The Iraqi Kurds, the Cold War and Regional Politics: 1958-1975

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CUP</td>
<td>Cambridge University Press</td>
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<tr>
<td>CENTO</td>
<td>Central Treaty Organisation</td>
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<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency</td>
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<td>DDRS</td>
<td>Gale’s Declassified Documents Reference System</td>
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<td>DNSA</td>
<td>Digital National Security Archive</td>
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<td>DOD</td>
<td>Department of Defence</td>
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<td>FRUS</td>
<td>Foreign Relations of the United States</td>
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<td>FO</td>
<td>Folder</td>
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<td>GOI</td>
<td>Government of Iraq</td>
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<td>ICP</td>
<td>Iraqi Communist party</td>
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<td>IPC</td>
<td>Iraqi Petroleum Company</td>
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<td>KDP</td>
<td>Kurdistan Democratic Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEA</td>
<td>Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs of the State Department</td>
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<td>NSC</td>
<td>National Security Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>OUP</td>
<td>Oxford University Press</td>
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<td>PUK</td>
<td>Patriotic Union of Kurdistan</td>
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<td>RAF</td>
<td>Royal Air Force</td>
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<td>SALT</td>
<td>Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty</td>
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<td>SAVAK</td>
<td>Sāzemān-e Ettelā’āt va Amniyat-e Keshvar (Organization of Intelligence and National Security)</td>
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<td>UKFO</td>
<td>United Kingdom Foreign Office</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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<td>UNSC</td>
<td>United Nations Security Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>OPEC</td>
<td>Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries</td>
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<td>UAR</td>
<td>United Arab Republic</td>
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<td>USINTS</td>
<td>United States Interest Section</td>
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<td>USSR</td>
<td>United Soviet Socialist Republics</td>
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<td>VP</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
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<td>WPLUSD</td>
<td>WikiLeaks Public Library of US Diplomacy</td>
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Abstract

The Kurds comprise the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East. As such, they have had a considerable influence on the international relations of a number of Middle Eastern states and their internal politics. Conversely, regional and international politics have had their own effects on the political status of that people. This thesis focuses especially on the Iraqi Kurds, examining the impact on them of regional and international politics in terms of the Cold War and focusing on US policy during the period 1958-1975.

Given Iraq’s location in a sensitive area of the world, this is a surprisingly under-explored area, both geographically, at country level, and specifically at this time, during the Cold War. That is the gap in the literature, therefore, that the present research fills. It takes 1958 as its starting point as this was the year of the overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy and the establishment of the Republic, which had a profound effect on the Cold War in the Middle East, and it takes 1975 as its end point, since this saw the signing of the Algiers Accord between Iran and Iraq, which, widely perceived as a betrayal amongst the Iraqi Kurds, constituted a major setback for the Kurdish national liberation movement in the country.

The thesis approaches this topic through the examination of several issues, including American policies, Iraq-Iran relations and the impact of regional politics on the Kurdish Issue in the new Republic, analysing the impact of these not just as discrete factors but also in terms of their complex and dynamic interplay.
Declaration

I declare that that no portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.
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To my parents, Ning and my late grandparents
Acknowledgments

I wish to express my gratitude to all who have helped me through my journey to reach this stage in my education, whether mentioned here or not. In particular, I would not have been able to complete my studies without the tenacious support of my partner, Ning, and therefore words do not do justice to how grateful I am for her help. I would also like to thank my parents Farah and Ali for their lasting encouragements and assistance. Similarly, I thank my good friend, Anjoman.

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A special thanks goes to the Graduate Office staff members of the University of Manchester, each and every one of them, for always being there for the students. I also wish to thank Dr Mahmoud Othman, for giving me his time to interview him twice via skype from the UK for this research.
Introduction

Background

The Kurdish question in Iraq has been one of the most serious and enduring issues facing Iraq since its formation in 1921.¹ The Kurds consider themselves a nation that do not have a state of their own, being known, in fact, as one of the largest peoples lacking this. The territory they inhabit straddles primarily across four countries: Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Since the end of the First World War and the demarcation of the current borders of the Middle East, successive Kurdish generations have strived for self-rule or statehood in one or the other of these countries, often resulting in armed conflict and rebellion.² This research is a study of the Iraqi Kurds and the impact of regional and Cold War international politics on their status between the years 1958 and 1975. It examines a number of issues in addressing this overarching research question. With reference to the Cold War, the effects on the Iraqi Kurds of the US and USSR’s policies are assessed, focusing in particular on those of the former, while at the regional level, issues such as Iran-Egypt tensions, Iraq-Iran tensions and the Arab-Israeli wars are considered, and in Iraq, tensions within the Iraqi political class are analysed and their relevant impact determined.

In relation to the time covered, the year 1958 is selected as the starting point because this was a consequential year not only for Iraq but also for regional politics. In Iraq, this was the year in which the monarchy was overthrown and a republic established. This had profound implications for Middle Eastern politics and also inevitably on the Cold War in the Middle East, as widely recognised by scholars.³ The year 1975 is selected as the end point as this was the year of the Algiers Accord, which resulted in the abandonment of the Iraqi Kurds by Iran.

followed by the US and Israel and consequently a catastrophic collapse of the Kurds’ Şorş or revolution, which had endured 14 years even in the face of the Iraqi army’s determination to crush it.⁴

**Scope of the research**

The superpowers (US and the USSR) and the regional powers of Iran, Iraq, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and Turkey all had a stake in the Kurdish Issue in one way or another during the time period covered by this dissertation (1958-1975). This is further to internal Iraqi, and inter-Kurdish politics, which comprise another and interrelated side of the Kurdish Issue in Iraq. Due to the complexity of the Kurdish Issue, clearly this study cannot elaborate on every single question that can be raised in respect of the relations between the above actors. Therefore, it only addresses developments that impacted on the Iraqi Kurds, emphasising the examination of contemporary materials.

Thus, this research is not purely a study of all the aspects of the subject in general or of the Iraqi Kurds themselves or their relations with Baghdad but will cover such topics as suggested by the primary sources in order to examine the main subject as stated. This work is not intended to be a study of the Cold War or of Middle Eastern politics per se. Rather, it brings together all the aspects of the issue necessary in order to address its overarching research question.

A number of works already exist on aspects of the Kurds’ history, Iraqi politics, the Cold War, regional history, the study of US foreign policy, and related issues. Accordingly, this research avoids repetition of these in addressing the overall aim of the study, although further sources

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⁴ In contrast to words such as ‘rebellion’ or ‘revolt’ to describe Kurdish insurrections, Kurds usually refer to their attempts to achieve autonomy from the ‘parent state’ as ‘Şorş’ in Kurdish, which equates to ‘revolution’ in English. See, for instance, the English and Kurdish titles of two of Masoud Barzani’s memoir series volumes (below); also, while the actual contents of these works (the main texts) are in Kurdish (except one, which is in English), their titles are given in English as well as Kurdish, where ‘revolution’ is employed: Barzanî, Mes’ûd, *Barzanî Û Bzutnewey Rизgarîxwazi Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşî Yekem 1961-1975* [Barzani and the Kurdish Liberation Movement Part i, Vol. i: The September Revolution 1961-1975], (Hewlêr: Çapxaney wezareti perwerde, 2002[?]); Barzanî, Mes’ûd, *Barzanî Û Bzutnewey Rизgarîxwazi Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşî Duwem 1961-1975* [Barzani and the Kurdish Liberation Movement Part iii, Vol. ii: The September Revolution 1961-1975], (Hewlêr: Çapxaney wezareti perwerde, 2004[?]). Also see Shareef, Mohammed, *The United States, Iraq and the Kurds: Shock, Awe and Aftermath*, (Oxon & NY.: Routledge, 2014), p. 137.
on these subjects are indicated and consulted. Ultimately, defining this scope enables the dissertation to be of an innovative nature by remaining focused on its objective.

**Research Statement and Literature Review**

This study examines the impact on the Iraqi Kurds by regional and Cold War politics between the years 1958 and 1975. Within this overall research focus, a range of issues are studied at national, regional and international levels. At the international level, the impact of the superpowers’ policies (the US in particular, as well as the USSR) insofar as they affected the Iraqi Kurds are determined. At the regional level, tensions and insecurities between Iran and Arab-nationalism, largely spearheaded by Nasser, including Iran-Iraq relations and the effects of these on the status of the Iraqi Kurds are explored. Further, at country level, the impact of Iraqi and also intra-Kurdish politics are considered.

Regarding the literature, three categories of written work are directly relevant to this research. The first is that on the Kurds themselves, particularly in Iraq; the second category is that pertaining to Middle Eastern politics and its international relations generally, including bilateral state-relations, such as between Iraq and Iran; and the third category comprises literature related to the Cold War, particularly in the Middle East. The first of the categories listed, the literature on the Kurds, has undeniably flourished in recent times. The most substantial scholarly works within this connected to the history covered by the present thesis that I have located are as follows.

**On the Kurds**

The contribution to the literature most relevant to the topic at hand when I embarked upon this research in September 2012 within the field of Kurdish studies were those of Marianna Charountaki, Michael Gunter and Douglas Little. Also important were works or parts of works by Quil Lawrence, Lokman Meho, David Mack and Francis Ricciardone. During the course of

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my research, these were joined by the works of Mohammed Shareef, and Roham Alvandi, while the latest addition to this list was authored by Bryan Gibson, in 2015. Other works that have been explored within this category include those of Peter Hahn and Kenneth Osgood, these being examples of publications that briefly focus on the (Iraqi) Kurds in addressing the broader US-Iraq relations.

Investigating the ‘role of the Kurds in US foreign policy from World War II until Gulf War III (March 2003) and its aftermath’, Charountaki focuses on two central questions, namely, ‘whether the Kurds have influenced US foreign policy, and if there is such a thing as a relationship between US foreign policy and the Kurds in the form of an interaction between a state and “non-state” actor’. The book adopts a ‘comparative approach’, which it achieves by ‘looking simultaneously at the case of the Kurds of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey’. The period most relevant to the present research is covered in Chapter Four, ‘US foreign policy towards the Kurds, 1945-1990’. This chapter

[...] examines how, within the general context of US Middle East policy [...] US foreign policy towards the Kurds in the Middle East was formulated from World War II until the onset of the Gulf War II (1991). The nature and stages of US-Kurdish relations are identified, and particular consideration is given to whether these relations were ‘institutionalised’ and structured, or, by contrast, were merely *ad hoc* and unstructured.

Thus considering US views of the Kurds in the four states, Charountaki finds that there was no such a thing as a relationship as such between the Kurds and the US in the 1950s and that this was because the US was more preoccupied with preventing the USSR from attaining regional domination. While this conclusion is relevant here, the focus in the present work is on the impact of the Cold War and regional politics on the Iraqi Kurds in particular, within

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10 Charountaki, *The Kurds and US Foreign Policy: International Relations in the Middle East since 1945*, p. 3.


which the overall context US policy was framed. Charountaki’s work has the merit of being among the first to concentrate on primary sources when looking at US foreign policy in relation to the Iraqi Kurds. However, the years picked out in the current thesis (1958-1975) are only covered in a one part of one chapter of Charountaki’s book, and then in the context of addressing a rather different research question to that considered here in seeking an international relations paradigm to explain the superpower-non-state actor relationship(s), and this latter concerning the Kurds in general rather than specifically the Iraqi Kurds. All this shows the considerable divergence of Charountaki’s interest from mine in terms of perspective and scope and thus demonstrates the contribution that the present study promises to make.

Michael Gunter has offered a good analysis of the history of US foreign policy towards the Kurds. He identifies five stages of US foreign policy in relation to the Kurds, starting from WWI and Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points. Gunter’s second stage begins in the early 1970s and ends with the Kurdish revolution’s capitulation in 1975. Thereafter, the remaining three stages go beyond the year 1975, where this thesis ends. Gunter also seeks to explain the complexity of the Kurdish Issue and relates this to the fact that the Kurdish territory is divided into four countries.¹³

In his book, Mohammed Shareef seeks to address the issue of change and continuity in US policy towards Iraq, largely taking 1979 as its starting point.¹⁴ Chapter Six of the book, on ‘The Iraqi Kurds in US Foreign Policy: from Kennedy to Obama’, deals with US-Iraqi Kurd relations. Within this chapter, in 10 pages, Shareef covers the Iraqi Kurds in US foreign policy between 1961 and 1975, the period covered here,¹⁵ which more or less coincides with the period covered here (the rest of the chapter stretches to the Obama Administration). Noting that his work from Chapters One to Five focuses on US policy towards ‘Arab Iraq’,¹⁶ Shareef also recognises that

[w]hat contemporary scholarship largely fails to address is US relations with Iraq’s Kurds, the second largest ethnicity in Iraq, who were largely absent from government in Baghdad until the toppling of Saddam Hussein in 2003.¹⁷

¹³ Gunter, ‘The Five Stages of American Foreign Policy Towards the Kurds’.
¹⁵ Shareef, The United States, Iraq and the Kurds: Shock, Awe and Aftermath, pp. 135-91
The rest of Shareef’s book lies outside of the immediate scope of this research. Notable in its field, Shareef’s book is related to the present work in that this thesis expands on what Shareef has covered in the chapter section mentioned. Since my thesis studies the impact of regional and Cold War politics on the Iraqi Kurds, moreover, of which US policy is only one aspect – albeit a major one given the US position as a superpower and its active role in the Middle East – the present work extends Shareef’s in this respect regarding the subject matter, as well as, clearly, detail, as the 1961-1975 focus only occupies ten pages in Shareef’s book.

Douglas Little’s article on US and the Iraqi Kurds examines ‘three key episodes’, which are all directly related to the Kurds in Iraq: 1) secret backing given to Kurds by both the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations intended to weaken the Qasim regime; 2) The ‘cynical covert action launched by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger in Iraqi Kurdistan, with help from Iran and Israel’,18 after the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 1972 between Iraq and the USSR; and 3) the half-hearted US attempt to use the Kurds to foment regime change in Iraq in the early 1990s. Little states that ‘In each case the U.S. government exploited long-lasting anti-Arab resentments among the Kurds’ and ‘secretly supplied US guns or dollars or sometimes both’,19 but adding that it pulled back when the situation escalated.

Little also examines the connection of the Cold War to the Kurdish Mehabad Republic as well as Barzani’s return from the Soviet Union after the Iraqi Revolution of 1958. Overall, the article presents an overview of interactions between the US and the Iraqi Kurds in relation to the Cold War but also beyond and before that. The present research, however, is primarily concerned with this issue from 1958 up to 1975, so focuses on a much narrower timeframe. There are also several other points to note regarding Little’s work, which are as follows.

Firstly, as noted, the author states that the work examines three major episodes – the Eisenhower and the Kennedy administration backing for the Iraqi Kurds and Nixon’s covert operations in Iraqi Kurdistan – and, ‘In each case’ [emphasis added] the U.S. government exploited long-lasting anti-Arab resentments among the Kurds, secretly supplied U.S. guns or

19 Little, Douglas, ‘The United States and the Kurds: A Cold War Story’, p. 64.
dollars or sometimes both, and helped ignite an insurrection in Kurdistan. However, the argument presented is not convincing in showing how, during the Eisenhower and Kennedy periods, the US ‘secretly supplied’ the arms and money. In fact, the evidence examined by the present study suggests that the Kennedy administration, at least, supplied munitions to Iraq to be used against the Kurds (see Chapter Two).

There are a number of other points made by the article that may be questioned. For instance, the claim on page 69 that Barzani had essentially insisted on Kurdish autonomy with the Ba’athists in 1963 as a reward for helping to weaken Qasim; similarly, page 70 gives the impression that US envoys tried to broker a deal between the Kurds and the Ba’athists. Both of these points are contentious and may be disputed. Indeed, it is not clear whether the US, through the CIA, actually helped the Kurds in July 1963 or not.

Little essentially argues that the US saw the Kurdish Issue through the Cold War prism and it is within this context that he examines the issue. Overall, he makes an innovative contribution in examining the relationship between the Iraqi Kurds and the Cold War when it comes to the US. However, as indicated, and in light of the large volume of data now accessible and employed in this research, a number of clarifications are needed.

Another source on the subject matter of this thesis is that of Alvandi, who describes his book as ‘a study of Iran’s impact on how the United States fought the Cold War’. Related to this, in his third chapter he details how and why both the Shah and Israel were involved in arming Barzani’s Kurdish Peshmerga against Iraq in the 1960s. He finds that the two parties pursued this for different reasons and purposes. The Shah, however, he notes, was not interested in the Iraqi Kurds winning autonomy within Iraq; rather, he was seeking to preoccupy the Iraqi army in Iraqi Kurdistan so that it would not pose threats to Iran in its territorial disagreements with Iraq. The Shah, he proposes, would not have wished a Kurdish entity within Iraq as the shockwaves of this would have affected the Kurds of Iran and thus Iran itself (recalling the Mahabad Republic of 1946, in which Barzani himself served and fought to defend). Alvandi explains all these as an extension of the Cold War for Iran, combined with its territorial disputes with Iraq.

20 Little, Douglas, ‘The United States and the Kurds: A Cold War Story’, p. 64.
21 Alvandi, Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War, p. 4.
Alvandi also states that the US, throughout the 1960s, refused to be dragged into the Kurds’ conflict with Iraq. This contradicts the argument presented by Little that the Kennedy and Eisenhower administrations assisted the Kurds. Alvandi instead conveys the idea that the US saw this issue as entirely internal Iraqi matter. According to this author, ‘the Americans were suspicious of Barzani’s ties with Moscow and feared that a civil war within Iraq would not only generate instability that the Iraqi communists could exploit, but also make Baghdad more dependent on military assistance from the Soviet Union’. Alvandi also presents a history of Iran and Israel’s relations with the Iraqi Kurds, of how and why these developed from the early 1960s. Alvandi’s focus here seems to be the role of the Shah in all this and the nature of his relations with the Kurds. He also briefly mentions the Mahaband Republic. In four pages, the author then covers the reluctance of the Americans to become involved in Iraqi-Kurdish disputes and also looks at internal Iraqi political affairs leading up to the March 1970 Accord between Iraq and the Kurds. He covers these together with Iran and Israel’s continuing assistance as well as their interest in the continuation of the war in Kurdistan, thus making his work highly relevant to this research.

Of concern to Alvandi also is how the Shah managed to sell the Iraqi Kurds’ cause to the White House in the mid-1970s as one of fighting the Cold War and preventing a pro-Soviet coalition government between the Ba’ath Party, the Iraqi Kurds and the Iraqi Communist Party. This will be studied subsequently in detail in this dissertation (see Chapter Four). One major goal for the Shah, it should be emphasised, was to force Iraq to concede to Iran’s demands regarding redrawing the Iran-Iraq border in the Shatt, this being the result of a 1937 treaty between the two parties. The Iraqi Kurds were essentially only a means to this end. Alvandi thus examines the Shah’s role in this and how he managed to draw the US into the conflict, since he is primarily concerned with the influence of the Shah on the US in the Cold War, as mentioned. In one chapter – ‘Iran’s Secret War with Iraq’ – the author makes a significant

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22 Alvandi, Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War, pp. 65-73.
23 Alvandi, Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War, p. 73.
24 Alvandi, Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War, pp. 65-73.
25 Alvandi, Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War, pp. 73-77.
26 Alvandi, Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War, pp. 63-125.
27 Alvandi, Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War, pp. 77-84.
contribution to the literature on how the Kurds were treated by the various parties for their own benefits, taking Iran as the focal point in this.

Reflecting on the chapter in Alvandi’s book that concerns the Iraqi Kurds and is thus relevant here, indeed, not only does it allude to the impact on them of regional politics and the Cold War – a major part of the focus here – but it must also, moreover, be commended for its originality in relation to Iran-US involvements in Iraqi Kurdistan, and, in particular, in respect of the period from 1969 to the collapse of the Kurdish national liberation movement in March 1975. The author has utilised a significant number of primary sources. However, the main subject of Alvandi’s work is a study of relations between the Nixon administration and the Shah, and it is within this context that he introduces the Iraqi Kurds in, that is, in terms of the Shah’s influence on the Nixon White House.

One other source of literature on the Kurds is again produced by Michael Gunter. While looking at the plight of the Iraqi Kurds, Gunter notes ‘foreign influences’ in the struggle with Baghdad under Barzani’s leadership. The most relevant part of his book consists of six pages (25-31). Like Alvandi, Gunter also recognises the Shah’s role in bringing in the US to back the Kurds, albeit symbolically (as part of a strategic game played for his – Iran’s – own purposes, not with any genuine intention to support the Kurds, in Iraq or elsewhere and especially – because of those – in his own country, as mentioned). Gunter looks at the Pike House Committee Report28 and its mentions of US involvement in the Kurds’ war with Iraq, and he ties covert US support to the Kurds to a number of reasons. Primary among these, as stated, was the US responding to the calls of one of its allies (the Shah) to contain Iraq (a Soviet ally) in the Cold War and to preoccupy Iraqi troops with problems at home so that they would be unable to participate in any future Arab-Israeli conflict.

Additionally, it is also stated that US aid to the Kurds was given in response to Barzani’s desire for US involvement so that it would act as a guarantor for the Kurds and to prevent the Shah from summarily abandoning them when it suited him to do that. The author also proposes that the US supported the Iraqi Kurds basically to secure access to their oil and thereby solve its energy issues. Barzani is quoted as saying that he ‘would turn over the oil fields to the

28 The Pike Committee was a Congressional investigation set up to investigate illegal CIA activities.
United States’ if it supported the Kurds in their bid for independence. However, the US was well aware of the landlocked geography of Iraqi Kurdistan and, indeed, the hostile concurrent geopolitics of the region in relation to any Kurdish statehood. The only way America would have been able to make use of Kurdish oil would have been through Iran or Turkey, and it is widely recognised (even by the author) that the Shah’s support for the Kurds was tactical (to use the Iraqi Kurds to bring Iraq to submit to Shah’s Shatt al-Arab demands, as mentioned) and did not extend to the birth of any form of a Kurdish entity in Iraq, which would give succour to his own, Iranian Kurds. The author then subsequently reviews the relationship between the Iraqi Kurds and Israel. Thus, the relevant part of Gunter’s work is another good indicator, albeit brief, of the effect of regional and international politics on the political status of the Iraqi Kurds in 1958-1975 (and beyond).

