal antagonism between their leaders. Even though the present may not be an automatic continuation of the past and the future not

necessarily mirror the present, it would perhaps be unduly optimistic to expect the two to genuinely settle their differences in the foreseeable future. Ever since the Kurdish defeat following the Algiers Accords, which closed the era of the legendary Mullah Mostafa, there has been a constant internal struggle between the Kurdish political leaders. The unique position enjoyed by the late KDP-chief of achieving near unity among the Kurds even beyond Iraq's borders, has been the ultimate goal for any leader ever since.

Events of the 1990s did not indicate a political maturity among the Kurdish leadership(s), and neither Masoud Barzani nor Jalal Talabani has emerged as a statesman. Instead, developments proved clearly that the interests of the leaders of the dominant parties have been placed above those of 'Free Kurdistan' as a political entity. Once again the theory of omnibalancing can be applied, which holds that 'the leader of the state rather than the state itself should be used as the level of analysis'.<sup>37</sup> What are Barzani and Talabani likely to do? It appears unreasonable to believe that one of them would give up complete control over his own region for the benefit of Iraqi Kurdistan as a whole. The current factual division of the area may prove to be so entrenched that it will remain split into two spheres of influence under a Kurdish administration in a future Iraqi Arab-Kurdish federation.<sup>38</sup>

According to the principle of self-determination, the Kurds have qualified for an independent state of Kurdistan, but is this the only alternative to a solution to the Kurdish problem in Iraq? Those maintaining that this is so may be advocates of wishful thinking rather than well-reasoned determination. Some may argue that since the Kurdish genie is now out of the bottle, political independence will inevitably follow, but such a simplistic assessment is not endorsed in this analysis. It is true that the Kurds can no longer be ignored as was largely the case prior to 1991, but there are other options available in order to achieve a lasting settlement of the issue.

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<sup>37</sup>. David (1991), p. 237.

<sup>38</sup>. Back in 1995 David McDowall stated that since both Barzani and Talabani seek ascendancy, 'the only way in which autonomous Kurdistan is big enough for both of them is by partitioning the area'. This still appears to be the case. See 'The struggle for Kurdistan', *MEI*, No. 499, 28 April 1995, pp. 17-18.

Political nationalism argues that only a self-governing people are a free people. There are those who propose that the reason for a national community to seek the establishment of their own state is mainly because they want to manage their own affairs and not be hopelessly dependent.<sup>39</sup> The assumption is then that a federal arrangement would not satisfy desires or needs for self-rule, since 'the only road to *genuine* self-rule lies through independence'.<sup>40</sup> As shown when discussing the force of economic and political globalisation and its impact on the nation-state, political independence is often an illusory idea, and one that cannot bring political satisfaction. 'In the best of all worlds', as Taylor writes, 'nations would not have to become states': self-determination should still be one option, but the 'higher aspiration is supranational unity'.<sup>41</sup>

Iraq, which is the country that has employed the most brutal methods of treating its Kurdish population - the Kurds have been in the way of Saddam Hussein's pan-Arab ambitions of a greater Babylon - is ironically also the country where the Kurds periodically have enjoyed a certain autonomy. However, despite the overwhelming changes that have taken place in Central Kurdistan over the last decade, it appears that the Kurds of Northern Iraq were no more free to determine their own future in the early 1990s than they were in the early 1970s, given the non-existence of regional (or international) consensus for independence. In that sense their position and relation to Baghdad has not changed significantly - the Iraqi Kurds appear to have no choice but sooner or later to enter into negotiations with the central government.

If the Kurdish nation of Iraq needs a state to save it from the domination of the Arabs, a political arrangement that reduces the power of the central government over the Kurdish areas will give the Kurds the necessary political space without having to demand the elusive political sovereignty. This is particularly so in view of the fact that 'the world has become too complex and dynamic for

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<sup>39</sup>. As argued by, for instance, Charles Taylor in his 'Why Do Nations Have to Become States?' in Taylor, Charles (ed.) (1993), *Reconciling the Solitudes. Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, pp. 40-58.

<sup>40</sup>. Taylor (1993), p. 44.