Finally, the most recent scholarly addition to this category of relevant literature in the field of Kurdish studies is Bryan Gibson’s (2015) Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds and the Cold War. Writing on US relations with the Iraqi Kurds, Gibson states that ‘This book underscores the reactive nature of US foreign policy during the Cold War, while assessing America’s policies towards Iraq’, explaining that ‘As a study of the Cold War’, his book is ‘situated within a wider debate about superpower intervention in the Third World’ and shows that ‘America’s intervention in Iraq – a Third World nation – at the height of the Cold War contributed to the country’s political and economic destabilisation and its continual national upheavals and agonies’. This indicates the nature of Gibson’s work and its relationship to the Iraqi Kurds and to my study. Certainly, this book must be regarded as a major contribution not only to the study of US foreign policy towards Iraq but also to the Kurds’ position in this matter.

Gibson’s book shows ‘how the United States moved from being an unsophisticated observer of events in 1958-59 to becoming a direct protagonist in Iraq during 1972-75 through its own covert programme to support Iraq’s Kurdish rebels. Accordingly, Gibson’s work focuses heavily on US policy in relation to Iraq and also examines a number of other issues in this affair in focusing on the Kurds, while the present study focuses on the effect of Cold War

29 Quoted in Gunter, The Kurds of Iraq: Tragedy and Hope, p. 28.
30 Gibson, Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds and the Cold War.
31 Gibson, Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds and the Cold War, p. xiv.
32 Gibson, Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds and the Cold War, p. xiii.
generally and regional politics on the Iraqi Kurds, within which US policy is but one aspect, albeit it vital (of immense importance but not dominant over all else). Gibson’s book thus assumes a somewhat different perspective from that adopted here, although it clearly remains highly pertinent to my research and its significance is noted in this thesis.

One other important point to note regarding the above work is that Gibson recognises the significance of the Iraqi Kurds’ as an actor in both regional and Iraqi affairs and has thought to explain the implications of this, calling the Kurds’ conflict with Baghdad the ‘Kurdish War’.\(^{33}\) Indeed, this thesis acquiesces with the use of the ‘Kurdish War’ as a more accurate term for the Kurds’ relationship with Baghdad than description with words such as “conflict” or “rebellion”. With regards to this terminology, David Kimche has also observed that ‘By 1965, the Kurdish insurrection had grown into a full-scale war’.\(^ {34}\) This study, therefore, also adopts this as a more appropriate name – for the simple reason that there were protracted hostilities on a large scale that often involved the bulk of the Iraqi army, as will become clear.

Overall, Gibson’s work examines a number of issues related to the Kurds and also the wider region in reference to US policy. In Chapter One, he narrates US foreign policy towards Iraq from 1958 and demonstrates the consequences of the Iraqi Revolution both on regional policies and those of the superpowers. He also examines this, with reference to the Iraqi Kurds, from the Eisenhower administration to Kennedy. Nasser, the US, communism, Qasim, the USSR and also US regional policy and the link between all these are among the other issues examined by Gibson. In terms of sources, he has explored a large number of US archives and secondary sources. Gibson has sought to show how Iraq had become a ‘Cold War battleground’\(^ {35}\) from 1958; how the US and the Soviets both sought to exert influence on successive Iraqi governments and ensure that the country did not join the other side in the Cold War divide. To this end, the author has extensively analysed American and also Russian policies towards Iraq, and within this context as related to the Iraqi Kurds.

Gibson makes extensive use of quotation from his sources. However, since Britain’s role in the Middle East frequently enters as a major theme in his work, the inclusion of British

\(^{33}\) Gibson, Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds and the Cold War, p. 163.


\(^{35}\) See for instance Gibson, Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds and the Cold War, pp. 80 and also 1-30.
governmental archives would have strengthened his work, a point that applies similarly to Kurdish sources. Importantly in this respect, the author has relied on secondary (non-primary) sources and US archives in order draw his conclusions on the Kurds and Britain’s stance to the whole issue.

One disadvantage of relying heavily on American sources is that American diplomats primarily tended to report what they had heard from the Iraqi government and Iran’s side rather than the Kurds. There is, thus, a lack of balance, which does not allow the presentation of an accurate picture of events, particularly since there was (and still is) a conflict of interest between Iran, Iraq and even Turkey, on the one hand, and the Kurds, on the other, revolving around Kurdish self-determination. Accordingly, given that these state actors perceived any Kurdish autonomy to be an existential threat to what they consider to be their territorial integrity, one cannot have expected any of them to have reported anything positive on the Kurds. The aspect of sources is expanded upon in this dissertation in the relevant section of this chapter. There are also a number of other points that should be observed in respect of Gibson’s work.

First, the evidence for a number of claims made by the book is not compelling. For instance, on page 80 the author states that ‘throughout the spring of 1963, the Kennedy administration pressed the Ba’th Party to make reasonable concessions to the Kurds [but] without much success’. In fact, however, the Kennedy administration approved a $55 million arms-deal to provide Iraq with arms even though US officials themselves had recognised that there was an element of truth in the Soviet’s charge of genocide in Kurdistan, as raised in the UN by the USSR in July of 1963. The US also sought to rally its Arab allies against the Soviets’ charge of genocide.36 These will be studied here in detail (Chapter Two).

Furthermore, according to Gibson, on page 84, under the Johnson administration, Britain and also Iran and Israel ‘were all giving the Kurds military and economic support to destabilise the pro-Nasser Arif regime’. However, the evidence available to this research in the form of large volumes of British national archives suggests that not only was Britain not aiding the Kurds but in fact it was playing an adverse role with regards to the Kurdish national liberation movement. Again, these matters are considered in the present work (Chapters Two to Four).

36 See Gibson, Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds and the Cold War, pp. 69-80.
Similarly, contentious points are made on pages 87 and 90 regarding Britain’s relations with the Iraqi Kurds. It is not only that Britain was just unsupportive of the Kurds, as indicated, but rather that it supplied Hawker Hunter bombers to Iraq with devastating effects in Kurdistan and it had imposed “informal” conditions on the visas of Kurdish emissaries visiting the UK, imposing upon them abstention from public activities such as talking to the media. This was because, according to the Foreign Office, it ‘could be embarrassing to us both in our relations with Iraq and vis-à-vis public opinions here in the context of our decision to supply arms to Iraq’.\textsuperscript{37} Equally, Britain spearheaded the West’s effort to derail Soviet attempts at the UN to discuss ‘Genocide in Kurdistan’.\textsuperscript{38}

While providing a detailed narrative of the Kennedy administration’s policies towards Iraq until the end of Qasim’s regime in February 1963, in Chapter Two of his book, on page 67, Gibson also states that the Soviets had offered ‘limited degree of diplomatic and military assistance’ to the Kurds after the breakout of war in June 1963 between the Ba’ath and the Kurds. However, in the light of alternative evidence, my work will dispute the idea that the Soviets provided ‘military assistance’; rather, what they seem to have offered to the Kurds was the financial assistance with which they could buy arms themselves (Chapter Two).

Overall, Gibson has examined US policy towards Iraq and whether this can be explained by Cold War considerations, finding that it can be, and it is within this context of US policy that he looks at the affairs of the Kurds.\textsuperscript{39} Gibson emphasises that Cold War considerations dominated US thinking in its relations with the Iraqi Kurds – this, while also examining other, related regional issues, such as the Arab-Israel conflict and Israel’s stake in assisting the Kurds and the US interest in these. Gibson’s work may be the most detailed account of the history of US relations with the Iraqi Kurds within the above framework to date. However, its specific focus and thus frame of reference along with the limitations that this imposes enables the present research to make a new contribution to the field, as explained in the next section.

The above sources constitute what is arguably the most significant works on the subject of this research in the field of Kurdish studies in terms of originality, scholarly endeavour and substance. Many of these works were produced during the course of the present research

\textsuperscript{37} ‘FO371/170429: 1963’, (UK: National Archives, No date).
\textsuperscript{38} FO371/170429: 1963.
\textsuperscript{39} E.g., see Gibson, Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds and the Cold War, p. 197.
(for this thesis, since 2012), which indicates the developing nature of the subject. Generally, they have assisted in the preparation of this thesis to develop a better understanding of the subject, and as secondary sources, they have enriched this research. Undoubtedly there are other works and published materials on the Kurds and Kurdish politics and history which also touch upon US relations, although these are mostly not scholarly studies, or just they briefly touch on US relations with the Kurds in the context of a larger theme and refer to what is already circulating in the literature, or else they focus on a time period outside of that covered here.

Among such publications, for instance, are works by Jonathan Randal, Quil Lawrence, David Mack, Francis Ricciardone, Aram Rafaat, Lokman Meho, Edmund Ghareeb, David Romano, Nader Entessar, Ofra Bengio, Edgar O’balance and David Kimche. Some of these are dedicated to the Kurds in US foreign policy in a different timeframe or are rather short, while others are dedicated to the history of the Kurds in one era or the other and also include their relations with external powers, partially or wholly. Additionally, there are also works on US relations with Iraq that only very briefly look at the Kurds’ struggle or place in this in the period of interest here. Examples of these are works cited (earlier) by Peter L. Hahn and David Ryan with Patrick Kiely. Nevertheless, despite their tangential relevance, these works have still informed this thesis in various ways.

The contributions cited of Mack and Rafaat may be cited as examples of works that concentrate on the post-1990s, while Ricciardone briefly looks at US policy and the Kurds. While these works have been consulted in the developmental phases of this research, therefore, they are not reviewed here as they look at matters outside the main concern. Similarly, the books by Meho and Rehmani are collections of documents from the US and

41 Ricciardone, An American Diplomats Perspective, pp. 246-51.
other sources on issues pertaining to but not specifically focused on the subject at hand. Rehmani’s Kurdish work also has an introductory addendum by the collector in which he interviews and explores a number of important sources, in particular, regarding Iran’s use of the Kurds, and from them constructs a narrative of the events.

Nader Entessar is an example of another scholar who has written on the Kurds in a broader period on issues of present interest. Entessar looks at international relations in the Middle East in relation to the Kurds, including the Iraqi Kurds. He recognises that there was essentially a cold war between Nasser and the Shah due to their respective alliances with the Soviets and with the West, as a result of which each viewed the other as a threat. Entessar also notes that the 1958 Iraqi Revolution gave a new impetus to the Kurdish Issue in Iraq, as essentially changing the political dynamics of the region. This thus acts as a further confirmation of the significance of the year 1958, taken as the starting point of this thesis. Overall, Entessar presents a good overview of the state of affairs in the period covered by this dissertation. Similarly, David MacDowell’s book is an excellent source on the modern history of the Kurds. Stansfield’s *Iraqi Kurdistan: Political Development and Emergent Democracy* is another text that focuses on the political developments in Iraqi Kurdistan from 1991, although, clearly, it is beyond the historical time period covered by this thesis.

*On Middle Eastern politics and its international relations*

The second category of literature as listed consists of works on the wider international relations of the Middle East, on politics among the states of the region and on its Cold War politics. The Kurds inevitably enter into consideration in some of these works, as, essentially, used by the powers to advance their local and regional interests. Good examples of such publications are the books written by Trita Parsi, Louise Fawcett, Fred Halliday, Beverly-Milton Edwards with Peter Hinchcliffe and volumes edited by L. Carl Brown, Raymond Hinnebusch with Anoushiravan Ehtehami, in addition to another work by Hinnebusch and pieces by David W. Lesch, Yezid Sayegh with Avi Shlaim, among others.

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44 Parsi, Trita, *Treachorous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States*, (Yale University Press, 2007); Fawcett, Louise *International Relations of the Middle East*, (Oxford: OUP, 2013); Halliday, Fred,
Parsi’s book on relations between the US, Iran and Israel in the Middle East also examines the undisclosed dealings of these countries in connection to the Iraqi Kurds. Again, Parsi seeks to explain each actor’s particular interests and essentially how Iran betrayed the Kurdish movement in Iraq in 1975. One strength of the relevant part of this work is the inclusion of a number of interviews with US and Israeli officials that were closely involved at the time.

In her book, Fawcett recognises some of the difficulties and challenges involved in studying the international relations of the Middle East. For instance, she notes that there is an internal Middle Eastern studies aspect of this together with the external broader international relations dimensions that has impacted on it (the former). Scholars only started to integrate these towards the end of the twentieth century. Similarly, in studying the international relations of the region, Fawcett notes that another issue has been that the international relations of the Middle East have largely been observed from the outside, by outsider observers or observers trained outside the region and thus with a different understanding of the traditions and the practices of the region.

In relation to this thesis, one may argue that Fawcett’s observation is also applicable to the Kurdish Issue in the Middle East since it, too, has an internal and regional aspect and a broader dimension. The latter takes the form of the Cold War, or rather, the complicating impact of this. Fawcett’s work is an excellent resource for the study of international relations in the Middle East, as it covers a wide range of theoretical areas and approaches to international relations as related to the Cold War in the Middle East and ultimately to the 21st century.

Other works include Brown’s edited volume, a study of the international relations of the Middle Eastern powers as well as the policy of the major world powers, including the US and UK, towards the Middle East. Hinnebusch and Ehtehami, meanwhile, provide an analysis of

the Middle East in the context of international relations as a regional system, also taking into account the foreign policies of a number of the countries, including Iraq, Iran and Turkey.\textsuperscript{45}

Hinnebusch’s own work is another example of a comprehensive study of Middle Eastern affairs. Hinnebusch notes that the Middle East is ‘the epicentre of world crisis, chronically war-prone and the site of the world’s most protracted conflicts’.\textsuperscript{46} Other areas that Hinnebusch addresses include, among others, the relevance of international relations theories to the politics of the region, issues of identity, sovereignty and foreign policy making. In relation to the Kurds and in studying the incongruity of identity and territory in the Middle East, in the context of this dissertation, Hinnebusch notes that the Kurds ‘have been regularly used by their host states’, while in their turn they have also sought to exploit the inter-state rivalries to attain their rights.\textsuperscript{47} This work gives an excellent insight into the broader politics of the region.

By the same token, Halliday’s works present other excellent sources for studying the Middle East in international relations and raising questions about understanding the region,\textsuperscript{48} while Milton-Edwards and Hinchcliffe are concerned with ‘the nature of conflict in the Middle East’\textsuperscript{49} and putting these conflicts in their wider context, which includes coverage also of ‘the forgotten Kurds’.\textsuperscript{50} The most important contribution of such books to this thesis has been their contribution to a grasp of the wider international relations of the region, within the context, that is, of larger scale and global politics. Sayegh and Shlaim’s book is another example of rich texts on understanding the Cold War in the Middle East and the Middle East during this post-WWII period.

Other sources that are relevant to the subject of this dissertation are country-specific works on Iran and Iraq. These offer historical overviews of both domestic and foreign policies and the developments of these states in the context of the present work and also beyond.

\textsuperscript{45} Brown, L. Carl, \textit{Diplomacy in the Middle East: The International Relations of Regional and Outside Powers}; Hinnebusch, Raymond and A. Ehteshami, Anoushiravan, \textit{The Foreign Policies of Middle East States}.

\textsuperscript{46} Hinnebusch, Raymond \textit{The International Politics of the Middle East}, (Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 1.

\textsuperscript{47} Hinnebusch, \textit{The International Politics of the Middle East}, p. 56.

\textsuperscript{48} This is especially true for his work titled Halliday, Fred, \textit{The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology}, (Cambridge: CUP, 2005). Also see Halliday, Fred, \textit{Nation and Religion in the Middle East}, (London: Saqi Books, 2000).


\textsuperscript{50} Milton-Edwards and Hinchcliffe, \textit{Conflicts in the Middle East since 1945}, pp. vii and 72.
Examples included Nikki R. Keddie, and Ervand Avrahamian on Iran and Charles Tripp and Gareth Stansfield on Iraq.\textsuperscript{51}

\textit{On the Cold War}

The final and third category of literature pertaining to this research comprises those works that study the Cold War itself. Among these, an excellent eclectic text on the history of the Cold War is that produced by Arne Westad.\textsuperscript{52} Westad looks at the historical evolution of the Cold War, its origins in the Third World and how and what motivated the superpowers to intervene in the Third World as well as the cases of several interventions. The CIA intervention in Kurdistan in the mid-1970s is covered as among these, but only minimally.

Within this Cold War-related category of publications, there are also a number of good articles. In the journal \textit{Diplomatic History}, for instance, Little remarks that ‘Nowhere has the story of American covert action in the Middle East since 1945 been shrouded in greater mystery than in Iraq’.\textsuperscript{53} The relevance of Little’s contribution to this thesis, like that of others here, is that it conveys the impact of the Cold War and the superpowers’ involvement in one way or another on the international relations of the Middle East. Other periodical texts pertaining to the region, its states and the Cold War include works authored by Roham Alvandi, Eric Jacobsen, Brandon Wolfe-Hunnicutt, and another (different) publication by Douglas Little.\textsuperscript{54}

There are also contributions on broader US-Middle East relations and politics, such as Matthew Jacob’s book on the Middle East and American Foreign Policy until 1967, in which he examines the evolution of US views of the region through half of the twentieth century.

\textsuperscript{52} Westad, Odd Arne, \textit{The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times}, (Cambridge: CUP, 2005).
\textsuperscript{53} Little, ‘Mission Impossible: The CIA and the Cult of Covert Action in the Middle East’, p. 694.
Ray Takeyh and Steven Simon’s is another example of such works. In this, the authors study 10 significant crises in the Middle East during the Cold War to show the successes of America’s strategy in the region in relation to the Cold War. Burton Kaufman has authored another such publication, in which he surveys US policy towards the Arab world. Among other scholars whose works have been consulted in this context during the course of the research for the present thesis are Yakub Halabi, Joyce Kaufman, Robert J. Pauly and Patrick Kiely.55

It ought also to be mentioned that theories of international relations as a field of study were a part of this dissertation during its development stages. However, time and space restrictions and the desire to go more deeply into a historical approach made it necessary for these to be discarded. Nevertheless, this research is still the product of that effort and process. Many such sources of international relations theories, and others, studied during the earlier stages of this work are still evident in this final thesis production.56

Finally, further to the mentioned sources, I have comprehensively searched through various databases for related publications, including those covering ETHOS, Index Islamicus,


Justification for the Research

While the preceding section has already alluded to gaps in the existing literature, this one seeks to clarify those but without unnecessarily repeating what has been covered thus far. Here, I seek to present common shortfalls in the literature in respect of my research question, or, essentially, to show the justification for this research; this section will demonstrate why and how this research will contribute to the field.

Firstly, the only work that could be argued to be wholly dedicated to the subject of this thesis and the period that it covers is that of Gibson (published in 2015, during the preparation of this thesis).57 Gibson’s work is largely a study of US policy towards Iraq, however, and it is within this context that he examines US relations with the Iraqi Kurds. My study, as stated, seeks to determine the effects of the Cold War and regional politics on the Iraqi Kurds. Nonetheless, this thesis notes the efforts and the contributions made by Gibson’s work, and, indeed, by others. Inevitably, there will also be some overlap between my work and that of Gibson, as, for instance, Cold War politics will heavily influence any such study. That, however, should by no means be taken to imply that the present research will not make a contribution, most especially given that it explores sources that are largely yet uninvestigated in the context, as will be explained shortly.

More importantly, however, the gap in the literature, the under-representation of the issue under discussion and also of that of the Kurds in general is well recognised by several of the authors whose works were reviewed in the previous section. The significance of the Kurds in Middle Eastern politics and especially during the Cold War becomes apparent when one consults texts that include it, such as that of Gibson, or when one studies the large volumes of primary sources, as my research has done. This is all while the Kurdish cause is in itself already a very complicated subject due to the fact that several actors have and have had a stake in the Kurds’ cause, both state and non-state actors and on local, regional and

57 Gibson, Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds and the Cold War.
international levels. These points are also well recognised by other scholars in one way or another, as presented below.

In relation to US foreign policy and the Kurds, which is one major aspect of this thesis, Charountaki has stated that ‘it is impossible to discuss a generalized US foreign policy towards the Kurds since each Kurdish cause is different’.\(^{58}\) This implies that “each Kurdish cause” in the four different “parent states” does, indeed, merit a dedicated study of its own, due to the differing compositions and hierarchies of the actors involved. In support of this complexity, Gunter has also observed that ‘The United States does not really have any grand foreign policy strategy towards the Kurds because they live in four separate states’.\(^{59}\) The indication is that general studies alone of the Kurds do not do justice to the issue due to its complexity and that specialised and finely focused studies are also needed, such as this.

In his doctoral thesis and in connection to the scarcity of such specialised studies, Shareef has also observed that:

> [...] little can be found focusing solely on US Iraq policy. Furthermore, within this context, even less can be found on US policy towards Kurdish Iraq. Modern scholarship fails heavily in describing accurately the highly significant and parallel US interaction with Iraq’s Kurds.\(^{60}\) [emphasis added]

He later echoes this by remarking that ‘The Kurdish aspect of US Iraq policy is heavily under-researched’ [emphasis added]; its understanding remains an effective tool for studying US foreign policy towards the Middle East’.\(^{61}\) Therefore, as noted by Shareef, and also alluded to by Charountaki, the literature is short on what Shareef has called ‘solely dedicated studies’ of US relations with the Iraqi Kurds. While this research is not entirely on US foreign policy towards the Kurds, these comments show that there are still gaps in our understanding of the Cold War in connection to the subject and that this is so because it is impossible to discuss the Cold War in this context without addressing US foreign policy – and that studying US policy towards Iraq and the Kurds means, by implication, that we also need to study the Cold War. The latter is what this thesis addresses.

\(^{59}\) Gunter, ‘The Five Stages of American Foreign Policy Towards the Kurds’, p. 93.
\(^{60}\) Majeed, Mohammed Shariff Jalal, ‘President George W. Bush’s Policy Towards Iraq: Change or Continuity?’, (PhD, University of Durham, 2010), p. 5.
Further to Shareef and Charountaki, Gibson has also commented that ‘The historiography – or the history of [the] evolution of a historical debate – of US-Iraqi relations during the Cold War is still in its infancy’ and that ‘To date, only a single book focuses on US-Iraqi relations’. 62 Regardless of whether Gibson’s comment regarding there being only one book is fully justified, his recognition of this wider area as in its infancy, together with the other scholars as stated, are strong indications depicting the contribution that my research can make.

Along these lines also, Kenneth Osgood has remarked that ‘We know more about the 1991 Gulf War than we do about US-Iraqi relations during the five decades of the Cold War that led up to it’. 63 There appears to be a broad consensus in published scholarship testifying to a lack of literature in this area – which is still ‘in its infancy’ – and, manifestly, this includes the Cold War and regional politics. Accordingly, this research will be of an innovative nature and will be well placed in the literature as demonstrated.

In addition to the fact that other scholars have noted the under-representation of the topic area, there is also the issue of the sources the existing literature has used. Essentially, the Kurds’ side of the story has been left out by some of the scholars who have studied the subject at length. Researchers such as Gibson and Alvandi have consulted few if any Kurdish sources. Doubtless, this is in part a language-related issue – Kurdish is not widely known and not necessarily understood by scholars in the field of Kurdish studies. Here, the present work, authored by a native speaker, is at an obvious advantage and thus in an excellent position to make original contributions.

In such a case – where native language sources are to all intents and purposes unavailable – one can argue that there is an urgent need for works making use of these and the perspectives they bring. However, they need also to take their place in the international medium of a lingua franca for balance between the different language sources used and their particular interests and tendency to or inherent bias. Overly heavy or (near) exclusive reliance on American sources, for example – as in the case of Gibson and also Alvandi – has meant that claims that would be made by the Shah or are relayed to the Americans by Iranian sources are not cross-checked. Findings are stated without the recourse to confirmatory evidential triangulation. In

62 Gibson, Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds and the Cold War, p. xvi.
63 See Osgood, Eisenhower and Regime Change in Iraq: The United States and the Iraqi Revolution of 1958, pp. 4-7.
In this case, due to the conflict of interest between what Kurds view as national liberation and the states view as separatism and secession, one simply cannot substitute Iranian for Kurdish sources. Effectively, when the Shah’s views are relayed to US officials and later when this is cited as a source without the other side of the story (that of Kurds), the analysis that results can only be described as one-sided.

In short, the most substantial sources in relation to the period covered by this study are lacking in any notable primary Kurdish references, while these studies are supposed to be about the Kurds. The lack of the Kurds’ side of the story is immensely significant in the context of this study area, obviously. There have been, for example, momentous times in the history of the Iraqi Kurds, such as their sell-out by Iran in March 1975, which led to the collapse of a Kurdish liberation movement that had previously endured successive Iraqi attacks since 1961, and death and destruction to an extent that charges of genocide by Iraqi bombs can be raised. Indeed, the Kurds’ “September Revolution” that began in 1961 had outlived three governments in Baghdad.

Regarding this, Alvandi, for instance is indirectly influenced by Iranian sources – the Shah or his inner-circles – and thus seems to attempt to vindicate the Shah for his betrayal of the Kurds, accepting his claim that the Kurds had already been defeated and thus the narrative of the Shah having had no other choice but to scavenge whatever he could out of their fate (in return for an Iraqi compromise on the Shatt al-Arab issue).64 Kurdish sources, however, strongly dispute and dismiss this.

For the Kurds, the Shah simply sold them out, and there was no justification for this as would later be claimed by the Shah – and taken up by Alvandi. In fact, it is argued in this thesis (Chapter Four), the reason that Saddam Hussein yielded to the Shah’s demands regarding the Shatt al-Arab was precisely because of the failure of Iraq’s full-scale military offensive to overcome the Kurdish movement, causing Saddam, therefore, to resort to his undeclared ‘plan B’ (to come to terms with the Shah’s demands regarding the Shatt). In this case, Alvandi has made use of only one single primary Kurdish source, one that has been translated into

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64 For instance, on page 110 he states that ‘The Shah’s only choice [emphasis added] was to use the winter lull in the fighting to secure a deal with Iraq, while the Kurds were still on their feet’ and also that ‘The Shah’s faith in the Kurds’ fighting ability was clearly wavering,” and on page 112 the author makes a similar case yet there is no representation from the Kurd’s side to maintain the balance and see how the war was going. See the given pages of Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War*. 33
English and only covers the years 1931-1961.\(^{65}\) The question here is not whether or not Kurdish sources are more credible than Iranian ones, or *vice versa*, but to ensure that the different sides’ accounts are all taken into consideration – to which endeavour this thesis aims to contribute.

There are a number of primary Kurdish sources of great significance related to the topic that this thesis covers that have not been considered by any of the above-named scholars. In the case of Gibson and Alvandi, this may be due, as mentioned, to language barriers, as these are only available in Kurdish and perhaps maybe Arabic, too. In the cases of Shareef and Charountaki, this is primarily due to the fact that these scholars have addressed different research questions. Although they have conducted a good number of oral history interviews, Shareef and Charountaki’s works only briefly cover the period of the present topic and the actors involved (as reviewed).

There is also the aspect of other non-Kurdish data sources that, in conjunction with the above paragraphs, sets this study apart from those mentioned. There are now thousands of recently declassified US and also UK archives, materials that remain largely unexplored by much of the literature due to considerations of timing.

In addition to developing a balance in the narrative through a balance of original primary sources as explained, the present work also benefits from some of the sources utilised in the existing works on the subject. Here, therefore, I elaborate further on both the nature of and also the range of primary sources that this thesis will study. For instance, while Alvandi consults only one single primary Kurdish source – the English language translation of a memoir of Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani\(^{66}\) – this study takes that into account in examining and integrating Masoud Barzani’s three other (Kurdish) memoir-series publications, which include rich documentary sections and cover the subject to 1975 (the one that Alvandi uses only goes up to the year 1961).\(^{67}\) These Barzani memoir-series publications only seem to be


\(^{66}\) Barzani, *Mustafa Barzani and the Kurdish Liberation Movement (1931-1961)*.

available in the Kurdish and Arabic languages, which presumably explains their lack of employment until now.

Similarly, there are a number of audio-visual materials that narrate much of the history this work covers and are only available in Kurdish. These consist of lengthy interviews of people who have been very closely and actively involved in this history, including some in positions of leadership and political power. For instance, they include a former Iraqi minister who enjoyed close relations with both Saddam Hussein and the USSR and who was also a high ranking Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) figure; another was Mustafa Barzani’s confidante, one of the highest trusted emissaries and who also met with the Shah at critical times. Clearly, this research has made use of a number of original sources (to be further explicated in the next section). In fact, exceeding all else in the field in this respect, this thesis can claim to be the most comprehensive work on the subject to date.

As noted, the question of sources in the available literature hitherto and the issues that accompany this has also been recognised by a number of the scholars already mentioned. With regards to this, Shareef has remarked that

Due to the contemporary nature of this study, my research has been profoundly handicapped by the lack of unclassified documents allowing a greater and detailed assessment of US Iraq policy under the George W. Bush administration. It has been additionally hampered by the lack of unclassified documents from previous administrations. 68

This present work, however, does not face such an obstacle and, on the contrary, has had the luxury of being able to make use of a large number of American archives, among others (next section). In relation to sources, Charountaki also notes that

The dearth of literature on the research topic [that she had studied] results from the fact that the Kurdish Issue is still in flux. Additionally, the release of official US documents relevant to the theme under examination has occurred only recently from around 2005 or a bit early 2003. I tried to fill the gap through reference to an extensive collection of scholarly writings on the Kurds as a nation, Kurdish history and the current status of the Kurds. Most of my primary information was drawn from the

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interviews, US government electronic sources and US congressional records and reports.\(^{69}\)

Again, the present study does not face such an issue and only needs to make use of the literature that Charountaki mentions above as a complementary source supporting the collection of the primary sources. This thesis has had unhindered access to the declassified material to which Charountaki alludes and then to the additional material that has been further declassified since. In other words, in this respect the current work brings the contemporary scholarship up to date.

Charountaki, Shareef, Osgood and recently Gibson have all recognised the scarcity of the literature in one or more aspects of this research, which therefore must be weighed heavily here. In addition to the coverage of the Kurdish language sources, those areas include US foreign policy, which becomes crucial because of the Cold War. Such recognitions by other scholars, therefore, together with all the other points noted in this section, position this research well in the literature. It should be stressed that the lack of Kurdish sources in the literature, as specified, does not necessarily undermine their contribution – the point, rather, and as made, concerns balance. The need for balance constitutes a task that this work undertakes.

Finally, as mentioned, other publications that have not been included here examine other aspects of the Kurds – as a nation, their political cause, history and so forth – and are not particularly pertinent to the subject under examination. Nevertheless, some of these works are referred to in subsequent parts of this study, as necessary.

Summarising this section, therefore, a need for a study of this nature and the question that this research seeks to answer is justified at least on three grounds, which also indicate the contribution that this research will make to the field. First, the literature in this broader area is still in development, in its infancy even, as has been well observed by other scholars. Second, this research aims to integrate unexplored sources and cross-check them, developing a narrative balanced by introducing sources that are only available in Kurdish. Third, this dissertation will also make a contribution, however small, to the study of the Cold War in the

\(^{69}\) Charountaki, *The Kurds and US Foreign Policy: International Relations in the Middle East since 1945*, p. 3.
Middle East and the study of Iraq as well as of international relations of the Middle East in general.

Regarding the latter, the main lens through which this thesis focuses on the Kurds, the recognition by other scholars that US-Iraqi Kurdish relations during the Cold War is under-explored, including by the latest addition to the literature (that of Gibson), indirectly confirms that the study of the Cold War and regional politics together with their impact on the Kurds and, indeed, on Iraq itself comprise an evolving field of study. Indeed, the particular recent interest in Iraq during the Cold War, on the Kurds in the Middle East and also on aspects of the Cold War itself, such as US policy in the area, all go to confirm that the original work in this research will be well placed in the literature.

**Statement of Primary Sources and Method**

The information sources, source types and databases of which this research has made use are indicated here. This list, however, does not comprise a complete list of all the sources used, since it is not a repetition of the entire bibliography, but it is indicative of the origins of the data employed. The sources can be broadly categorised into American, Kurdish and UK sources, with others. In addition to these, the literature on the Kurds (as reviewed) itself complements a listing of the primary sources. For the purposes of brevity, I will refrain from stating the numbers of documents or archives obtained from each of the sources listed or explaining the nature of each of the sources in detail.

The American databases used hold well over two million governmental documents in total, from which I have extracted materials numbered in the thousands related to “Kurd” and then filtered by reading those that appeared most relevant to this research. In this endeavour, I found the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) to be invaluable. FRUS contain documents from the State Department and also documents from the ‘Presidential libraries, Departments of State and Defense, National Security Council, Central Intelligence Agency, Agency for International Development, and other foreign affairs agencies as well as the private papers of individuals involved in implementing U.S. foreign policy’.\footnote{FRUS, ‘About Us – Office of the Historian’, (US: US Department of State).}
Additionally, this study has drawn documents from The WikiLeaks Public Library of US Diplomacy’s ‘The Kissinger Cables’, the Digital National Security Archives (DNSA), Gales Declassified Documents Reference System (DDRS), and memoirs and newspaper publications from the US, among others.

When it comes to UK documents, I have spent time at the British National Archives in Kew selecting large volumes of archives of interest. These amounted to 21 large folders on the Kurds. Again, I have assiduously examined these documents, which also numbered in the thousands, in order to filter those that could be of use to this work in one way or another. The UK was still heavily involved in the Middle East during the time that this thesis covers. In addition to these, data is derived from Kurdish and Persian sources. The following paragraph expands on the nature of the Kurdish sources that have been consulted.

This research had access to accounts given by a number of Kurdish figures who were core members of the Kurdish leadership. These people were closely involved in much of the history covered by this research. In particular, I telephone interviewed Dr Mahmoud Othman, a prominent Kurdish politician for this study, via Skype. Mahmoud Othman was Mustafa Barzani’s confidante and the head of the Kurdish delegation for the negotiations that led up to the March 1970 Accord between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Ba’ath Iraqi government. He was also one of the two Kurdish representatives that for the first time met high-ranking US officials in 1972 in Washington (Chapter Four).71 Dr Othman also met the Shah on a number of occasions. He was one of the Kurdish leaders that met the Shah for the last time in March 1975, after the Algiers Accord, in which the Shah told them what he had in store for them as a result of the Accord.72

Other Kurdish materials consulted for this study are in the form of a series of detailed audio-visual documentary interviews in which Muhsen Dizaei, Mahmoud Aziz, Omar Othman, and Mukaram Talabani (separately) share their accounts of this history. Dizaei is the only other living member of the Kurdish delegation that negotiated the 1970 Accord and was also made Minister for the Development of the North in 1968 under the Ba’ath Party rule. Mahmoud Aziz was director of Mustafa Barzani’s headquarters and also deputy-head of the KDP’s

71 The other was Idris Barzani, who is deceased.
72 Mahmoud Othman, in ‘Telephone Interview B from the UK’, by Hawraman Ali (October 15, 2015).
intelligence agency, Parastn, when the Kurdish national movement under Mustafa Barzani collapsed as a result of the Algiers Accords. Mukaram Talabani is a former high-ranking Kurdish ICP official and was Iraqi Government Minister in 1972 when the ICP joined the Ba’ath in the National Front Government. He also had close and lasting relations with Saddam Hussein – with whom he met on numerous occasions and had extensive discussions – as well as the Ba’ath leadership and the Soviets.73

In addition to these, Masoud Barzani’s memoirs, which are in Kurdish, have been another major source of data on the Kurds’ side. Masoud Barzani, Mustafa Barzani’s son, was the head of the Parastn when Iran and Iraq signed the Algiers Accord of March 1970. There are simply no other better living Kurdish sources than these. In relation to this thesis, these public figures were involved first-hand in the making of much of the history concerning the Kurds that this inquiry covers. Broadly speaking, this thesis introduces these sources into the literature for this field of study, as reviewed in the previous section.

Lastly, the Mitrokhin Archive (a Soviet archival source), the memoir of Asadollah Alam, Minister of Iran’s Royal Court (a significant Iranian source) and a number of other texts, such as Jalal Talabani’s Kurdish memoir have all been explored in depth. Talabani was also a high-ranking Kurdish leader during Mustafa Barzani’s time; he represented Barzani on several significant occasions, such as at a meeting with Nasser.74

Structure

While not a repetition of the entire thesis, this section communicates the overall composition of the work; within each four chapter sections (below), it outlines the main points in relation

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to their contribution to the overall argument. The four main chapters are divided chronologically, with time periods structured according to the focus of the main research question. Chapter One covers the period 1958-1962. It does not abruptly start from 1958, however, since it sketches a history of the earlier days of the Cold War. This is necessary so that the effects of the Cold War from its early days can be examined and a foundation established. After this introduction and a background, the first main section then shows how the development of the Cold War and its effects on regional politics affected the Iraqi Kurds and how regional powers hostile to Kurdish statehood affected this. This is then followed by coverage of the Iraqi Revolution of 1958 and its impact on “superpower politics”, on the region and ultimately on the Kurds.

The outbreak of hostilities in Kurdistan and the perspectives of the two superpowers and the major regional powers on the Iraqi Kurds are then analysed. This again shows how both the Cold War and regional politics affected the Iraqi Kurds as time progressed. The chapter then explores the development of US policy towards the Iraqi Kurds, and it assesses and demonstrates why and how this was treated as an internal Iraqi matter. Lastly, in order to put the research in to a wider context, this chapter examines the link between the global US policy in the Cold War and its effect on the Iraqi Kurds, even if indirect. The aim here is to show that US attitude towards the Iraqi Kurds was compatible with its broader global policy. It is recalled that one major aspect of this focus within the structuring of the overall research question is that of the impact of the Cold War on the Iraqi Kurds, within which US policy was an integral part. This section of examining the broader US policy is repeated at the end of the following Chapters Two and Four (so with the expectation of Chapter Three).

Chapter Two covers the years 1963-1965. Within this period, the policies of the first Ba’ath regime, the regional aspects of this and superpower politics are studied. This is followed by a further analysis of the US and the USSR’s policies in the area. The next section examines the heightened regional tensions between President Nasser of Egypt and the Shah of Iran, with the implications of this for Iraq and consequently on the Iraqi Kurds. US policy from Kennedy to Truman is the subject of the last section of this chapter before its conclusion. Within the larger aim of the thesis, the aim of each section in this chapter, as with others, is to show how both the Cold War and regional politics affected the Iraqi Kurds and their aim of self-rule.
Chapter Three covers the years 1965-1971. It consists of parts analysing the Kurds’ appeals to the US for help and how Cold War politics took precedence over the plight of the Kurds when it came to their war with Baghdad. This chapter argues that several actors had a stake in the Kurdish Issue in Iraqi Kurdistan, but each for difference reasons and purposes. The change of government in Baghdad under a military coup d’état is then considered, in the context of this research. This is followed by a further investigation of the Kurds’ appeal to the US, another change of government in Baghdad and then Britain’s withdrawal from the Gulf with the tensions arising from this. Again, the ultimate aim in covering these issues is to bring them together to address the overall aim of studying the impact of regional and Cold War politics on the political status of the Iraqi Kurds.

Chapter Four concludes the main body of the thesis by addressing the topic for the years 1971-1975. This chapter explores how an opportunity was missed to remove the Ba’ath party from power after US reluctance to back the plan. The strengthening of Soviet-Iraqi relations are then considered with the implications of this. Iran’s perception of insecurity and the use of its “Kurdish card” are the focus of another part of this chapter, and lastly, the renewal of the war in Kurdistan and the various parties’ interests in this are analysed, as well as the betrayal of the Kurds by their supposed allies. This is be followed by observation of US foreign policy under Nixon and Ford in order to assess the link between US Cold War policy and its impact on the Iraqi Kurds. After Chapter Four and its conclusion, the final part of this thesis, is the Conclusion.
Chapter 1

The Iraqi Kurds, the Cold War and Regional Politics: 1958-1962

Introduction

This chapter starts by presenting a historical background of the Kurdish Issue in the 20th century through to the Iraqi Revolution of 1958. This historical overview presents the origins of the issue and mostly covers the years 1958 to 1962. After a background section, it looks at how, from early on in the Cold War, certain states portrayed the Kurds as a security threat liable to function as a Soviet Trojan giving it entry into the Middle East. The aim is to establish the effect of this on US and Western perceptions of the Iraqi Kurds.

Next, the chapter moves to the consequences for regional politics of the Iraqi Revolution of 1958, particularly regarding the Kurds, the region and the Cold War, and including, in this respect, US foreign policy. It shows clearly that one actor that cannot be neglected here is Iran – in which context, therefore, it analyses the regional tensions that existed between Nasser(ism) and the Shah, on the one hand, and communism and the Shah, on the other. The intention here is to determine how all these affected the Iraqi Kurds.

Another concern of this chapter is to demonstrate how regional states, notably Iran and the USSR, each sought to exploit the Kurds after the re-ignition of hostilities in Kurdistan in September 1961, within the historical framework that will be established until that point, in order to affect both Iraqi and regional politics.

Finally, the wider context of US foreign policy from Truman to Kennedy is considered, in order to draw insights into the relationship of this with the findings of the preceding sections, taking into particular account the fact that the Kurds were a non-state actor. A conclusion is then made, summing up the main findings of the chapter.

1.1 Background

In the aftermath of WWI, on August 10, 1920, the Treaty of Sèvres was signed between the Allies and the Ottoman Empire. Among other things, the Treaty stipulated that a referendum should be held on self-determination for the Kurds under the rule of the Ottoman Empire,
which was obliged to respect its outcome. Sèvres also laid the ground for ‘the voluntary adhesion to such an independent Kurdish State of the Kurds inhabiting that part of Kurdistan which [had] hitherto been included in the Mosul vilayet [i.e. Iraqi Kurdistan]’.  

However, with the birth of the new Republic of Turkey, Sèvres never materialised. Instead, it was annulled and replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923, which demarcated the borders of the new Turkish republic. With control over western Levant already ceded to Britain at the San Remo conference in April 1920 as a League of Nations Mandate over the then Mesopotamia, Mosul was included in what became the State (later Kingdom) of Iraq, a British client territory in which the House of Hashim was established (the Iraqi kings Faisal I, Ghazi I and then Faisal II). Thus denied the opportunity for self-rule, the Kurds of what was the old Mosul vilayet rebelled, with major revolts and uprisings in 1922, 1931, 1937, 1943 and thereafter. Each time, Britain intervened, supporting the Iraqi forces in forcibly subduing the Kurds. Britain did hold a referendum to legitimise the Hashemite accession, but, as Nader Entessar has noted, the ‘Kurds either boycotted the referendum or voted against Faisal’. After Faisal’s accession, Britain was more concerned with installing and maintaining a pro-British monarchy in a viable Iraq than it was in autonomy for the Kurds, regarded now as lost, like the Treaty of Sèvres, to history.  