<sup>41</sup>. Ibid. p. 58.

independence to satisfy the needs and wants'.<sup>42</sup>

The artificial construct constituting the state of Iraq has created a situation whereby the subnational group of Kurds owes allegiance to interests other than the national interest. Failing to identify with the state, individuals place their loyalties along ethnic, religious, tribal lines. As the levels of repression steadily increased in Iraq under the Baathists, identification with the Kurdish nation over the Iraqi state kept getting stronger. However, there appears to be a discernible Iraqi element to 'Free Kurdistan', and as full independence has never been advocated since the establishment of the self-ruling entity, a unified but decentralised Iraq could emerge post-Saddam. Instead of being the representative of a group in control of power in the capital, the state could develop into a participatory incorporative unit, within which the Kurds would find adequate representation. As the current Iraqi regime has been delegitimised through its policies in its Kurdish areas, only under a scheme of considerable decentralisation of state power are the Kurds likely to re-accommodate themselves under the umbrella of the Iraqi state. With a federal arrangement Kurdistan would be as Kurdish as Basra is Arab, but still the two nations would be co-joined within one political structure.

Concerning the Kurdish people, Richard Falk states that 'it is evident that their sufferings illustrate too well the regional vulnerabilities and perils of a nation ... without a satisfactory state'.<sup>43</sup> Not contesting the truth in that statement, it is nonetheless felt that if Iraq were to develop into a well-functioning federation between Kurds and Arabs, the Iraqi Kurdish people would have far less to fear from geopolitical power games. There should be some political space for the Kurds to explore possibilities for expressing their identities.

The Iraqi Kurds advocate a democratic federation of Kurds and Arabs, as made clear by the announcement of the formation of a Kurdish federal state in late

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<sup>42</sup>. Rosenau (1995), p. 202.

<sup>43</sup>. Falk (1991), pp. 386-7.

1992.<sup>44</sup> Not only does this present a realistic and lasting solution to the Kurdish problem in Iraq, it also serves to preserve the unity of the country. Such a federative arrangement would grant the Kurds political institutions they could see as ‘their own’, an important aspect of legitimising any settlement. Iraqi Kurdistan would cease to be an area of unsatisfied nationalism, as its political aspirations would have been met, although in a modified way.

Federalism is a general constitutional system, which provides the same degree of autonomy to each of the units in the federation. It describes a method of government in which differing territorial interests are accommodated, a structure that steers clear of the frequent overcentralisation of unitary systems as well as the extreme decentralisation of confederations.<sup>45</sup> Federal systems function in a variety of different political contexts and it is important to point out that as any other system of governing, a federal arrangement needs to be tailored to the specific conditions of the country and will only prove successful if it responds to the needs of people being governed.

In their call for a federal system, the Kurds request power to be shared between the Kurdish region and Baghdad. This implies Kurdish representation in the central government and the democratically elected parliament (i.e. the sharing of executive and legislative powers), the latter of which needs to constitute two assemblies: one for representing the Iraqi people as a whole and one for the two federal regions respectively. Such a federal, democratic structure requires the present one-party-domination to be brought to an end. By proposing a federation of Kurds and Arabs instead of endorsing regional autonomy favoured by the central government, the Kurds seek a bi-lateral agreement between two equal parties. This gives power and security to the Kurds that an easily revocable autonomy law does not provide.<sup>46</sup> Needless to say, a federal system between

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<sup>44</sup>. In the early 1990s Professor Nouri Talabany drafted a comprehensive constitution for the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (which was adopted by the elected Parliament in October 1992), meant to supplement a future Federal Constitution for Iraq as a whole. See Nouri Talabany (1999), *The Kurdish View on the Constitutional Future of Iraq*, London (publisher unknown).

<sup>45</sup>. Federalism is to be distinguished from mere power-sharing arrangements or ‘consociationalism’. Arend Lijphart has written extensively on consociational democracy - see for instance *Democracy in Plural Societies*, (1977), London: Yale University Press.

<sup>46</sup>. This Kurdish view of the federation-scenario was explained by Professor Nouri Talabany, London 1999.

Kurds and Arabs is possible only in a post-Saddam Iraq as it necessitates the abolition of Saddam Hussein's regime - a regime that cannot conceivably agree to a power-sharing arrangement. Only an Iraq that in practice could accept its plural identity could be fully open to democratic development. The culture of politics must be transformed if a new Iraq is to enjoy constitutional stability. When a politically disadvantaged group gains a voice inside the system, exiting from that system loses its appeal.<sup>47</sup> That Iraq is unlikely to remain an entity after the demise of Saddam Hussein from the political scene is an argument mainly put forward by the Iraqi President himself. Iraq may remain as strong as any other regional country.