The 1943 uprising was led by Mustafa Barzani, also known as Mullah – or rather Mela – Mustafa, later to become a pivotal figure in the Iraqi Kurds’ national liberation movement. Outnumbered and outgunned, the 1943 rebellion finally crumbled in the face of RAF bombings and the Iraqi army onslaught, and Barzani and his fighters retreated across the border into Iran’s Kurdistan. In Turkey and Iran too, various Kurdish uprisings took place but all were crushed by the use of military force and the leaders usually executed. The Kurds of

76 For more on Kurdish nationalism at the turn of the 20th century and an account of the post-WWI settlements as related to the Kurds, see Ghareeb, The Kurdish Question in Iraq, pp. 1-7 and also 29-31.
77 Entessar, Kurdish Ethnonationalism, p. 51.
78 For more on these and the related politics, see Entessar, Kurdish Ethnonationalism; Allain, Jean, International Law in the Middle East: Closer to Power Than Justice, (England & USA: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004); Ghareeb, The Kurdish Question in Iraq.
79 Lawrence, Invisible Nation: How the Kurds’ Quest for Statehood is Shaping Iraq and the Middle East, pp. 13-17; Entessar, Kurdish Ethnonationalism, pp. 49-80. The English language literature usually refers to ‘Mullah’ Mustafa, from the Persian/Urdu mulla following the Arabic mawla (e.g. Randal, Kurdistan: After Such Knowledge, What Forgiveness?, p. 116; Charountaki, The Kurds and US Foreign Policy: International Relations in the Middle East since 1945, p. 9; in Kurdish, however, it is ‘Mela’, which will be used henceforth.
Syria did not have a better fate, and in all these countries, the Kurds faced forced assimilation in one way or another.\textsuperscript{80}

As indicated, therefore, regional and international politics had a profound effect on the status of Kurds, including what were now the Iraqi Kurds, who never settled with the new order of rule from Baghdad. After WWII, the impact of the wider political environment on the Kurds was to evolve further with the transition from imperial conflicts to the Cold War. Following their crossing into Iran, Mustafa Barzani and his fighters joined the Kurdish Mahabad Republic, before it, too, was crushed (by Iran) and its founders hanged, and Barzani with his fighters sought refuge in the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{81} In November 20, 1945, however, the Turkish ambassador in Moscow conveyed to the Americans that Barzani was ‘in Moscow being provided with a printing press and propaganda to be distributed to the Kurds in Iraq and Turkey’.\textsuperscript{82} Thus, Kurdish aspirations for independence became entangled with international relations and alliances as determined by the growing tension between the US and USSR; indeed, this may be regarded as the beginning of the connection of the Iraqi Kurds’ struggle to the Cold War.

By August 1946, the Iraqi Kurds had established the Kurdish Democratic Party in Baghdad, in the absence of Mustafa Barzani himself, who was, nevertheless, appointed as its chairman. The Party was later renamed the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in 1953.\textsuperscript{83} When, in July 1958, the monarchy in Iraq was ousted by a group of officers led by Brigadier Abd al-Karim Qasim, the KDP declared its support for the new regime and the interim constitution. This constitution included the statement, ‘Arabs and Kurds are partners in the Homeland, and their national rights are recognized within the Iraqi entity’.\textsuperscript{84} Qasim also invited Barzani back from exile, but this was primarily just to balance his adversaries (see below). Consequently, the honeymoon was short-lived, and a combination of factors led to the outbreak in


\textsuperscript{81} See Entessar, \textit{Kurdish Ethnonationalism}, p. 56.


\textsuperscript{83} See McDowall, \textit{A Modern History of the Kurds}, pp. 293-97.

\textsuperscript{84} Quoted in McDowall, \textit{A Modern History of the Kurds}, p. 302.
December 1961 of major hostilities between the Iraqi Kurds, led by the KDP, and the Iraqi government. These continued intermittently until 1975, when Iran ended its support for Mustafa Barzani’s Kurdish movement, to be followed by the US and Israel.

The 1961 hostilities broke out in the context of a number of regional struggles and also a global one. At the regional level, one may name the regional powers of Iran, Egypt and Turkey, among others, while at the international level, the international powers of the USSR, USA and UK all had a stake in the direction in which Iraq headed. Subsequently, the road taken by the new republic impacted also on the relations of these national actors with the Iraqi Kurds. This chapter, therefore, is concerned with analysing these interactions and the contribution this may make to the broader research of Kurdish, Iraqi and related international relations’ issues, focusing on the years 1958-1962.

1.2 The Cold War’s Regional Delineation and the Iraqi Kurds: The Exaggerated Soviet Interest.

In relation to the Cold War and contrary to the impression that the literature conveys about the lack of US interest or knowledge regarding the Kurds in the period covered by this chapter, it is apparent that the US was taking a cautious interest in the Kurds from as early as the late 1940s. A lengthy report produced by the CIA on December 8, 1948, provided thorough information to US policymakers not only on the Kurds’ political circumstances and their relations to the ‘parent state’ but also on the Kurds’ ancient history, socio-political composition and even, in a throwback to nineteenth century anthropology, their physical characteristics. Distributed to the Office of the President and the National Security Council, among others, this report comprised of 21 pages and was presented in the form of a study. In fact, it might be better categorised as a scrupulous study of the Kurds’ socio-political history than a mere intelligence report.

85 For a lengthy narrative of these events and the recommencement of hostilities, see McDowall, A Modern History of the Kurds, pp. 302-13, and Ghareeb, The Kurdish Question in Iraq, pp. 29-44 (the latter is perhaps slightly influenced by non-Kurdish Iraqi sources); see also the British Embassy in Baghdad, ‘FO 371/157404 :E1821/5 Confidential, Feb 1961’, (UK: National Archives, 1992), and Mhemed ‘Ezîz- Pencemor; Muhsin Dzeıy – Nwênerî Pêşûy Mes’ud Barzanî – Beşi Duwem.
It is clear from the report that disunity had hampered success of Kurdish aspirations, or at least that it seemed that way to the CIA. The Agency saw a unity that would have to be on an unprecedented scale as ‘necessary before any Kurdish uprising could achieve genuinely serious proportions’. Nevertheless, however, it also stated that ‘The Kurdish question, as manipulated by Soviet agitation, is a disruptive force which will continue to threaten, sporadically, the delicate balance of the present Near East system’.\(^8^8\) In other words, the Kurdish Issue was framed by the US in a Cold War context from the very start of its involvement in the region. The report goes to some length in describing the Turkish government’s assimilation policies and various Kurdish uprisings, as well as Kurdish organisations and the names of influential individuals and their ambitions in each of the so-called parent states. Undoubtedly, therefore, there was a degree of awareness of the Kurds’ situation in US government circles, although any natural empathy there might have been for the desire of a people for self-rule was tempered both by realism (the Kurds’ own divisions) and realpolitik (the overriding concern with Communism and the power politics of regional influence).

Concerning the start of the Cold War and its relation to the region in the context of this work, various US documents from the period understood the Kurds in one way or another to have, as one put it, ‘strong but unfulfilled nationalistic aspirations’.\(^8^9\) In contrast, primary sources suggest that Iranian, Turkish and Iraqi diplomats and other officials played a significant role during the second half of the 1940s and also the 1950s in attempts to convince the US that the USSR was intent on establishing a satellite Kurdish state in the midst of these countries.\(^9^0\) Certainly, Soviet attempts to woo the Kurds ran counter to Kurdish aspirations, since they both augmented the states’ apprehensions that the Soviets really were seeking to establish a client Kurdish state out of their Kurdish areas and also were indeed perceived by the US as dangerous. For example, the Washington Post reported that a Soviet radio station broadcasting from Baku in September 1950 had ‘appealed to the broad masses of the ‘Kur-

\(^{8^8}\) CIA, ‘The Kurdish Minority Problem’, p. 2.

\(^{8^9}\) Daily Selected Intelligence Reports [...] (DNSA, August 4, 1950) p. 4.

\(^{9^0}\) For Turkish and Iranian diplomats reports on the alleged Soviet aspirations, see e.g. Daily Selected Intelligence Reports [...] and ‘Intelligence Summary—Red’ (DNSA, December 3, 1945); Intelligence Summary—Red (December 10, 1945); no author ‘Ankara Quarters Fear Kremlin [...] the Kurds’, The Washington Post, (March 15, 1946); no author, ‘Reds Take Part In Kurd Talks, Iranians Say’, The Washington Post, (May 01, 1946).
dish people’ to be ready to fight “for peace and independence’’, 
while a CIA report on the matter concluded that ‘Soviet propaganda continues directed agitation of the Kurdish tribes’, 
that there were ‘reports of greater Kurdish activity than in previous years’, and the ‘tribes’ were ‘not capable at present of causing serious trouble in Iran and Iraq without direct Soviet support.’

There was, therefore, at least a suspicion at these times among various American organs that the Soviets were attempting to destabilise the post-Ottoman framework in the northern Middle East and establish a client Kurdish state there. This belief seems to have influenced US views on the potential risk that the Kurds posed, which must have contributed to the US policy of remaining aloof, cognisant of the Kurds’ various attempts to self-rule and watching them closely, but with some apprehension. The US would not have consented to its number one antagonist, the Soviet Union, creating a Kurdish state from territory at the geographical intersection of its allies, Iran, Turkey (and Iraq), and most especially not in the oil-rich Middle East.

In relation to the CIA’s apprehensions, a question that arises is whether the USSR actually did have such an intention of backing a Kurdish state? On the one hand, the prevailing view among ‘the diplomatic community’ on the West’s side of the Cold War immediately after 1945 was that the Soviets were intent on establishing a satellite Kurdish state and thus adding a regional Soviet ally to the Cold War in the region that would thus significantly enhance Soviet power in the area. On the other hand, however, the Soviet courting of the Kurds seems to have been at least partly due to its desire generally to exert pressure on Iran, Turkey and Iraq.

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93 See for example the following cable which states that ‘The Soviets have attempted for a number of years, without notable success, to establish a Kurdistan, embracing the Kurdish areas of Iran, Turkey, Iraq and Soviet Armenia’ (Daily Selected Intelligence Reports [...]). The same cable also mentions that the Iranian military attaché in Ankara ‘stated that the Soviets are stirring the Kurdish peoples to form an independent state’. Also see ‘Memorandum From the Director [...] to Dulles’, (FRUS, November 15, 1959). This memo states that ‘One result may be an increase in Kurdish restiveness, which the Soviets have been able to stimulate and exploit in the past, in the face of disunity among the Arabs in the country’. The latter refers to the implication of the arrest of Arif by Qasim’s Iraqi government.
94 See e.g. no author, ‘Red Column Approaches Kurdistan [...]’, The Washington Post, (March 16, 1946), where it is stated that ‘The move [a Soviet troop deployment to the Lake Urmia area, in Iran] apparently gave support to a theory among many Iranian and foreign government officials that the Russians favour the establishment of an independent Kurdistan for the Kurds of Iran, Iraq and Turkey’. Also, see ‘Intelligence Summary—Red’.
and also/or else to have an additional (Kurdish) card at its disposal, should it need to use it. This study has found no evidence or indications of the Soviets considering the establishment of an independent Kurdistan, and, other than the fears – real, exaggerated and/or – manufactured – of the states, there appears to be no good reason to postulate this.

Therefore, we may assume that the USSR’s intentions were not to parent a Kurdish state, either generally or, as the concern of this study, in Iraq specifically. As Edmud Ghareeb has also observed, if the Russians had sympathised with Kurdish aspirations, even in Iran, then the Kurds’ status may have been different. When, in 1941, the Soviets occupied northern Iran, they had other objectives. It was as a side-effect of these, one may say, that they then encouraged Kurdish separatist movements, but this was to serve their own interests rather than wanting to sponsor a Kurdish state. The Soviets did not even attempt to avert the fate of the Kurdish state in Iran that was already declared.95

Therefore, while it is correct to say that the Soviets provided both political, and financial aid to the Iraqi Kurds from the early 1960s to early 1970s – as will be examined in due course – this was directly proportional to fluctuations in Soviet relations with the government in Baghdad.96 Soviet-Kurdish relations are considered throughout this thesis in different periods, but what is important to emphasise from the outset is that they fluctuated and were unsteady (as will become apparent).

The evidence that the regional states saw or at least portrayed the Kurds as being in the Soviet camp and therefore engaged and working with, in their view, ominous intent (i.e. to establish a Kurdish client) is substantial. When Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in his May 1953 visit to Iraq met Iraqi Prime Minister Jamil al-Madfai and a number of his cabinet ministers, Nuri al-Said, then Minister of Defence, pointed out to the Secretary that ‘Turkey was strong and ran less risk than Iran, which was weak’ and that ‘Kurds were being trained in Russia under Mulla Mustafa’ (emphasis added).97 In fact, Al-Said had resigned as Prime Minister in 1944

95 For more on this, see Ghareeb, The Kurdish Question in Iraq, pp. 11-12; with regard to Soviet support for Mahabad, see e.g. Joseph Goodwin, ‘Russians Are Supplying Arms To Kurd [...]’, The Washington Post, (April 04, 1946). On the Mahabad Republic, see Eagleton, The Kurdish Republic of 1946.
96 For the nature of this backing, see e.g. Barzani, Barzanî Û Bzutnewey Rizgarîxważî Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşi Yekem 1961-1975, pp. 30-31.
97 ‘Memorandum of Conversation [...]’, (FRUS, May 18, 1953).
due to the Kurdish Issue and shortly after that had stated in a report that ‘some of the great powers want to exploit the Kurdish problem for their own interest’. 98

It is evident that American intelligence must have at least believed that the Kurds could be a factor for destabilising its allies and susceptible to exploitation by the USSR. Therefore, Kurdish nationalism was not looked upon favourably by the US. While any Kurdish state would have meant a major Soviet gain in the Cold War, insofar as this would have hugely impacted on Iran and Turkey (from 1952, of course, a NATO member) – and negatively, of course, from the viewpoint of the US – a Soviet-client Kurdish state was unthinkable. This would have not only have presented the Soviets with an immediate opportunity that could be used, for example, directly for military purposes in the midst of US allies, but it would also have given the Soviets an ally in the Middle East, one that would have been dependent on them for its survival and thus equating to a firm Soviet foothold and power base in the Middle East more generally.

This, essentially, is how the US appears to have perceived the dangers of a Soviet-sponsored state for the Kurds. As stated, however, in reality there is no evidence to suggest that the Soviets did actually intend to create a Kurdish state or to assist the Kurds in doing so. It was in this political environment and against this backdrop, therefore, that US perceptions of the Iraqi Kurds took form as the Kingdom became the Republic, which is the subject of the next section.

1.3 The 1958 Iraqi Revolution and the Kurds: The Consequences of the Revolution.

The Iraqi Revolution of 1958 had a profound effect on the region as a whole as well as on Iraq. In relation to the Iraqi Kurds, one of its main effects was to cause Iran to reassess its relations with them. 99 The gradual change in Iran’s relations with Iraq’s Kurds in the years that followed had radical implications for the latter. There were a number of reasons behind this rethink of approach and policy on the part of Iran, as demonstrated by primary sources. These were:

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98 Quoted in Ghareeb, The Kurdish Question in Iraq, p. 33.
99 For the implications of the Iraqi Revolution of 1958 on regional and Middle Eastern politics, see e.g. Osgood, Eisenhower and Regime Change in Iraq: The United States and the Iraqi Revolution of 1958, p. 5; Gibson, Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds and the Cold War, p. xvi; Aburish, Saddam Hussein: The Politics of Revenge
i) Iran sought to contain the new revolutionary Iraqi regime under Qasim, which it suspected to be at least a pro-communist regime under this leader.\textsuperscript{100}

ii) The Shah feared that the Iraqi Kurds could ask the USSR for assistance, resulting in a Kurdish state. Iran, therefore, needed to reassess its relations with the Iraqi Kurds not only to contain and destabilise Iraq but also to divert the Kurds away from the USSR, by portraying Iran as preferable for them; this involved forestalling any alliance between the Soviets and the Iraqi Kurds that could result in a Kurdish state, as assumed by the Shah.\textsuperscript{101}

iii) The Shah was apprehensive about Nasser’s influence over Iraq, and thus also motivated to drive a wedge between the Kurds and Nasser; the Shah saw Nasser as in favour of an independent Kurdistan, which worried him.\textsuperscript{102}

Regarding the last point (iii), Nasser had come to power himself through a military capture of the state and abolishment of the monarchy and was now enjoying unequalled popularity in the region after his victory over the British and French in the Suez Crisis; and indeed, the Iraqi Kurds and Nasser did enjoy warm relations – such that, according to Masoud Barzani ‘The attitude of the deceased president Jamal abdul-Nasser on the Kurdish Issue was that he was always with the just demands of the Kurdish nation, and has admitted to the right of self-determination of Kurds and had thought that this was also in the interest of the Arabs’.\textsuperscript{103} Barzani also confirmed not only Iran’s but also Turkey and Britain’s concerns of both a communist takeover of Iraq as a result of the Revolution and also of the strengthening of Nasser’s hegemony in Iraq.\textsuperscript{104}

Whether Nasser was genuinely supportive of the right of self-determination for the Kurds is uncertain and how he may have construed ‘self-determination’ is unclear. What seems to be beyond doubt, however, is that he was forthcoming in his support, at least, for Kurdish rights and enjoyed cordial relations with the Kurdish leadership. For instance, Nasser welcomed Mustafa Barzani to his home in 1958 when the latter was passing through Egypt on his return

\textsuperscript{100} See ‘FO 317/170456: EQ103134/9, Iraqi Relations with Iran, June 29 1963’, (UK: National Archives, No date).
\textsuperscript{101} See FO 317/170456: EQ103134/9, Iraqi Relations with Iran, June 29 1963.
\textsuperscript{102} See ‘FO 317/170456: EQ103134/6, Kurds: Interview with the Shah […] May 30 1963’, (UK: National Archives, No date); FO 317/170456: EQ103134/9, Iraqi Relations with Iran, June 29, 1963.
home from exile in the USSR after the Revolution. However, Nasser also had an interest in developing amiable relations with the Kurds in order to use them to influence Iraqi politics and counteract the Shah’s influence. He did not want to “leave the Kurds” for non-Arab regional actors, lest they pit them against the Arabs under Nasser’s control. Nasser was thus for a peaceful solution of the Kurdish Issue within Iraq.\textsuperscript{105}

Contending with these factors and bearing in mind these consideration, the Shah engaged in an alliance with the Iraqi Kurds, and by 1963, he was considering the Iraqi Kurds, in his own words, ‘as weapons’\textsuperscript{106} to be used as necessary against Nasser and his ambitions in Iraq. This not only referred to Iran’s need to redefine its relations with the Iraqi Kurds, as explained, but was also to have a fundamental effect on the Iraqi Kurds’ relations with the US.

After the overthrow of the monarchy in Iraq, one of the choices that the pro-US regional states of Turkey, Iran and Jordan made, with US blessing, was to launch a military invasion to topple Qasim’s regime. However, there was also a second choice. In his July 20, 1958 meeting with Edward Wailes, the US ambassador to Iran, the Shah ‘felt strongly that Turkey should not at [the] present time invade Iraq’ but nevertheless then suggested to the ambassador that if there was a lesser precipitous approach to the Iraqi situation then it would be to ‘work with local tribes in Iraq, including the Kurds, to try to win them over to our side’,\textsuperscript{107} among other measures. The Shah’s views as shared with the ambassador here are consistent with other sources cited in this section on this, which thus constitute one consequence of the Revolution regarding the Iraqi Kurds.

On July 23, three days after the meeting of the Shah with the American ambassador, the State Department instructed Wailes to meet with the Iranian leader again and provide the following response. In reference to the Shah’s suggestion that Iran could work with ‘local tribes including the Kurds’ to win them to ‘our side’ and thus influence Iraqi politics, the Department ‘agreed [that] that might be worthy of study as means of influencing developments’\textsuperscript{108} insofar as it related to non-military action. Therefore, while the regional states most concerned with

\textsuperscript{105} The following British archive folder is instructive on this: ‘FO 371/170450: 1963’, (UK: National Archives); also Othman, Mahmoud, in ‘Telephone Interview A from the UK’, by Ali, Hawraman (October 14, 2015).

\textsuperscript{106} Quoted in FO 317/170456: EQ103134/9, Iraqi Relations with Iran, June 29, 1963. Also see ‘FO 317/170456: EQ103134/8, Ambassadors talk […] the Shah, June 19 1963’, (UK: National Archives, No date).

\textsuperscript{107} ‘Telegram From the Embassy in Iran […]’, (FRUS, July 20, 1958).

\textsuperscript{108} Quoted in footnotes of ‘Telegram From the Embassy in Iran […]’, (July 20, 1958).
the Kurds were viewing them suspiciously along with the USSR’s related strategy in the region, primary sources denote the Revolution as marking the start of a partial change in Iran’s policy towards the Iraqi Kurds, which was ultimately, by the early 1970s, to have profound implications for US views of the Iraqi Kurds, as the Shah ultimately drew the US in to back the Kurds in their war with Iraq. This itself was directly related to the Cold War (see Chapter Four).

After 1958, America and its regional allies were worried that the Revolution could pave the way for a Soviet push into the region or the takeover of Iraq by followers of Nasser or else communists; as for the Shah, Nasser and the Nasserites were ‘worse than the communists’. The Shah was concerned that the collective defence (CENTO) planning put in place to stop Soviet expansion into the region, along with the details of the (1955) defensive (anti-Soviet) Baghdad Pact, would be shared by Iraq with the Soviets and Nasser, thus creating a security quandary. He feared isolation for Iran if more Middle Eastern countries fell into the ‘enemy hand’. This, he noted, would put ‘my people and country [...] in imminent peril’ unless the US acted promptly. The action the Shah was asking for, however, was directed against Iraq but rather took the form of military assistance for Iran. It is worth noting here that Qasim did, in fact, withdraw Iraq from the Baghdad Pact, in March 1959, and also that diplomatic relations between Iran and Cairo were later severed, in the summer of 1960. Such was the state of regional affairs, of course, that the Iraqi Kurds were caught in the middle of these regional power-pillars; Britain was also a member of the Pact.

In response to the Shah’s worries, President Dwight D. Eisenhower confirmed to him by writing on July 19, 1960 that ‘It is our purpose to help assure the political independence and integrity of your country as an integral part of those security arrangements’. When it came to the Cold War and the Revolution, on the US side, the fear among the intelligence community was not only that Iraq could be lost to either communism or pan-Arab Nasserites and thus gaining the Soviets a victory in the Cold War in this sensitive region but also that other pro-Western Arab regimes might follow the Iraqi example, especially if Iraq was to enter into any kind of a federation with Nasser’s Egypt and its political union with Syria, the United

109 Quoted in ‘Telegram From the Department [...]’, (FRUS, July 19, 1958).
110 Quoted in footnotes of ‘Telegram From the Department [...]’, (July 19, 1958).
111 For more on the Baghdad Pact and such regional defensive measures, see e.g. Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*, pp. 114-15; Gibson, *Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds and the Cold War*, pp. xv-18.
112 ‘Telegram From the Department [...]’, (July 19, 1958).
Arab Republic (UAR), also established in 1958. The worry was of a domino-effect, that opposition elements in other regional countries would take over and then either ally with communists (essentially, the USSR) or pay allegiance to Nasser. Such governments deemed to be at risk of instability and thus of falling to the leadership of Nasser or Nasserites with consequences for Iran included, in particular, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Sudan. And of course, not to mention Iraq itself, which would have been a trigger for the others. These were the worries.

In July 1958 and in relation to the Kurds, a US inter-departmental Special National Intelligence Estimate stated that ‘Kurdish nationalism, which is susceptible to exploitation by the Soviets and the UAR, might flare into revolt in north-western Iran’.\textsuperscript{113} There is no reason why this special intelligence assessment of the Iranian Kurds was not also applicable to the Iraqi Kurds in the US view, since both Iraqi and Iranian Kurds harboured ‘strong but unfulfilled nationalistic aspirations’, as expressed by another CIA report, in 1950.\textsuperscript{114}

In fact, it appears that Iran did shortly thereafter pursue a dual policy with the Iraqi Kurds, by which, on the one hand, it befriended and assisted the Kurds – to the extent that this empowered Iran with the means for an indirect interference in Iraqi politics – while, on the other, this assistance was restricted to a level that ensured the Kurds did not actually break away from Iraq or pose a threat to Iran itself.\textsuperscript{115} As such, Iran’s rapprochement with the Iraqi Kurds after the Revolution had specific strategic aims; certainly, it was not about assisting the Iraqi Kurds to establish an entity of their own or for the sake of the Kurds themselves.

Adding to this complexity, Turkey was also concerned about a possible collaboration between Iraq and Egypt in fomenting unrest among the Kurds of Turkey and Iran.\textsuperscript{116} Indeed, before the Revolution, the radio ‘Voices of Kurdistan’\textsuperscript{117} from Cairo was inciting Kurds to rise up against the Baghdad Pact Powers and establish an independent Kurdistan. This led Iran to complain

\textsuperscript{113}‘Special National Intelligence Estimate’, (FRUS, July 22, 1958).
\textsuperscript{114}Daily Selected Intelligence Reports [...] p. 4.
\textsuperscript{115}These sources are indicative of this: FO 317/170456: EQ103134/9, Iraqi Relations with Iran, June 29, 1963; FO 317/170456: EQ103134/8, Ambassadors talk [...] the Shah, June 19, 1963.
\textsuperscript{117}FO 317/170456: EQ103134/6, Kurds: Interview with the Shah [...] May 30 1963.
to Cairo. The fact that Cairo wanted the Kurds to rise up against the Baghdad Pact Powers again evidences the strong regional dimensions of the Kurdish Issue in the Middle East.

However, after the Revolution, even Turkey, which at times would officially deny the very idea of the Kurds’ existence as a people distinct from the Turks, was in private considering the (Iraqi) Kurds as ‘a factor to be held in reserve for possible use if the Iraq situation deteriorates’. At least, this was the view expressed by its Foreign Minister (Fatin Rüştü Zorlu) in his meeting with US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State (Parker T. Hart) in Istanbul in 1959. Hart had visited Turkey and the region at the Turks’ request primarily to discuss the Iraqi situation (i.e. Qasim’s coup and the Revolution).

The complication of the Kurdish Issue in the Middle East by the internal politics and relations among the regional powers and the Russian and American interests within this, perceived and/or otherwise – and specifically these in respect of the Iraqi Kurds – can be traced back to the mid-1940s and the new world order post-WWII. When it came to American interest, this was intensified after the fall of the monarchy in Iraq in 1958. For instance, a US National Security Council (NSC) meeting in November 1958 unequivocally presented in meticulous depth the knowledge of the Kurds of American policymakers. While discussing US foreign policy towards Iran, the participants at this meeting, who included the President, again raised their worries of Soviet influence on the Kurds.

As part of Iran’s rapprochement with the Kurds after Qasim’s takeover, Eisenhower had been told by the Shah that it was desirable to establish an Iranian radio in Kurdish broadcasting with a 50-kilowatt capacity to the ‘Kurds living in Iran’. The Shah had desired this because ‘the Kurds were constantly bombarded by Soviet propaganda broadcasts’, which he wanted to counteract. In the NSC meeting, the US President wanted to learn the response to the Shah’s requests, which included US assistance in setting up and programming the radio station. The US Information Agency (USIA) was concurrently working with the Iranians to establish this station and, more importantly, to also formulate broadcasts which ‘the Kurds would respond to favourably’. According to the Director of the USIA this was not easy,

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118 See ‘Memorandum for the Record’, (FRUS, June 1, 1959).
119 Memorandum for the Record (June 1, 1959).
121 Memorandum [...] of the National Security Council (November 13, 1958).
122 See Memorandum [...] of the National Security Council (November 13, 1958).
'because the Kurds have always disliked the Iranians and probably could never be induced to like them'. Manifestly, there was a keen awareness of the Kurdish Issue and Kurdish sentiment among US officials. This exchange also shows the extent of superpower involvement (by the US, in this case) in Kurdish affairs in their ‘parent states’.

FRUS sources also suggest that while US officials were well aware of the Kurds’ nationalistic desires, these desires were regarded as posing potential risks to US interests or those of its allies. From an American viewpoint, as mentioned, a Soviet-sponsored Kurdish entity could be exploited by the communists to destabilise Iran and Turkey, and also Iraq as well as affording the Russians a foothold in the Middle East. This represents a deeper knowledge and awareness of the Kurds and their potential role in the Middle East than is conveyed by much of the literature – or rather, there is a lack in the literature of indications to show the depth of these. The literature gives the impression that the US was somehow simply ignorant of the Kurds – presumably because it did not have the imperial background or geographical proximity – and/or that it basically had no real interest in this people – for why should it? As shown here, however, that was simply not the case, and there was much more going on here than superficial appearances or a sketchy reading of the situation would suggest.

Further evidence of this is provided in another memorandum. In their meeting on March 22, 1959 in Camp David focusing on how to counter ‘Soviet probing for weak spots in the free world position’, Eisenhower told the visiting British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, that ‘the Soviet Union would make its next move in Iraq by organizing the Kurds’ and also that ‘Iraq would be the next major trouble spot with the Soviets making use of the Kurds who live in four countries [Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria] and have never been assimilated into these’. The CIA Director, Allen Dulles, also told the aforementioned leaders that he ‘had always believed that the Russians were trying to develop an advance through the Kurds and Iraq’, adding that ‘If they succeeded they would have it made’.

Thus, by January 1959, the US priority in Iraq, as elsewhere, was to respond proactively to the perceived threat of a communist takeover, as, should this occur, in Eisenhower’s words (at

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124 ‘Editorial Note’, (FRUS, 1960 [?]).
126 ‘Memorandum of Conversation’, (FRUS, March 22, 1959). Also see ‘Editorial Note’, (1959 [?]).
another NSC meeting), ‘the result would be to outflank both Iran and Turkey and to provide
the Soviets with their long-desired land bridge to the Middle East’. In this meeting,
President Eisenhower also ‘expressed anxiety about a Kurdish uprising’ together with a
potential communist move to seize power in Iraq, with all the assumed ramifications for the
Cold War in the Middle East.

The reason for Eisenhower’s ‘Kurdish anxiety’, based on all the sources examined so far,
would primarily have been that, in the US view, a Kurdish uprising would have meant
instability in Iraq. It was then presumed that this would give the Soviets greater opportunities
to exploit in Iraq, with the resulting instability from a Kurdish uprising presenting openings for
Iraqi communists to exploit (and thence a Soviet foothold in Iraq and the broader Middle
East). The latter was precisely what the US was striving to avoid (see Chapter 1.6).

Moreover, short of dissecting Iran from Turkmenistan or passing through significant non-
Kurdish regions of Iran, the Soviet “land bridge” was assumed to have to go through Kurdistan,
as the following map (Figure 2.1) illustrates. The worry seems to have been this land-bridge
coupled with a communist Iraq would, in addition to allowing the Soviets a gateway to the
Middle East, have involved eventual control over this “bridge” region; that is, it would also
have led to the Kurds cooperation in a dismembering of the surrounding US allies of Iran and
Turkey.

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128 Memorandum of Discussion [...] the National Security Council (January 15, 1959).
129 The views of the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, Senator J. William Fulbright, are a further
indication of this; see: Carroll Kilpatrick, ‘Fulbright Says West Has No Policy On ‘Most Dangerous’ Crisis in Iraq’,
For all these reasons, therefore, as Secretary John Foster Dulles stated in the aforementioned NSC meeting, ‘the situation in Iraq [...] was very complicated indeed’. Primary sources point to a considerable anxiety on the part of US policymakers after the Revolution regarding the likelihood of the USSR exploiting the Kurds in order to further its regional – thence global – interests. This manifests the degree of the Cold War impact on US policy in the region and its perceptions of the Kurds. The Kurds were not communists so far as the US was concerned, but they could have been exploited by communism. Iran, Turkey and Iraq were the parties that largely convinced the US of this “Soviet Kurdish threat”, which demonstrates that not only the Cold War but also the regional politics in relation to the Kurdish Issue in the Middle East must be considered in this analysis.

American perceptions of the Iraqi Kurds, therefore, were shaped by the Cold War and also by regional politics from as early as the Iraqi Revolution of 1958, if not before that. This section has shown that the Cold War and regional politics had a significant effect on the Iraqi Kurds.

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130 CIA, ‘Kurdish areas in the Middle East and the Soviet Union’ [cropped from the original] (The University of Texas at Austin, 1986).

131 Memorandum of Discussion [...] the National Security Council (January 15, 1959). Also from the discussion given in the memo, it is clear that the US was at this time open to a rapprochement with Nasser as the lesser of the two ‘evils’ and to contain the communism in the region.
and their aspirations for independence, whether they realised it or not. The regional powers hostile to Kurdish nationalism did their best to convince the US of a Soviet design to access the Middle East via Kurdish lands, and they inflated this. For its part, the US took this on board and perceived the Kurds in the “parent states” as security risks to the region liable to exploitation by the USSR. The Kurds were thus caught in a quagmire, as will be demonstrated, even though there is, in fact, no evidence to suggest that the Soviets really ever did intend to work for the creation of an independent Kurdistan.

1.4 Ignition of Hostilities in Kurdistan and the Start of the Race to Exploit the Iraqi Kurds.

By September 1961, the honeymoon between the Iraqi Kurds or the KDP and Qasim’s government was over. Declared by the KDP, the initiation of hostilities in Kurdistan, known as Şorşî eylul (the September Revolution) among Kurds, went by the motto of ‘Democracy for Iraq and autonomy for Kurdistan’.

According to Masoud Barzani, beside the Kurds wanting democracy in Kurdistan, they also knew that only a democratic Iraq with all the other attributes that accompany such system could assure respect for the Kurds’ rights within Iraq – hence the ‘Democracy for Iraq’ motto. With the start of the Kurds’ September Revolution, it seems that relations between the Iraqi Kurds and external powers also began to intensify; essentially, external powers now had a strong card to play in Iraq against any undesired government in Baghdad, and they would exploit political instability in the country to advance their own agenda. The following paragraphs are illustrative of this.

Kurdish sources reveal that in January 1961, Barzani visited Moscow and was seen by high ranking unnamed Soviet officials. The Soviets agreed to supply the Kurds with weapons and armaments. This was not implemented due to ‘practical and political reasons’, but instead it was decided that the Soviets would provide some financial aid to the Kurds to buy weapons themselves on the black market. The majority of the weapons that the Kurds obtained via this means were of ‘English and Czech’ origin. Between March and September 1961, 3000

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weapons were bought and distributed in Kurdistan. Mustafa Barzani was already anticipating political turmoil or a military coup in Baghdad; thus, the Kurds were preparing for war.\textsuperscript{135}

From 1961 until 1972, the Soviets continued to give financial support to the Kurds, consistently but in a limited, or what Dr Othman calls a ‘symbolic’\textsuperscript{136} way; this did not involve the direct provision of arms. The Soviets also told the Kurds not to trust Iran or America and advocated for a peaceful solution between the Kurds and Baghdad. Throughout this period, the Soviets wanted to exercise influence over the Kurds together with Baghdad so as not to allow the US or Iran an opportunity to exploit.\textsuperscript{137}

According to Masoud Barzani, the financial side of the USSR’s assistance to the Iraqi Kurds consisted of a quarter of a million dollars annually, gradually increasing to one million by 1972. This proved very useful for the Kurds, especially at the start. Therefore, in the period 1961-1972, the Soviets enjoyed warm relations with the Kurdish leader, Mustafa Barzani, a relationship that was especially nurtured by Yevgeny Primakov. However, with the 1972 signing of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Iraq, and the USSR’s insistence that the Kurds must join the National Front Government together with the KGB’s full disclosure of the Kurds’ relations with the US, this relationship dwindled until it was eventually severed.\textsuperscript{138} The signing of the stated treaty was a turning point in this era of Soviet-Kurdish relations (studied in Chapter Four).\textsuperscript{139}

Soviet sources confirm these relations of Moscow with the Iraqi Kurds and also show its underlying intentions. According to the Mitrokhin Archive, in the summer of 1961 the KGB Chairman, Aleksandr Sheplen, devised a scheme to support ‘a Kurdish rebellion’ in Kurdistan and also informed Nasser that if the rebellion succeeded, Moscow ‘might take a benign look at the integration of the non-Kurdish part of Iraqi territory with the UAR on the condition of Nasser’s support for the creation of an independent Kurdistan’.\textsuperscript{140} This scheme was part of a strategy devised by Sheplen and approved by Khrushchev in the summer of 1961 in which the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{135} Barzanî, Barzanî Û Bzutnewey Rîzgarîxwazi Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşî Yekem 1961-1975, p. 31.  
\textsuperscript{136} Othman, Mahmoud, in Telephone Interview B (trans. by author).  
\textsuperscript{137} Othman, in Telephone Interview B.  
\textsuperscript{139} Othman, in Telephone Interview A.  
\textsuperscript{140} Quoted in Mitrokhin, The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World, p. 150.
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Soviets would support national self-liberation movements around the globe.\textsuperscript{141} However, while the history and Nasser’s amicability towards the Kurds may have been influenced by the Soviets, there is no indication to show that the latter actively pushed for a political Kurdish entity or for this strategy to have been implemented. Certainly, one may conclude, there was by no means anything like wholehearted support for the Kurds. The very fact of the small nature of the aid, as mentioned, was very clearly vastly disproportionate, falling an extremely long way short of the amount that would be required to seriously set about the task of establishing a Kurdish state by means of armed force. According to an authoritative Kurdish source, also, at no point did the Soviets provide any offensive military ordnance to the Kurds\textsuperscript{142} or any kind of aid necessary for state-building.\textsuperscript{143}

It therefore seems more plausible that, rather than the Soviets determining to sponsor an independent Kurdistan, as the West was concerned about, they may simply have alluded to Nasser that his “tolerance” of this “possibility” would encourage them to look sympathetically at the potential of Arab Iraq uniting with the UAR. In fact, as seen throughout this thesis, it would be fairer to say that the Soviets’ relations with the Kurds fluctuated in the years until 1975, and that actually, the Soviet approach tended to depend on the political environment in Baghdad. Overall, it appears clear that the Soviets did not go on the offensive to create an independent Kurdistan but, much like every other actor involved, operated to serve its own interests – which, evidently, did not include this. The type and nature of support provided by the Soviets was simply too far short of what was needed to establish, let alone sponsor and sustain, a Kurdish state.

After the ignition of hostilities in Kurdistan and by late 1962, all the strategic locations on the borders of Iraq with Iran and Turkey had already been taken over by the Peshmerga. Meanwhile, it is also clear from the Shah’s meeting with Kennedy on April 12, 1962 that Iran continued to perceive the Kurds as a source of threat. The Shah used the likelihood of the Kurds becoming Soviet pawns to explain to the President that they posed a security risk to Iran and Turkey in order to, among other things, expedite US military support for Iran. This was in addition to his citing of the military strengths of Egypt and Syria as well as the Shatt al-

\textsuperscript{141} See Mitrokhin, \textit{The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World}, p. 150.

\textsuperscript{142} Othman, in \textit{Telephone Interview B}.

\textsuperscript{143} The aids provided are listed by Barzani as stated earlier, see Barzanî, \textit{Barzanî Û Bzutnewey Rizgarîxwazi Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşi Duwem 1961-1975}, p. 206. There is no indication of any substantial aid.
Arab issue as additional reasons for his request.\textsuperscript{144} The situation, with respect to the Iraqi Kurds, that is, comprised one of the (four) reasons listed by Iran as impelling America to, in simple terms, sell it weapons. This also supports the reports (mentioned earlier) that the Shah sought to divert the Kurds away from the Soviet Union by offering Iran as their backer, thereby pre-empting closer relations between the Soviets and the Kurds that may have ended in the sponsorship of a Kurdish state. In this meeting with Kennedy, the Shah told him that all of the ‘Kurdish tribes’,\textsuperscript{145} except one, were now united against Qasim and that if Qasim failed in controlling them, then ‘great problems would arise’:

Although the Iranian Kurds are true Aryans, any minority can get restless, and the security of Iraq could be threatened. Turkey, which has a Kurdish minority of four million, could also be affected. Iran therefore needs more mobility for its ground forces and more aircraft. The Soviets have not intervened in the Kurdish problem, but they might well do so if the situation were to worsen. Many of the Barzani Kurds who have lived 15 years in the Soviet Union must be Soviet agents.\textsuperscript{146}

What the Shah was arguing was that an eye needed to be kept on the Kurds, the Iraqi Kurds in this case especially, so as they could not to be strong enough to function as a Soviet Trojan. In order to account for this potential risk, the US also needed to strengthen the military capabilities of its allies (Iran in this case). The Shah, therefore, appeared to dread the possibility of the Kurds being backed by the Soviets in 1962 – or, at least that fear was a card he played in attempting to leverage military support from the US – which, as we have seen, had to be combined with the possibility of Nasser enlisting the Kurds in a strategic alliance against Iran or of the Soviets, not so much backing the Kurds as merely making use of them for their own agenda, with the (potential) outcome of any of these being a Kurdish state.

A further indication of the state of affairs was the Shah telling Secretary Robert McNamara, after his meeting with Kennedy, that ‘We must therefore be on our watch, especially since we have Kurds, as do the Turks’.\textsuperscript{147} Again, the reference to Turkey indicates the wider regional issue of security for America’s allies, throwing up the image of a vulnerable order easily cracked and broken to the advantage of the Cold War enemy. The timing of these meetings

\textsuperscript{144} See ‘Memorandum of Conversation’, (FRUS, April 12, 1962).
\textsuperscript{145} Memorandum of Conversation (April 12, 1962).
\textsuperscript{146} Memorandum of Conversation (April 12, 1962).
\textsuperscript{147} Quoted in ‘Memorandum of Conversation’, (FRUS, April 13 1962). The Shah met McNamara on his state visit to Washington on April 13, 1962.
with Kennedy and McNamara is crucial also, since they occurred some months after the beginning of the Iraqi army’s offensive in Kurdistan in September 1961, when Qasim’s attack had backfired, since, it appears, the Kurds were not only holding their own against the state power but actually advancing and taking territory.\textsuperscript{148} This could have only worsened the Shah’s unease about the likelihood of a Kurdish state, about the ‘great problems’ with which Iran would be presented were the Kurdish tribes to unite and Qasim fails to control them.

Summarising, it is evident from these entangled webs of relations and interests from the Iraqi Revolution of 1958, that by 1962 Iran was using the risk of a Kurdish statehood enabled by the Soviets to convince the Americans of the need to stand against such a development as potentially catastrophic for their strategy in the region and invoking this to gain (more) support. At the same time, however, Iran and Turkey also saw the Iraqi Kurds as a valuable asset to influence politics in Iraq. Meanwhile, the Soviets had indeed extended both political and financial support to the Kurds from 1961, with whom Nasser also enjoyed warm relations. For its part, clearly the US was convinced that the Kurds posed a risk to its regional allies and thus had the potential to be a Soviet gateway to Iraq and beyond. By implication, so far as the US was concerned, this supposed political Kurdish entity, a Russian land-bridge to the Middle East, would certainly have had serious consequences for the Cold War in the Middle East.

This section has shown that a number of actors sought closer relations with the Iraqi Kurds, but the intentions behind these were very well calculated. This does not mean, however, that states such as Iran and Turkey no longer perceived the Kurds in general as a clear and present threat; on the contrary, there is plenty of evidence that they did. It is also important to note that many of the new developments in thinking and policy in respect of this issue, the Iraqi Kurds, arose as a direct result of the profound change in Iraq, the Revolution of 1958. The next section will determine how, within the framework that has been explained thus far, the US developed a policy towards the Iraqi Kurds and how the rationale behind this policy was structured by the Cold War and the regional framework.

\textsuperscript{148} For more on why and how the Kurds were successful in this conflict, see Barzanî, Barzanî Û Bzutnewey Rizgarîxwazî Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşî Yekem 1961-1975, p. 87. Barzani backs up his claims with copies of documentary evidence, such as letters exchanged between Kurdish commanders and commands and also admissions by army officers in retrospect.
1.5 The US and the Iraqi Kurds: The Policy of ‘the internal matter’.

In 1962, the Iraqi Kurds aimed for their case to be heard by the UN and approached the US government for support. The response given by the latter reveals how the US government viewed the issue. On June 20, 1962, two Kurds – Kamaran Badrkhan and Jamal Abdullah – called on the State Department stating that they represented Mustafa Barzani, or, in the words of the Department, the ‘tribal leader now fighting [the] GOI [Government of Iraq] army’. Apparently, the Kurds asked for US ‘moral support’ – as a State Department telegram carefully quoted – this being, it explained ‘on humanitarian grounds’ for the ‘suffering’ of the Kurdish people ‘caused by Iraqi attacks’; the Kurds also asked the US not to be ‘hostile’ were the Kurdish question to be broached in UN debate.