With its composition of Sunni Kurds, Sunni Arabs and Shiite Arabs, a future federal state of Iraq will encompass cross-cutting cleavages, which would give the system stability. The religious cleavage will cut across the ethnic cleavage, which will prevent an enduring majority factor. Indeed, 'potential tensions will be cancelled out as, in this way, an individual cleavage does not become entrenched in the system'.<sup>48</sup>

Iraq is constitutionally already a multi-nation-state, but federalism is likely to solve the existing ethno-regional problems and make Iraq a genuine multi-nation-state. As an ethnonational group the Kurds have not been able to identify with the state of Iraq, despite being constitutionally recognised, and through their national movement they have previously been trying to rearrange the existing state structure. The multifaceted Kurdish identity will naturally also develop in this new structure, and as a new aspect of this identity evolves, Kurdistan will assert itself first *within* Iraq and then *together with* Iraq.<sup>49</sup> The citizens of a federated Iraq would simultaneously be Iraqi, Kurdish, Kurmanji-speaking tribesman without this causing internal contradictions. Neither the Kurdish language nor tribal affiliations nor religious belonging constitute *the* base for political claims of the Iraq Kurds, but remain important factors. These linguistic political claims can be accommodated in a federal structure.

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<sup>47</sup>. See Albert Hirschman's classic *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* (1970), Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

<sup>48</sup>. Khashman (1999), p. 91.

However, a note of caution must be added. Just as there were question marks with regard to the durability of a Kurdish independent state, it is unclear how a federal Kurdish entity would conduct itself, in view of the fact that 'Free Kurdistan' has been governed without Baghdad's intervention for over a decade. Is there a chance that the province would declare itself a liberated zone and proclaim independence? Would the leadership of a Kurdish province be able and willing to hand over full responsibility for defence and foreign policy to the central government and resist the temptation to form an independent policy for instance in relation to the Kurdish inhabited areas across the northern and eastern borders? This may cause tension.

The creation of a 'new Iraq', in the process of which no changes to the WWI borders are to be expected, would also bring substantial benefits to its neighbours. The economic burden of Turkey, for instance, would be eased and the enforcement of the no-fly zones over Iraq would be redirected to economic development and investment in reconstruction of Iraq, developing trade or commercial zones, developing industrial and agricultural infrastructure in these regions, as well as ensuring access to energy sources. Kurdistan on both sides of the Iraqi-Turkish border in forming a contiguous region could indeed be developed into such a zone. Trade, culture, and transportation are already connecting the region together. Such a development could contribute to the political status of Kurds becoming more equal across the borders.

An Iraqi federation between Arabs and Kurds should not be a utopia. After all, 'the conflict in Iraq is not between the cultures of nationalities, the difficulty is between the central government and the people'.<sup>50</sup> Iraq is likely to re-emerge on the regional scene and assert its authority, but in a new shape, in a federation consisting of Arabs and Kurds. In the next decade or two, the 'new Iraq' may seek to become integrated into a broader entity, a democratically revolutionised Middle East that translates into various networks of regional and municipal governments, as well as of civic associations, which multiply horizontal relationships throughout the region, but with the nation-state system in place.

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<sup>49</sup>. With reference to Yael Tamir's discussion (1993) regarding Israel and Palestine.

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<sup>50</sup>. Dr. Rashid, London, 1999.

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Dr. Mohammad Jawad-e Zarif, Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs, Tehran, 14 February 2000.

Mr. Hoshyar Rahman, official at the KDP office in London, London, 22 March 1999.

Dr. Latif Rashid, PUK-spokesman in London, London, 23 March 1999.

Dr. Mahmood Sariolghalam, Associate Professor of International Relations at School of Economic and Political Sciences, National University of Iran (Shahid Beheshti), Tehran, 27 August 1999.

Professor Nouri Talabany, Chairman of the Kurdish Organisation for Human Rights in the UK, London, 22 March 1999.

Dr. Mahmood Vaezi, Deputy Director for Foreign Policy and International Relations at the Centre for Strategic Studies and the former Deputy Foreign Minister for Europe, Tehran, 10 February 2000.

Mr. Bahram Valadbeighi, Director of The Kurdistan Cultural Institute (in Iran),  
Tehran, 20 June 2001.

Dr. Ali Akbar Velayati, former Foreign Minister 1981-1997, Tehran, 14  
February 2000.

Dr. Ebrahim Yazdi, Leader of the main Iranian opposition party *Nehzat-e Azadi*  
[the Freedom Movement] and the first Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic  
in 1979, Tehran, 25 August 1999.