The response the Kurds received was unambiguous: ‘Kurds must through [their] own endeavours reach [an] agreement with GOI and that for US to indicate sympathy or interest, let alone support, would merely accentuate their problems with GOI’. Manifestly and unsurprisingly, the US was siding with the state actor, and for all the reasons and considerations listed, one assumes. The Kurdish intent may have been less obvious. It seems that this Kurdish endeavour was in preparation for an attempt by the Soviets or its allies to raise the Kurdish Issue at the UN – for the latter was indeed what ultimately occurred, in 1963 (as detailed in the next chapter).

The US view of the Iraqi Kurds in June 1962, therefore, was that they would have to come to an understanding with the GOI and, for this if no other reason, it (the US) could not support the Kurds because it would exacerbate the issue. Actually, Qasim had already, much earlier, accused the US of plotting against him; this had prompted the US ambassador to Iraq, Waldemar J. Gallman, to be instructed by the State Department on December 8, 1958 ‘to convince Qasim that there was no truth to the allegations that the United States was encouraging or supporting dissension in Iraq’. When Gallman met Qasim three days later, on December 11, Qasim told him that ‘the Kurds in the Sulimaniyah area were being incited

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149 This is the description the State Department gave to Barzani at the time; see ‘Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Iraq’, (FRUS, June 22, 1962).
150 ‘Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Iraq’, (June 22, 1962).
151 ‘Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Iraq’, (June 22, 1962).
against his government’ and that there were movement of individuals across the border with Iran. These ‘individuals’ according to Qasim, included people of both American and other nationalities. Qasim, therefore, was indirectly accusing the US of stirring up a revolt against him, including among the Kurds, and that, moreover, US personnel were involved in this. The ambassador denied the allegation, including the involvement of any US personnel.

It is recalled here that the view on Iran’s side on the Iraqi Kurds in 1962 was that, if they were to unite, and in conjunction with Soviet support, they could provoke the Kurds in other countries and pose threats to them. When it came to communism among the Iraqi Kurds, it is certain that they were predominantly nationalists as opposed to communists or ideologues in general. This was made clear during another request for US assistance from the KDP. On September 20, 1962, an unnamed ‘Kurd official’ representing Barzani met with an officer from the US embassy in Baghdad and pledged that Barzani would essentially purge communists in Kurdistan, share intelligence with the US and ‘cooperate with conservative Arab Iraqi elements and, according to the US Department of State, bring Iraq back into [the] Baghdad Pact if we [the US] wish’; furthermore, ‘this offer would [also] be binding on Kurds in Syria and Iran as well as Iraq’. Barzani was offering this to the US, apparently, as quid pro quo for ‘money now and possibly arms later’.

We also learn that Mustafa Barzani’s representative conveyed the Kurdish leader’s view that the downfall of Qasim was imminent and that the USSR would be enticed into aiding the Kurds thereafter, but that Barzani preferred the West to the USSR ‘which he does not trust’. The carrot of cooperation was partnered by the threat of the Cold War enemy – and then impelled with urgency with the claim, as reported by the US Department, that ‘all Kurds are nationalists, and must win autonomy now or be prepared for racial extinction, but before Kurds will permit this, they would take help from the USSR or from the “devil himself”’. Despite the Kurds’ offer, essentially to become a US client, and its covert threat, warning what might happen if support were not given, and quickly, the ‘KDP official was clearly told that

153 ‘Telegram From the Embassy in Iraq [...]’, (December 11, 1958); U.S. Denies Attempts To Win Over Kurds.
154 See the Shah’s visit to Washington and his meeting with US officials including the President: ‘Memorandum of Conversation’, (April 13, 1962); Memorandum of Conversation (April 12, 1962).
155 ‘Telegram From the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State’, (FRUS, September 20, 1962).
156 Quoted in Telegram From the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State (September 20, 1962).
157 Quoted in Telegram From the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State (September 20, 1962).
USG policy toward Kurdish rebellion has not changed’. That policy was described in a memorandum on September 11, 1962, from the Director for the Office of Near Eastern Affairs, Robert C. Strong, to the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (and also Chairman of the Iran Task Force), Phillips Talbot. The memorandum is crucial to the subject at hand and runs as follows:

The United States considers the Kurdish problem in Iraq an internal matter which should be resolved internally. Our Government does not support Kurdish activities against the Government of Iraq in any way and hopes an early peaceful solution will be possible. It is our understanding that some of the Kurdish demands include requests for the reinstitution of certain constitutional guarantees. While the United States' position is clear on the desirability of democratic constitutional life, any comment on these demands in Iraq would be an intrusion into that country's internal affairs. We believe the future well-being of Kurds in Iraq, as well as those in Iran and Turkey, is inseparably tied to the well-being of the countries in which they reside. We know Turkey and Iran share this view, and believe the Iraq Government feels the same way.

This internal memo, therefore, captures the essence of US policy towards the Iraqi Kurds in September of 1962, and perhaps prior to that, from the mid-1940s or the onset of the Cold War proper. Whether the policy was publicly declared or otherwise is not the issue here, since it is the very privacy of this message in the form of a clear statement of official position that is important (indeed, it seems to read as an implied confirmation of that position with a superior in the Administration). Basically, a written policy existed as revealed and it was an institutionalised policy. This policy was based on a rational self-centred calculation. The memorandum from Strong to Talbot and the NSC meetings referred to confirm that this policy went beyond the views of an ambassador or field diplomat here and there, while the totality of the numerous official documents of US governmental bodies collectively cited in this thesis all testify as evidence to the general implementation of this written policy.

What is important to emphasise here, therefore, is that this US policy was calculated against the backdrop of regional and Cold War politics, as analysed, involving the US allies of Turkey and Iran (and also Iraq itself in relation to a Kurdish state sponsored by the USSR). Thus, the regional political context examined and its relations to the Cold War, when it comes to the

158 Telegram From the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State (September 20, 1962).
159 Quoted in footnotes of 'Telegram From the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State', (September 20, 1962).
Kurds, not only affected the Iraqi Kurds but the Kurds in all the relevant states. Of course, such a distancing in this matter by the US has had serious implications for the Kurds, in terms of turning a blind eye to flagrant human rights violations. A policy of no action, one may suggest, is itself an action, with consequences. The lack of response by the US to Kurdish rights’ claims over the years was not an oversight, accident or due to ignorance, therefore; quite the opposite, it was a result of a deliberation, and in that sense quite intentional and calculated, accepted, at least, as an undesired but necessary consequence of predetermined policy.

Moreover, since the Kurds essentially offered to be a US satellite and advance its interests in the region which the US refused, this also suggests to us that US-Kurdish relations cannot be explained by Cold War considerations alone but also require that the regional politics and the broader Kurdish Issue also be taken into account, concomitantly. The US feared upsetting its Cold War regional allies, Turkey and Iran, if it was forthcoming to Kurdish pleas. Again, the political considerations in play were strategic.

In addition to the US, according to Mela Mustafa’s representative and as confirmed by the British Embassy in Baghdad, the Kurds had also asked Kuwait for assistance and Kuwait had refused. The British Embassy in Baghdad confirmed that it had advised Kuwait to ‘give no money to [the Kurdish] rebels’.\footnote{‘Telegram From the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State’, (September 20, 1962).} Israel had also offered assistance at this stage, but the Kurds had declined it – reportedly not due to an unfriendly attitude towards Israel but because the Kurds were apprehensive that ‘Israel might purposely’ reveal information on this, which would harm the perception of the Kurdish movement in the Arab World.\footnote{‘Telegram From the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State’, (September 20, 1962). For a good account of Israel’s relations with the Iraqi Kurds from 1965 onwards, see Kimche, The Last Option: After Nasser, Arafat & Saddam Hussein: The Quest for Peace in the Middle East, pp. 189-200.} The developments after 1962 would, in fact, confirm this analysis of Israel-Kurdish relations, that discretion was crucial for the Kurds.

In late 1963 and beyond, Barzani also sent multiple emissaries to London to ask the UK for some – any – means of assistance. Again, they were to no avail, because Britain was more concerned with the state actor and improving its relations with Iraq.\footnote{See for instance: FO371/170429: 1963; ’FO 371/170448: 1963’, (UK: National Archives, No date); ’FO 317/170515: 1963’, (UK: National Archives, No date).} This is in contrast to a
claim that Britain, together with Iran and Israel, ‘were all giving the Kurds military and economic support to destabilise the pro-Nasser Arif regimes’. Not only does that not appear to have been the case – at least with respect to London – but the extensive volumes of UK state archives to which this research has had access (some used in this chapter) all show that Britain’s role was detrimental to the Kurds, and for the entire time covered by this work. Given the generally close and arguably tightening relationship between the UK and US over these post-war decades (Suez, of course, being the exception), this further demonstrates the effect of the Cold War in conjunction with regional politics and the significance of this combination on the policy of the Western bloc as a whole in relation to the Kurds’ national aspirations.

1.6 US Foreign Policy and the Iraqi Kurds in a Wider Context: From Truman to Kennedy.

This section looks at the broader global policy of the Western world’s leading state for the time covered by this chapter, which effectively here means that of the US, particular attention is paid to presidential doctrines. Taken as a whole, US policy had a significant effect on the Iraqi Kurds in much of the time covered by this research, as it will become apparent, particularly when taking into account the fact that the Kurds were not a state actor. The purpose of this section is to put this into a broader context in relation to this research as part of the Cold War. This section is accordingly repeated in subsequent chapters (with the exception of Chapter 3).

It is essential here to bear in mind the fact that from the start of 1958, several significant events took place in the Middle East and also globally that concerned the US in one way or another, and that US response was governed by certain tenets – which is the primary concern of this section. Among those significant events during the time period covered here was the landing of US marines in Lebanon in 1958 – purportedly to safeguard the independence of the country from “international communism”. The deployment of the US Navy in the Mediterranean, troubles elsewhere, such as in Jordan, Syria and, of course, Iraq itself in the form of the Iraqi Revolution, are among other examples of US concerns. These were in

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163 Gibson, Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds and the Cold War, p. 84.
addition to other significant issues involving the US outside of the Middle East, such as in Cuba, in Europe over Germany and in Vietnam.

On January 5, 1957, President Eisenhower addressed a joint session of Congress, in which, as Cecil V. Crabb has observed, he called for a ‘fundamental reorientation of American policy towards the volatile Middle East’.\(^{164}\) Eisenhower wanted Congress to collaborate with him on this, or to essentially empower him with the authority required, and Congress eventually passed a resolution on March 9, 1957 granting him a modified version of the authority he was seeking. This ‘Middle East Resolution’ came to be known as the Eisenhower Doctrine.\(^{165}\)

Previously, during the period of the Truman Doctrine – by which the US sought to contain the Soviet Union, in particular by extending financial aid to Greece and Turkey – it had been believed that the Soviets were interested in the Dardanelles and thus seeking to pressure Turkey. The worry in Washington was that if Greece or Turkey fell to the Soviet Union or communism then the Soviet Union would exert control over the entire surrounding region (or regions, given Turkey’s vital geopolitical position between Russia and the Mediterranean, on the one hand, and the Balkans, thus Europe, including the Soviet bloc, and the Middle East, on the other). US involvement in this and its aid to Turkey as enunciated by the Truman Doctrine indicates that Kurdish nationalism was already in contradiction with the Doctrine by way of its potential impact on Turkey as a Cold War US ally and NATO member.\(^{166}\)

The Eisenhower Doctrine, like that of Truman before him, was a response to threats that the US executive branch perceived the US as facing. While the locale of the Eisenhower Doctrine was shifted to the Middle East, the threat, like that of Truman’s, remained “international communism”. The Doctrine called for economic and military aid intended to bolster the independence of nations in the Middle East that requested such aid. More importantly, the Resolution, passed by Congress, empowered the President, if he determined to be necessary,

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to assert military power: ‘[T]he United States is prepared to use armed forces to assist any such nation or groups of nations [in the Middle East] requesting assistance against armed aggression from any country controlled by international communism’. Thus, the purpose of the Eisenhower Doctrine, like that of Truman but more specifically, was to challenge the hegemony of the USSR in the Middle East. Although Russia did not have a direct physical connection to the region, it was increasingly tied politically through the dyad logics involved in nationalist and pan-Arab sentiments pitting the region against the Occident and in the Western support for Israel.

With the Eisenhower Doctrine, Congress had authorised the use of military force to help nations contain communism in the Middle East if the President deemed it to be necessary and when such help was requested. It should be stressed here that the use of the word “nation” in the language of US policy, such as that in the Resolution mentioned, actually denoted states (through the notion of “nation-states”) – as opposed, that is, to the idea of a nation as a people. This, of course, distinguished rather pointedly those peoples that did not have a state of their own, such as the Kurds. Again, and evidently, there was no favourable place in US policy for the Kurds, since the Soviets could have exploited them and the US itself could not help them as this would have offended the (nation-)states (Syria, Iraq, Iran and Turkey). This was the predicament that the Kurds found themselves in with regards to the Cold War. Any American aid or assistance to the Kurds would have risked building closer ties between the states concerned and the Soviet Union in order to counter the US act; or at least it would have given an opportunity to the Soviets to meddle; or at least this is how it might have been and in fact seems to have been perceived by the US – which determined the position of the Kurds in respect to the broader US regional and global policy at the time.

This state of affairs and America’s anti-communism and obsession with international communism in the Cold War period was revealed when the rule of King Hussein of Jordan was threatened by anti-monarchy elements in the spring of 1957. Eisenhower’s response was to order parts of the US Six Fleet into the eastern Mediterranean. Although events that followed in Jordan did not require US intervention, that just the possible risk of the loss of a friendly power brought such a reaction indicates the political and regional atmosphere insofar as it

concerned the US and its interests, including safeguarding the security of its allies. The US seems to have preferred a stability that would keep the Soviets or communists out at all costs and would not risk this for anything. That seems to have been the overarching policy, with obvious implications for the Kurds generally.

In Syria, too, by mid-1957 there was the likelihood of an American intervention to prevent communists, or what Washington perceived to be communists, from taking power. Such was the seriousness of the situation that Khrushchev warned Turkey against intervening in Syria by declaring that ‘If the rifles fire, the rockets will start flying’, 168 while Secretary of State Dulles replied that if the Soviets attacked Turkey, the US would retaliate directly against the USSR. 169 Meanwhile, the situation in Lebanon was growing more acute, until, on July 15, 1958, at the request of its president, some 14,000 American marines landed in response to the charge that Syria and Egypt were fomenting a revolution. And this was just one day after the Iraqi Revolution of July 14, 1958. 170 These all demonstrate the delicate nature of the politics of the region, the high stakes involved and the two superpowers’ competing interests.

Collectively, moreover, these events serve to confirm the preservation of the status quo as the priority for the US, as the preferred option rather than any change that ran the risk of communist gains. When the broader context is considered, therefore, where the US was concerned, it simply would not have put its Cold War allies of Iran and Turkey at risk, for Kurds could not be substituted for a country like Turkey, Iran, Iraq or any other Middle Eastern country. Basically, the Kurds did not have a state that could be of a use, and it was this consideration that dominated, regardless of what the Kurds could have offered America as a non-state actor. This demonstrates, therefore, that the stage was already unfavourable for the Kurds, and this was the case at least from the Truman Doctrine.

When Kennedy become president in January 1961, conflict was already brewing in South Vietnam. Kennedy attached a great importance to South Vietnam, fearing a domino effect on South East Asia were it to fall. By the time of Kennedy’s assassination (November 1963), the US had sent 16,000 military advisers to Vietnam. The war in Vietnam was in addition to the

168 Quoted in Crabb, The Doctrines of American Foreign Policy: Their Meaning, Role, and Future p. 179.  
169 Crabb, The Doctrines of American Foreign Policy: Their Meaning, Role, and Future.  
170 For more details, see Crabb, The Doctrines of American Foreign Policy: Their Meaning, Role, and Future pp. 153-93; Pauly, US Foreign Policy During the Cold War; Little, ‘His Finest Hour? Eisenhower, Lebanon, and the 1958 Middle East Crisis’.  

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Bay of Pigs fiasco for the US, in April of 1961, a disturbance in Europe over West and East Germany and the Cuban Missile Crisis, in October 1962. Kennedy, therefore, was facing multiple serious challenges, ranging from Latin America (Cuba) to South East Asia (Vietnam), and Europe (Germany) to Africa, where the US was seeking to win over newly formed, decolonised states. Regarding the latter, as new states gained their independence, the idea was to fill “the gap” by getting there first, as it were (i.e. before the Soviet Union). 171

Against this backdrop – and again, much like the Eisenhower era – issues such as Iraqi bombings in Kurdistan or Kurdish national aspirations would have not been anywhere near of Kennedy’s list of concerns for America. War in Kurdistan did not directly affect the US. From the US perspective, not only did Kurdish self-determination offered no obvious gain but lending a hand to the Kurds in their struggle against any of the parent states would have been counterproductive to its relations with that state, as was analysed.

It therefore seems that at this time, non-state actors, such as the Kurds, were completely overshadowed in the political arena by state actors; the exception of international communism being more of an ideology than a people. Therefore, regardless of how important the Kurds may have been in the politics of the region, because the US perceived them as posing risks to its allies, they could essentially be sacrificed, as part of the Cold War. It is thus entirely comprehensible why the combination of regional and Cold War politics had such a detrimental effect on the Iraqi Kurds’ cause. This analysis is not to imply that neglect of the Iraqi Kurds’ suffering was ethically justified, of course, but rather to convey how the US as a Cold War superpower saw the issue, together with its allies, and why this was the case.

The broader question of non-state actors in US foreign policy goes beyond the defined scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, Shareef also seems to agree that Kurdish statelessness has had a significant effect on the Kurds’ status in US views of them as compared to state-actors such as Iran and Turkey. 172

171 For more on Kennedy’s policies and these issues see for instance: Costigliola, Frank, ‘US Foreign Policy from Kennedy to Johnson’, in The Cambridge History of the Cold War Volume 2: Crises and Détente ed. Arne Westad and Melvyn Leffler (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), pp. 112-33; Hartley, Anthony, ‘John Kennedy’s Foreign Policy’, Foreign Policy (1971); Kaufman, A Concise History of U.S. Foreign Policy, p. 94.
Conclusion

This chapter has largely focused on the subject of the thesis from 1958-1962. It started by briefly introducing the root-causes of the Kurdish Issue in the aftermath of WWI and how this developed until the period covered by this work. It then proceeded to study how the threat emanating from the Kurds apparently backed by the Soviets was inflated by the regional US allies of Iran and Turkey in order to demonise the Kurds in US eyes. It showed that, according to the evidence available, the US did indeed believe that the Soviets could destabilise the region by exploiting the Kurds.

The next section examined the consequences of the Iraqi Revolution of 1958 on the Kurds and on the region and the Cold War in relation to the Kurds. The different parties’ calculations with respect to using the Kurds to influence developments in Iraq were then explored, focusing on the period after the ignition of hostilities in Iraqi Kurdistan, from 1961. The nature and type of Soviet backing was also revealed. Then, the chapter analysed why the US developed a policy of considering the Iraqi Kurdish Issue to be an internal Iraqi matter. It demonstrated that this was indeed based on a rationale calculation that served US interests.

Finally, the broader global US policy in the Cold War was considered and this was compared to the US view of the Kurds to test whether or not the latter was compatible with implementation of the former. This chapter contributed to answering the main research question by studying the above issues at country (Iraq) level and at regional (Middle East) and global (Cold War) levels. It attempted to connect all these to establish the effects that they have had on the Iraqi Kurds and, of equality importance, how all these related to one another in relation to the topic of this research.
Chapter 2

The Iraqi Kurds, the Cold War and Regional Politics: 1963-1965

Introduction

This chapter covers the period between Qasim’s overthrow by the first Ba’ath regime in 1963 to the heightened tensions between Nasser and the Shah. After a background section setting the stage with a historical overview, the Kurdish Issue under the first Ba’ath regime, which overthrew Qasim, is studied. This is followed by a focus on how the US, with its Cold War and regional considerations in mind, was prepared to essentially turn a blind eye to the Kurds in order not to sacrifice the Ba’ath government. The chapter then moves to an analysis of the tensions between Iran and Arab nationalism under Nasser after the pro-Nasser nationalist overthrow of the Ba’athists, thereby showing the impact of the regional political context on the Iraqi Kurds during this period. Next, the issue of how the Shah of Iran considered the Kurds – as a trump card to be used against Baghdad – is investigated. Relations between Israel and the Iraqi Kurds are also covered before shifting to US global policy from Kennedy to Johnson to present the US approach at this time and how this related to US views of the Iraqi Kurds.

2.1 Background

In early February 1963, Qasim was overthrown and murdered in a coup d’état carried out by the Ba’athists. This led to an interim pause of hostilities between the army and KDP before they resumed a few months later, in June. The Kurdish Issue was a primary cause for the demise of Qasim’s administration. Before the coup, the Ba’athists and the Nasserites had promised Barzani autonomy for Kurdistan and even the right to self-determination if the Kurds ceased attacking the army and also issued a declaration supporting the coup upon its success. However, the coup plotters did not honour the pledge that they had made to the KDP and were uncompromising, especially on the issue of the geographical borders of the would-be autonomous Kurdistan, particularly in relation to the oil-rich city of Kirkuk. This led to the resumption of the war.\(^{173}\)

\(^{173}\) For a detailed account of the Ba’ath ideology, their stance on the Kurdish issue and the development of the Ba’ath government of February 1963 as related to the Kurds, see Ghareeb, The Kurdish Question in Iraq, pp. 44-
In November 1963, the Ba’ath government itself was also ousted, by pro-Nasser nationalists. The new government under President Abdul Salam Arif sought a rapprochement with Barzani. The KDP and Arif agreed a ceasefire to be effective from February 10, 1964. However, as Entessar has noted, because the constitution of 1964 ‘did not recognise the equality of Kurds and Arabs in Iraq’ and also because of disagreements about autonomy in Kurdistan, the ceasefire failed a year later, in April 1965, and there was a resumption of what may be named the “Kurdish War” (see Introduction).

Despite the use of chemical, phosphorous and napalm bombs in Kurdistan by the Iraqi army that was also able to call upon a force of some 50,000 combatants, the War again reached a stalemate with heavy losses for the state force. Hence, the government in Baghdad again sought to end the conflict peacefully. This new peace initiative, which became known as the Bazzaz Declaration, involved a 12-point programme announced by Premier Abd al-Rahman Bazzaz on July 12, 1966 promising autonomy for the Kurds, to which Barzani agreed (see Chapter Three).

However, frictions had already developed both on the Kurds’ side and in Baghdad. At the Kurds’ end, these frictions seem to have been caused by what could be regarded as essentially a blend of ideological differences coupled with power rivalry between Barzani, on the one hand, and Ibrahim Ahmad with Jalal Talabani, on the other. At the same time, the hardliners in Baghdad were still in favour of a military solution, despite the fact that the army had already failed to achieve this. Further, the three (successful) coups in Baghdad since 1958 and also the polarisation of the Arab Iraqi society between nationalists, Ba’athists and communists (and others) testify anyway to the divided nature of politics in Baghdad.

Also, before the nationalists ousted the Ba’ath government in November, the Ba’ath elements that carried out the coup against Qasim suppressed communist leaders who objected to their

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69. Ghareeb’s work for this period seems to have been influenced by Arab Iraqi sources but remains informative nevertheless. Also, see Entessar, Kurdish Ethnonationalism, pp. 64-66; Barzanî, Barzanî Ü Bzutnewey Rizgarîxwazi Kurd: Bergi Duwem 1958-1961, p. 123.

174 Entessar, Kurdish Ethnonationalism, p. 67. Also, for more, see the same source, pp. 66-68.

175 Entessar, Kurdish Ethnonationalism, p. 67.

176 For more on these, see McDowall, A Modern History of the Kurds, pp. 313-20; Ghareeb, The Kurdish Question in Iraq, pp. 29-42; Entessar, Kurdish Ethnonationalism, pp. 66-68.

177 McDowall, A Modern History of the Kurds, pp. 313-20; Entessar, Kurdish Ethnonationalism, pp. 66-68. Dr Mahmoud Othman considers this inter-Kurdish rivalry to be more due to the power struggle than ideological; Othman, in Telephone Interview A.
move. Thereafter, communist leaders were given sanctuary in Kurdistan, which, according to Masoud Barzani, played well with the Socialist bloc. This also indicates the usefulness of the Iraqi Kurds for external powers, such as the USSR in this case. Similarly, it shows the complicated dynamics of Iraqi politics at the time, and it offers a good example illustrating why most of the actors concerned sought to maintain links with the Iraqi Kurds as a major actor in the region – an instrumentalisation which meant that these links tended to be nurtured and employed in times of need, but the need of the other actors rather than that of the Kurds.

In Iran, in May 1964 the Shah was still weighing up whether to put his lot in with the Iraqi Kurds or the Iraqi government. According to the Shah himself, if Iran were to help Iraq in ‘crushing’ the Kurds, this would be tantamount to helping Nasser and the new Arab federation, the UAR, while if Iran were to side with the Kurds, it would upset Turkey and also create problems for Iran itself by inspiring Kurdish nationalist aspirations at home (in Iran). The Shah now admitted that Iran had provided a small amount of financial aid to the Iraqi Kurds and also that he saw that the Kurds could be weapons against Nasser and the Arab Federation when needed. This was while the US wanted the Iranian government to essentially persuade the Iraqi government of the importance of serious negotiations to reach a deal with the Kurds. The US did, in fact, have prior knowledge that the new (nationalist) Iraqi government was contemplating the resumption of action against the Kurds.

For his part, the Shah was also awaiting to see the result of recent visits by Iraqi Kurdish leaders to Cairo before deciding on whether to back the Kurds or not, while another reason for supporting them, as explained (Chapter One), was to pre-empt Russia’s backing, which he was dreading. In the words of the British ambassador to Iran, the Shah wanted ‘to steal a march on the Russians’ in this respect. Adding to this complication, by June 1963 the Iraqis were complaining to the Iranians that Russia was supplying the Kurds via Iran. The Iranians thought that the Russians might be overflying Iranian territory at night for this purpose, which can only have exacerbated their concern about Russia’s “Kurdish plans” and hence catalysed

the decision to divert the Kurds away from the Soviets by portraying themselves as a source to which the Kurds could turn. In short, Iran was conflicted about how to balance its various interests vis-à-vis regional influence and the ongoing thrust of Kurdish nationalism; it was motivated to support Baghdad in blocking a Kurdish state in Iraq, it was motivated also to support that state itself in order to forestall what it saw as a nascent Russian patronage of a Kurdish state.\footnote{The concern with Russian patronage was expressed by Iran’s contemporary Minister of Foreign Affairs; see ‘FO 317/170456: EQ103134/10, Iraqi Relations with Iran, June 29, 1963’, and also ‘FO 317/170456: EQ103134/8, Ambassadors talk […] the Shah, June 19, 1963 (UK: National Archives, no date).} The reality, however, seems to have been that the Kurds were buying weapons on the black-market, with some financial assistance from Russia (Chapter One).\footnote{See Barzanî, Barzanî Û Bzutnewey Rîzgarîxwaî Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşî Yekem 1961-1975, p. 31.}

Meanwhile, Nasser seems to have had a not dissimilar attitude towards the Iraqi Kurds as that of the Shah. The British ambassador in Cairo noted that Nasser was unlikely to give the Kurds his ‘all-out encouragement’,\footnote{‘FO371/170429: E1015/25: Latest Kurdish Activities […], February 6, 1963’, (UK: National Archives, no date).} for example, but could rather be expected to keep a line open to them in order to be able to influence Iraqi politics in Baghdad. That is the view argued here also as the rationale behind Nasser’s friendship with the Iraqi Kurds. Thus, Iran was also concerned that Iraq could fall into the hands of Nasser and thus other Arab states, as explained (Chapter One).

On the Russian front, after the Ba’athists took power in February 1963 followed by the resumption of hostilities with a particularly brutal campaign in Kurdistan, the Soviet Union made multiple attempts for the Kurdish Issue to be heard by various UN organs. In a letter to the UN Secretary General, dated July 9, 1963, it accused Iraq of ‘brutally exterminating the peaceful population […] and are reducing vast areas of Kurdistan to ruins’. It also accused ‘the colonialist military pact of CENTO’\footnote{‘PR 6/10, FCO 51/191; Research Middle East: The Kurdish Problem in Iraq 1963-1971’, (UK: National Archives, no date).} of being an accomplice to this and its members of meddling in Iraq and assisting it to this end. The Soviet letter requested an immediate end to the claimed CENTO support, arguing that it constituted a threat to international peace and security, warning that otherwise the Security Council may have to be convened. Following through on this, Moscow was also behind a request made by the Republic of Mongolia for
‘Genocide in Kurdistan’ to be put on the agenda of the 18th Session of the General Assembly.\textsuperscript{186}

This Soviet move was a cause for concern among the Western bloc countries, on this occasion spearheaded by the UK, it seems. The UK decided that the intention of the USSR was to internationalise the Kurdish Issue by having it heard by the UN, which was against the UK and US Cold War strategy of leveraging power through Baghdad, which now meant trying to win the favour of the new Ba’ath government there.

Led by the UK, CENTO members adopted the tactic of replying to the Russian letter to the UN Secretary General through their Secretary General and also individually, as member-states, but not at the UN, in order to avoid the Kurdish Issue going to an international stage in their attempt to prevent just that. This was despite the UK embassy in Baghdad confirming to its Foreign Office that the Soviet accusation was basically true and that the Iraqis were intending to drastically ‘reduce’ the Kurdish population by means of military force and repopulate the area with Arabs.\textsuperscript{187} The Soviet attempt to raise the matter internationally not only agitated CENTO but also risked antagonising the Arab World. The charges were thus subsequently withdrawn due to Arab pressure and its potential ramifications for USSR-Arab relations.\textsuperscript{188} As well as heading off Russia’s effort with the UN by having the issue discussed through CENTO instead, the UK and US furthered their support for the new regime with the provision of arms to Iraq, such as British Hawker Hunter bombers.

Parallel to the UN attempt, the Soviet media, primarily TASS, and commentators, attacked Iraq in strong terms and accused it of treachery. On the one hand, the Ba’athists’ assaults on the communists in Iraq and thus the nature of USSR’s own relations with the Ba’ath in comparison to that of the latter with the Western world may help to explain the Soviets’ attitude as presented here;\textsuperscript{189} on the other hand, the Kurds had given sanctuary to the

\textsuperscript{186} FO 371/170448: 1963.
\textsuperscript{187} FO 371/170448: 1963.
\textsuperscript{189} See FO371/170429: 1963.
communists, which could have had a positive influence on the Soviets regarding the Kurdish movement.

When it comes to the other superpower of the Cold War, the US, in July (1963), Barzani wrote a letter to President Kennedy through the US consulate in Tabriz, Iran. Some three weeks after Barzani’s letter to Kennedy, which received an oral acknowledgement, Barzani also sent another intermediary to the US consul in Tabriz asking the US to play a primary role in restarting negotiations and also reaching a ceasefire. Essentially, Barzani seems to have wanted the US to play the role of intermediary. State Department officials consequently agreed to act as a ‘post office’ but nothing more than this and not what Barzani wanted. Iran then recommended the US to join it as, or in some form of an intermediary. However, just as in the case of acting as a post office, American diplomats dreaded that this could be detrimental to Iraqi-US relations. This also contradicts the literature reviewed earlier (Introduction) claiming that Kennedy pressed the Ba’ath regime to make peace with the Kurds. Not at all, it would appear; on the contrary, the US held off from an intermediary involvement. Also, the Kurds were prepared to announce a ceasefire and negotiate for a settlement, provided that international powers mediated this. Manifestly, they did not, neither the Kurds nor other powers.

Multiple Kurdish emissaries thus failed to persuade the West in general to act as mediator or for the Kurds to be given international guarantees in future negotiations with Iraq assuring the implementation of the terms of any potential deal. In the second half of 1963, therefore, Barzani was unsuccessful in his attempt to attract international attention and the mediation of the West in particular. Britain and the US also persuaded the Shah to refrain from openly declaring his support for the Kurdish movement. The Shah only hesitantly agreed. With this background or narrative skeleton for the present chapter established, we can now proceed to examine the issues in more detail.

191 See Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds and the Cold War, p. 90.
2.2 Change in Baghdad: The First Ba’ath Regime, the Cold War and the Hapless Kurds.

The Ba’ath coup of February 1963 overthrew Abd al-Karim Qasim, and the National Council that took over declared one of its aims to be resolution of ‘the Arab-Kurdish problem’. In the initial stages of the coup, the consensus from the US-DOD and the CIA was that if the coup were to succeed, then relations between Iraq and the US ‘would be considerably improved’. In addition to this, the CIA also believed that the internal situation in Iraq (i.e. including Kurd-Arab relations) would also gradually improve.

On February 8, 1963, the day of the Ba’ath coup, Robert W. Komor, Senior Staff of the National Security Council (NSC), wrote to Kennedy informing him that the coup seemed to have been successful and that it was ‘almost certainly a net gain for our side’. After the coup, the US sought to court the new Iraqi government to at least remain in the non-aligned framework of the Cold War and thus minimise the influence over Iraq of America’s two adversaries (the USSR and UAR). To give this approach substance, however, a new policy was needed, one that called for economic, military and technical assistance to Iraq. On the military front, by April 2, 1963, the US had already agreed to sell 12 Helicopters costing up to $15 million to Iraq, which was to choose the kind it wanted.

Inevitably, however, this new policy and the ongoing struggle between the Kurds and the Iraqi government was to have ramifications on the Iraqi-Kurdish status quo. The Iraqi army had not been able to overpower the Kurds since hostilities began, in 1961, and Qasim’s government had paid a high price for its failed campaign in Kurdistan, this being the primary cause for the downfall of the regime (in which Qasim himself lost his life). The views of Harold H. Saunders of the NSC staff as expressed to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (McGeorge Bundy) on the US arms sale to Iraq on April 2, 1963 was indicative of US policy toward the Iraqi Kurds and the calculation behind it after the 1963 coup. This policy essentially entailed no change but was then to take a turn for the worse so far as the Kurds were

193 ‘Memorandum From Stephen O. Fuqua […]’, (FRUS, February 8, 1963). Also, for an account of Ba’ath-Kurdish relations in this era, see Entessar, Kurdish Ethnonationalism, pp. 64-66..
194 Memorandum From Stephen O. Fuqua […] (February 8, 1963).
195 Memorandum From Stephen O. Fuqua […] (February 8, 1963).
196 Memorandum From Stephen O. Fuqua […] (February 8, 1963).
197 ‘Memorandum From Harold H. Saunders […]’, (FRUS, April 2, 1963).
concerned. Writing to Bundy, Saunders noted that the US had already turned down their request for help and that

The Kurds may object to our military sales. [...] However, we think it’s more important to be responsive to the new regime. Besides, we want [the] Kurds to negotiate a settlement with the new government. If that fails, our interests will be better served if the government can control the Kurds than if the Kurdish rebellion is successful enough to invite Soviet or Iranian meddling.  

The request to which Saunders alluded was yet another plea by the Kurds for US backing, this time delivered by Jalal Talabani from Mela Mustafa in March (1963). With Talabani, then head of the Kurdish delegation in Baghdad, negotiating with the Iraqi government, Barzani had once again offered the US friendship, requested assistance for the Kurds and asked for a US official to meet with him. The response given by an embassy officer, however, was along the lines of the already established policy, that the US considered the Kurdish Issue an internal Iraqi matter and was therefore unable to help and that, moreover, a US official could not meet with Barzani.  

This illustrates the US policy in respect of the Iraqi Kurds in March 1963 under the first Ba’ath regime. It is to be noted here that while Saunders and Bundy were not from the State Department, they were both senior members of the Kennedy administration, so the policy in effect clearly went beyond the State Department. It seems that any related contemporary US diplomat or official already knew what answer to give to the Kurds and this was precisely because this was the established institutionalised policy. The question here is not whether this was announced as official US policy as such but that there was a standard position adopted among US policymakers based on an assessment in respect of the Iraqi Kurds and this was consistent across various governmental bodies. In fact, it was stated to be US policy, at least internally, in communication between the Department of State and the embassy.

Following Barzani’s message to the US by Talabani and the embassy’s response, the Department of State sent a telegram to its embassy in Iraq on April 5, 1963 – after, of course, the embassy officer had already informed Talabani about US policy – in which the officer

199 See footnotes of ‘[...] Department of State to the Embassy in Iraq’, (FRUS, April 5, 1963).
nonetheless reported the affair to the Department, which, in turn, endorsed the embassy’s position, thus:

United States policy remains unchanged; we consider [the Kurdish] problem strictly one between GOI and [the] Kurds. However, [the] consequences [of the] breakdown [of the] current negotiations [is] such that effort to persuade both sides of advantages [of an] equitable settlement through mutual compromise [is] warranted. You may, therefore, pass word to Talabani that Mulla Mustafa’s message [was] transmitted [to the] USG, which fully endorses positions taken by [the] Embassy officer.200

The Department also instructed the embassy to convey that a solution to the ‘Kurdish problem’ 201 could and had to be found, emphasising that it would be advantageous for the Kurds were they to form an integral part of the Iraqi state and urging the Iraqi government to be forthcoming in meeting Kurdish aspirations to a certain degree. Additionally, it noted that US government (USG) ‘understanding of and sympathy for legitimate Kurdish aspirations within [the] Iraqi state’ would ‘in no circumstances be allowed adversely to affect cordial USG relations with new Iraqi regime’.202 The Kennedy administration, therefore, merely wanted a peaceful settlement for the Kurdish Issue in Iraq.

In other words, what can be inferred from these exchanges is that the US policy was to seek a rapprochement with the new Iraqi government by providing financial aid for the new regime’s purchase of its military hardware and not providing any assistance to the Kurds to the extent even of declining Barzani’s request just to meet an American official; yet, the US also urged a peaceful solution! The reasons for taking this line primarily were to avoid offending the Iraqis in Baghdad, of course, with the assumed ramifications for the wider region were the Iraqi Kurds to win a significant degree of autonomy. Despite the official line, however, there do appear to have been voices in the State Department preferring that the sale of arms to Iraq (12 helicopters and 40 light tanks, in this case) be made conditional on a quick agreement with the Kurds. This is evident by the memorandum of the Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs of the State Department (NEA) to the then Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Harriman W. Averell) on April 8, 1963, that ‘asking Iraq for a quick agreement with the Kurds as a quid pro quo for the arms sale would defeat the purpose of

200 [...] Department of State to the Embassy in Iraq (April 5, 1963).
201 [...] Department of State to the Embassy in Iraq (April 5, 1963).
202 [...] Department of State to the Embassy in Iraq (April 5, 1963).
the sale, which was to augment U.S. influence with the new Iraqi regime’. Nevertheless, there is no indication that this suggestion ever came to anything.

The point to emphasis here is that the US did have a developed view of the Iraqi Kurds at above-embassy level and its attitude was determined according to what was perceived as serving its own interests. Therefore, the fact that the US did not involve itself in the Kurds’ cause does not imply that this was because it did not know who the Kurds were or that it lacked either the interest or the knowledge to become involved. On the contrary, keeping aloof and overtly so in respect of the Kurds’ struggle within Iraq was a deliberate decision made by the US for its own interests, fully appreciative of the apparent contradiction that supporting Baghdad militarily held for this and in this matter concerned, rather, with the contradiction implied by putative support for the Kurds with respect to its primary relationship (i.e. Baghdad). The Americans knew very well the choice they were making, one organised by considerations of regional Cold War strategy, basically, rather than, say, democracy and UN-recognised rights of peoples to self-determination.

One reason for concern among American military and diplomatic circles in 1963 about a possible re-ignition of the Kurdish War, as discussed, was the usual fear of Soviet interference and presumably a potential Soviet sponsorship of a Kurdish state. In the words of John W. Bowling (NEA officer in charge of Iranian affairs), this comprised ‘the possibility of an overland link-up with the Soviets, which would greatly facilitate the movement of supplies to the Kurds’. The idea of this “Kurdish land bridge” was not particular to John W. Bowling, of course, but went back to the pre-1958 period, as initially developed by Iran in the Eisenhower era (Chapter One).

Such perpetual apprehension of a Soviet Kurdish client imperilling regional US allies (Iran and Turkey) or potentially outflanking them or at least causing them internal instability and thus presenting a vulnerable point for Soviet exploitation seems to have been consistently lingering as far as the US and its regional allies were concerned. It was always in the background and the primary policy consideration. Accordingly, the course of the Cold War and the associated regional politics hugely directed the fate of the Kurds, including the Iraqi

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203 ‘Circular Airgram [...] to the Embassy in Iraq’, (FRUS, April 18, 1963).
The US did seek to prevent a resumption of hostilities between the Iraqi Kurds and the new government in Baghdad as its preference. To this end, the US embassy in Baghdad was instructed by the State Department to renew its démarche to the Iraqi government in May 1963 to continue the negotiations and avoid a resumption of hostilities – but the US did not push Iraq on this.205 The Department, particularly through its embassy in Lebanon, was also urging the Kurds to do the same. However, the US desire for this Arab-Kurd peace was based on the idea that the Ba’ath government was anti-communist and thus motivated by the desire to keep the Kurds away from the Soviets not only in Iraq but also in Iran too.

In addition to the USSR, the US also wanted to keep the pro-Nasserites as well as the Iranian-linked Shia of Iraq in check by stabilising Ba’athist rule. Nasser’s dislike of the Ba’ath may have been a major reason for his openness to maintaining his connection with the Kurds. In the US itself, meanwhile, Justice William Orville Douglas of the Supreme Court took up the Kurdish case in November 1963, which made it difficult, thereafter, for the State Department to reject visas for Kurdish representatives outright under Iraqi pressure.206 US state policy was affected by various extraneous and non-governmental considerations.

On July 19, 1963 Robert W. Komer of the NSC staff wrote to President Kennedy updating him on the Iraqi policy and the aid as intended to keep a divide between the new regime in Baghdad and the USSR. Along with the tanks that the US had agreed to sell to Iraq, Komer also informed Kennedy that they had agreed to sell ‘12 tank transporters, 500 big trucks, and 15 large choppers’.207 These military sales were in line with and to materialise US Iraqi policy after the overthrow of Qasim – although limiting the sale of offensive equipment not so much to save the Kurds, bearing in mind that it would have had a direct impact on the Kurdish War, so much as to avoid undesired impact in another area, the Arab-Israeli front. Komer also

205 Memorandum for the Record (May 16, 1963); FO 371/170450: 1963.
207 ‘[...] to President Kennedy’, (FRUS, July 10, 1963).
indicated that the UK had offered to sell Iraq ‘some [Hawker] Hunters and ammo, etc.’ (as mentioned earlier).\textsuperscript{208}

Crucially, in his memo to Kennedy, Komer also stated, ‘As you know, we’re giving Iraqis some ammo [\textit{less than 1 line of source text not declassified}] for Kurd campaign’, adding ‘So are Syria and UAR apparently’ (note original).\textsuperscript{209} Regardless of the content of the continued redaction, this is the first indication that the US was directly supporting Iraq in its war with the Iraqi Kurds. The support may only have extended to ‘some ammo’, but nonetheless this was directly intended for the ‘Kurd campaign’.

The rational for this commitment to the new Ba’ath regime was of course to drive a wedge between the USSR and Iraq, on one hand, and also Iraq and Nasser, on the other, as explained. It was essentially intended for bridge building with Iraq. As expressed earlier by Saunders, apparently it was also more in the US interest for Iraq to control the Kurds if negotiations failed than for the Kurds to be sufficiently successful as to invite Soviet intervention, in which case, presumably, Kurdistan would have been a Soviet base with serious consequences for (other) US allies (Iran and Turkey) and thus for the Cold War in the Middle East. Such appears to have been the mind-set in the US. The US, therefore, was patently not a neutral player in the Iraqi-Kurdish war under the Ba’athists after Qasim.

The views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense (Robert McNamara) on August 15, 1963, add further evidence regarding the explanation of this policy. Among the reasons for pursing a policy of appeasement towards Iraq, they believed, were the aim of eliminating the communist threat within Iraq and the implications of this (i.e. Soviet hegemony) as well as countering Nasser’s power.\textsuperscript{210}

With regards to the Kurds, therefore, not only the civilian part of the US government but also the military, while assisting Iraq, perceived a prolonged conflict between the Kurds and Baghdad as giving the Soviets an opportunity to meddle, and not only in Iraq but in Turkey and Iran too. In reference to this, the Joint Chiefs recommended to the US government to ‘give favorable consideration to reasonable Iraqi requests for equipment and seek to use [the]
resultant influence to urge moderation on the Iraqi Government [regarding the Kurds]. They also argued that, to circumvent USSR’s intervention, ‘a firm Iraqi military position’ coupled with the accommodation of ‘legitimate Kurdish grievances’ was ‘the most promising avenue for an early end to hostilities and advancement of internal stability in Iraq’. This is further indication of the nature of the policy as contended in this section, and it also shows that although the US was in favour of a settlement for the Kurdish Issue within Iraq it did not object to a military solution to be part of this “settlement”.

With the Ba’ath regime taking power in February 1963 and the corresponding adjustment in the US policy toward the Kurdish Issue and fate of Ba’ath-Kurdish negotiations, as seen, was a matter of both apprehension and also interest for the US. America desired them to succeed, but it desired Iraq to dominate in the case of failure, a desire of which Baghdad, obviously, could not be expected to remain oblivious and fail to take into account in its approach to those negotiations. In other words, US policy may be assumed as a factor in the likely breakdown of talks and resumption of war, as in fact transpired, even if it was only intended to strengthen Baghdad’s hand in forcing the peace; at best, this represents an American miscalculation.

However, no overall change in US policy regarding the Iraqi Kurds themselves occurred (as compared to the Qasim-period policy). Adding to what has been exposed hitherto in this section, a circular airgram in March 1963 from the State Department on ‘Interim Policy Guidelines for Dealing With Iraq’ approved by several Department officials provides further evidence of this:

The United States should continue to regard the [Kurdish] problem as strictly an internal Iraqi matter in which there is no role for the United States either directly or indirectly. In discussion with Iraqis and others, United States officials should limit themselves to expressions of hope that the GOI and the Kurds will be able to come promptly to a mutually satisfactory agreement and the United States is pursuing a strictly hands-off policy. Our influence should be used with Iran and Turkey to assure a similar hands-off policy on their part. (Emphases added.)

211 Memorandum From the Joint Chiefs of Staff [...] McNamara (August 15, 1963).
212 Memorandum From the Joint Chiefs of Staff [...] McNamara (August 15, 1963).
213 ‘Circular Airgram From the Department of State [...]’, (FRUS, March 2, 1963).
214 Circular Airgram From the Department of State [...] (March 2, 1963).
This Interim Policy Guidelines had earlier added that ‘Failure to find a political solution soon would benefit only the Soviets and the Iraqi communists’. It is evident why the US under Kennedy viewed the issue as explicated. A number of sources from the UK government also verify the analysis presented here. In short, it is clear that the Cold War and the pertaining regional politics essentially largely shaped the US approach toward the Iraqi Kurds and their desire for independence – and this was not, ultimately, one of neutrality but one of opposition and intervention to that end.

### 2.3 Not Offending the Iraqis: The Super-worried Superpower?

Evidence that the US was not only not ignorant of the Iraqi Kurds’ cause and ambitions but actually closely weighing its local and regional interests in the matter is also observable from Mustafa Barzani’s letter to Kennedy dated July 12, 1963. Barzani commenced the letter by stating that

> The United States Diplomatic authorities are certainly informed and fully aware of the question of the Iraqi Kurds and our demands from former and present governments, which are entirely in harmony with the bill of human rights and the Charter of the United Nations.

The letter also complained about successive Iraqi governments’ policies towards the Iraqi Kurds and how the new Iraqi government after Qasim has reneged on all its promises ‘made under oath’ and that ‘In a Hitlerian Fascist fashion’ it had ‘adopted the policy of burnt lands’ and ‘committed outrages’ that were ‘a disgrace for mankind in the twentieth century’. It is to be recalled here that Qasim was unseated from power and murdered by the Ba’athists in the February coup of 1963 and also that fighting between the Kurds and the Baghdad (now Ba’ath) government had flared up (again) in June 1963 after a short pause. Barzani asked Kennedy and the US to use their influence to help the Iraqi Kurds ‘acquire their rights, i.e., autonomy within the Republic of Iraq’, adding that this request was being made ‘in order to prevent bloodshed and eliminate the nightmare of cruelty which keeps down the Iraqi Kurds’.

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216 The rest of an English version of the letter and the relevant attached airgram from US Tehran embassy to the State Department is accessible via ‘Mullah Mustafa Barzani seeks Kennedy’s aid [...]’, (DDRS-Gale, July 30, 1963).
217 Mullah Mustafa Barzani seeks Kennedy’s aid [...] (July 30, 1963).
218 For more on these see Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*, pp. 64-66.
219 Mullah Mustafa Barzani seeks Kennedy’s aid [...] (July 30, 1963).
within Iraq rather than fostering an outright separate Kurdish state; that is, he was pushing for autonomy not independence. He had already tried the latter earlier but to no avail (as detailed).

Before Barzani’s letter reached the White House, however, a reply was already proposed, first by the US ambassador in Tehran and then by the State Department. The ambassador, in forwarding the letter, proposed to the Department to instruct the US consul in Tabriz (where the letter was received) ‘not to indicate to Barzani’s intermediary in any way that the letter has been forwarded’ 220 and to ‘reiterate orally the Department’s position on the Kurdish problem’. 221 Meanwhile, in a memorandum dated August 6th sent from the Department’s Acting Executive Secretary (John McKesson) to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (McGeorge Bundy), the Department also conveyed its belief that a reply from the President was not necessary because, in their view, ‘a Presidential reply to Barzani might well damage United States relations with Iraq’. 222 Such details as this portray the nature and the rationale in the US dealings with the Kurds in Iraq in August 1963, and, more broadly, the instrumentalization of the Kurds in Iraq and the region generally for the ends of the Cold War (as, indeed, were Iraq and the region).

When blocking Barzani’s plea from being made directly to Kennedy as damaging to US relations with Iraq, the Department instead proposed that an oral response be given to Barzani’s intermediary by the Tabriz consul, and that this be

...along the lines of our standard guidance with respect to the Iraqi Kurds, i.e., that the United States sympathizes with legitimate Kurdish aspirations within the sovereign state of Iraq, but that our sympathy will not be permitted to prejudice the cordial relations now existing between the United States and Iraq. 223

Contradicting the US ambassador in Tehran, the Department further proposed that if asked whether the letter had been forwarded or not, the consul in Tabriz should state that the letter had been forwarded to the Department and that the consul was replying on behalf of the Administration, as indicated. The Department believed that this would not ‘damage United

220 Mullah Mustafa Barzani seeks Kennedy’s aid […] (July 30, 1963).
221 Mullah Mustafa Barzani seeks Kennedy’s aid […] (July 30, 1963).
222 ‘Memorandum From the Department […]’, (FRUS, August 6, 1963).
223 Memorandum From the Department […] (August 6, 1963).
States-Iraqi relations’ and, moreover, ‘At the same time (...) would demonstrate, if only symbolically, United States’ concern for and interest in the Kurds’. 224

In conjunction with what has already been shown, what this correspondence tell us about US policy and the Iraqi Kurds is first, that the duplicity was entirely intentional, and second, that this response given to Barzani was an institutionalised response; it was systemic or, in the words of the Department a ‘standard guidance’. 225 That is, this was not the result of semi or wholly independent schemes of US officials alone in some occasional or piecemeal fashion but a formalised policy in relation to the Iraqi Kurds’ cause. That is, it was the policy of the USG and passed up and down as a “chain decision” made by US officials for the way the US wanted to deal with the Iraqi Kurds and for the reasons given.

In addition to the existence of a US policy towards the Iraqi Kurds based on the calculations analysed, the documents cited here collectively show also that the Kurds had cordial relations with US diplomats in Iraq. This in itself also demonstrates that, like the other powers, the US wanted to maintain the bridge with the Iraqi Kurds – but not much more. This relationship was conducted on an informal level since US policymakers were afraid of offending the Iraqis, of course with the potential consequences for the Cold War in the region that such contacts carried or may have been perceived to have carried or at least were feared thus by the superpower.

Many of the documents consulted up until now were the result of meetings or exchanges between Kurdish emissaries and US diplomats evidences both the existence of a relationship, whatever its scale, and also its nature. More importantly, with regards to the aim of this research, these documents also portray the impact that the Cold War and regional politics had on the struggle of the Iraqi Kurds. Indeed, it is proposed here, the Cold War and associated regional politics were intertwined when it came to an issue like who was ruling Iraq – and the Iraqi Kurds may be seen as essentially in the middle of all these. This was the case up until the point that has been covered thus far, namely, from the Iraqi Revolution of 1958 to the Iraq under the first Ba’ath regime, after Qasim.

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224 Memorandum From the Department [...] (August 6, 1963).
225 Memorandum From the Department [...] (August 6, 1963).

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2.4 Nasser and the Shah after the Overthrow of the First Ba’ath Regime: Heightened Tensions and their Implications.

As has been shown, the Soviets, Nasser, Iran, the US and also Turkey (among others) all had a stake in who and what prevailed in Iraq, although each for their own, quite different reasons. Apart from the Cold War rivalry in Iraq, the US was also apprehensive about Iraqi-Kurdish relations and Iran’s role in the country generally. The US was wary of the Shah derailing negotiations or a potential settlement between Baghdad and the Kurds. Indeed, the Shah had the ability to do so, but again, as motivated by self-interest rather than any *bona fide* sympathy for the Iraqi Kurds or their cause. As will be investigated, it may be argued that Iran had a pivotal influence on the Iraqi Kurds’ relations with Baghdad, and this was for a number of both bilateral (Iran-Iraq) and also regional reasons.

For a number of reasons (examined below), when or shortly after the nationalists overthrew the Ba’ath government that had come to power in the February 1963 coup, the Shah seems to have overcome his dithering over whether or not to aid the Iraqi Kurds against Baghdad and taken steps to build closer relations with them. Iran’s role in the context of this study, therefore, cannot be overlooked. Indeed, this is indicated by the primary sources, especially since it was Iran that ultimately decided the fate of the national land-locked Kurdish liberation movement under Mustafa Barzani in 1975 (Chapters Three and Four). The following paragraphs present this Iranian influence on Iraqi-Kurdish affairs through US concerns on the matter.

The evidence for Iran’s impact on the status of the Iraqi Kurds in terms of the trilateral Iraqi, Kurdish and American relations is copious, and similarly apparent are US apprehensions about Iran’s role in Iraqi Kurds affairs with Baghdad in this era. After the start of the Baghdad-KDP negotiations in the aftermath of the overthrow of Qasim by the Ba’athists in February 1963, Robert W. Komor of the NSC staff wrote to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (McGeorge Bundy), regarding the potential for the negotiations to fail, thus:

> Some of our spies are beginning to get quite worried about [the] risk that [the] Kurdish problem may flare up again to bedevil [the] new Iraqi regime. [...] We’re warning [the] Iranians especially to keep hands off, but if [the] Shah should decide that [the] new Iraq[i] regime is too cozy with Nasser, he may not take our advice.226

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This indicates that for Iran, the Iraqi Kurds were a means through which to potentially weaken adversaries in Iraq or to meddle in and influence developments in Iraqi politics. The Shah had his own reasons for this, and, given their landlocked geography, the Iraqi Kurds had few options. Both sides thus needed each other, as will become clear shortly. A UK Foreign Office Research Department study on the Kurds and Iran’s role in this history stated that ‘The Iranian aim is to keep trouble firmly on the Iraqi side of the border’. This, in short, was indeed the reason behind Iran’s support for the Iraqi Kurds, broadly explaining Iran’s aim in this matter until the Algiers Accord of March 1975. David Kimche has also observed this in the same way; basically, he argues that Iran simply exploited the Kurds whenever necessary and betrayed them when the need was resolved, the aim was achieved. The present research concurs with that view.

Robert W. Komer’s prediction of March 1963 regarding the likelihood that the Shah would interfere in GOI-Kurdish negotiations if he perceived that the Iraqi regime was ‘too cozy with Nasser’, would be precisely the case later, as stipulated by the Shah himself in a letter to the US President (Johnson) on January 7, 1964. This letter confirms the reasons for Iran’s interests in the Iraqi Kurds as contended, namely, here, in order to counteract a threat to Iran (and not based on any kind of compassion or a genuine sympathy per se). The threat to be countered for which the Kurds were to be utilised could broadly be referred to as Arab nationalism, primarily, and additionally, in the words of the Shah himself, ‘Agents of international communism’.

The Shah conveyed to Johnson that if the GOI and the Kurds did not reach a deal, then they had ‘reason to expect that the fighting [would] flare up again in the spring [of 1964]’. It is to be recalled here that the Ba’ath regime that took power in February 1963 was itself overthrown by the Nationalists, led by Abdul Salam Arif, in November of 1963. The Shah also apprised the US President that Nasser had been trying to mediate between the GOI and the Kurds, but, while this was good in itself, Nasser had malevolent intentions in this towards Iran.

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228 Kimche, The Last Option: After Nasser, Arafat & Saddam Hussein: The Quest for Peace in the Middle East, pp. 189-200.
229 Memorandum From Robert W. Komer [...] (March 1, 1963).
231 Letter From the Shah of Iran to President Johnson (January 7, 1964).
Nasser’s malice towards Iran, according to the Shah, was fully revealed by the content of one of his messages to the Kurds. The Shah wrote that Nasser had ‘said in effect, according to [their] information, that it was a pity the Kurds were fighting the Arabs. He would have given them full support if their force[s] were directed against Iran’.

Indeed, a letter written to Mela Mustafa by Jalal Talabani from Baghdad to Kurdistan in April 1963 indicates that the Kurds had been in close contact with Nasser, and also, indeed, that Talabani had met Nasser in Cairo to discuss the Kurdish Issue. The Kurds, apparently, were open to the idea of Iraq joining a federation of Arab states, such as the UAR. This must have troubled the Shah even more when insofar as this involved Nasser and increased his apprehension of Arab nationalism. Talabani had already been received twice by Egypt as Barzani’s representative by April 1963, and he claimed to have found the Egyptian leadership’s views to be more enlightened than those of the Iraqis. At least Talabani, and presumably the Kurdish leadership in general, since he was representing Barzani in Cairo (and Baghdad), believed that the Kurds could perhaps fare better in a larger Arab federation with an enlightened leadership (Nasserites in this case) than in Iraq.

Before the Ba’athists were overthrown by the Nationalists, it was also speculated that President Nasser might be tempted to arm the Kurds to cause the downfall of the Ba’ath regime if he so desired. It has to be recalled that the Kurds had been the primary factor in causing the demise of Qasim’s regime. In other words, Nasser may have assisted the Kurds militarily had the Ba’ath regime not submitted to his authority. This was the speculation at the time, before the actual overthrow of the Ba’ath by the pro-Nasser nationalists.

The Shah then informed Johnson that he had an obligation to his country and people not to ‘tolerate Egypt’s subversive influence at our doorstep; nor fail to regard it seriously’. It is worth recalling also that a ceasefire between the Kurds and the new nationalist Iraqi

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232 Letter From the Shah of Iran to President Johnson (January 7, 1964).
233 An electronic copy of the original, hand-written version of the letter (in Kurdish) was obtained from Facebook and is retained by the author. Jalal Talabani, ‘Dear Beloved Sir [...] [trans. by author]’, (April 6, 1963), p. 10. Also see Entessar, Kurdish Ethnonationalism, p. 65.
234 These were the views of Talabani, see: Peter Mansfield, ‘Kurds Sift Prospects in Arab State [...]’, The Washington Post, (June 5, 1963).
235 Peter Mansfield, ‘Kurds Sift Prospects in Arab State [...]’,
236 Letter From the Shah of Iran to President Johnson (January 7, 1964).
government was agreed upon on February 10, 1964 (as mentioned earlier). Indeed, a number of reasons may have increased the Shah’s apprehensions by late 1964 and finally convinced him to side with the Kurds, albeit reluctantly. Among these, according to British archives, was that with a nationalist government taking power after the Ba’athists, by November 1964 Arab unity had reached an extent such that officers from Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon and even Kuwait were taking part in ‘mountain warfare’ courses under the auspices of the ‘United Arab Command’ in Aqrah (Akrê) in Kurdistan, courses that included indoctrination by Egyptian lecturers. Furthermore, at least on one occasion a skirmish took place between this group and the Peshmerga when the former strayed into Kurdish-held territory, and despite Nasser having reassured the Kurds in August 1964 that Egyptian troops would not be used against Kurds in the case of a union between Iraq and UAR. It should be pointed out, however, that the logic on Barzani’s side was that if this union did occur, then Egypt would be forced to assist Iraq in any future Arab-Kurdish hostilities, because, from the Kurds’ point of view, the pro-Nasserite nationalist Iraqi government was standing on such weak ground already that it would have compelled Nasser to intervene to save it in the case of a renewal of the Kurdish War.

This development came after the Shah’s letter of January 1964 to Johnson (as mentioned), which also indicates the further weight added to the Shah’s worries. Moreover, the presence of Syrian troops had already been publicly acknowledged by the Iraqi government by late 1963, and also acknowledged by the Kurds; Nader Entessar puts their number at 5,000. Nasser remained amicable towards the Kurds after the Ba’athists were unseated from power, but this was after the Iraqi army had suffered heavy losses in attempting and failing to advance in Kurdistan. Multiple sources, including British archives, indicate the army’s losses after Arif and the nationalists took power, and before the February 1964 ceasefire, to be in

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237 ‘Background Paper […]’, (FRUS, April 6, 1964).
240 Entessar, Kurdish Ethnonationalism, p. 66. The presence of Syrians troops is also confirmed by Masoud Barzani in addition to the aforementioned sources; see, for instance, Barzanî, Barzanî Û Bzutnewey Rizgarîxwazi Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşî Duwem 1961-1975, p. 199.
the hundreds – the government in Baghdad had to fabricate victories and advances by the army in order to explain the high number of casualties to the families of dead soldiers.

According to the British embassy in Baghdad, the army was already stretched to its limits by the Kurdish War and therefore, since Nasser had no alternative to the Nationalists if they were to be also ousted, he thus wanted the Kurdish Issue in Iraq to be resolved by peaceful means (or at least this consideration may have influenced his views). Essentially, with this being the case, it seems that for Nasser not only Iraq had failed to “resolve” its Kurdish Issue by military means but a further continuation down this path risked a backlash and an overthrow of the pro-Nasserite government in Baghdad, like the other two (Qasim and the Ba’athists) before. Nasser appears to have been convinced that under the current circumstances there could not be a military solution to the Kurdish Issue. The strain of the Kurdish War on Arif’s government, on the economy in particular, was such that the resignation of three ministers entailed, including that of the Minister of Finance.241

Meanwhile, in early June 1964, Mustafa Barzani made yet another attempt to advance the Kurdish case with one of a Cold War superpowers: the US. This time he sent Shawkat Akrawi and Luqman Barzani (Barzani’s own son) to the US embassy in Cairo. The representatives met an embassy officer there and they conveyed Barzani’s message that, inter alia, he wanted the pair to go to Washington ‘to present the Kurdish case to officers in the Department’.242 However, in response to the request, in a telegram to its embassy in Baghdad, which seemingly was personally concurred upon by the Secretary of State (Dean Rusk), the State Department replied that the representatives ‘while not unwelcomed in Washington’ but would ‘not be able to advance Kurdish interests there’ – in fact, the telegram stated, the ‘delicate Kurdish-GOI situation might be irritated unnecessarily by conversations here with avowed Kurdish nationalists [i.e. by conversations with the Kurdish representatives in Washington]’.243

Also, and just as significantly, the Department stated that the Kurdish representatives might only find frustration when discovering that the Administration’s position was parallel to that of its embassy in Baghdad. Additionally, the Department also relayed that its Baghdad

242 ‘[...] Department of State to the Embassy in Iraq’, (FRUS, June 5, 1964).
243 [...] Department of State to the Embassy in Iraq (June 5, 1964).
embassy was capable of serving as a channel between the US government and the Iraqi Kurds and for the purposes of conveying ‘subjects of concern to Iraqi Kurds and of making clear US positions’. Thus, the US policy as it was at this stage (June 1964) was: i) to refrain from escalating contacts with the Iraqi Kurds to anything above embassy, and desk level, for the reasons stated, and because it would be fruitless for the Kurds anyway and may even prove counterproductive; and ii) to keep US relations with the Iraqi Kurds merely on friendly terms.

Yet again, just like Iran and Turkey, which had earlier portrayed the Kurds to the Americans as potential Soviet agents, Iraq too was exploiting America’s Cold War concerns. The Kurdish Issue had preoccupied Iraq to the extent that it had little time or energy for much else, as it had ‘fundamentally dominated the Iraqi scene’ according to its Foreign Minister Naji Talib – who added that ‘the Kurds were controlled by the Communists’, and ‘if a Kurdish state were established, it would be a Communist enclave which would split the Arab world, pierce the protective CENTO belt, and shatter the stability of Turkey and Iran’. These were the views relayed to the US Secretary of State in a meeting with Talib in New York on December 10, 1964. The US Secretary ‘shared the Minister's concern about the dangers of Communist penetration of the Near East by means of a Kurdish independence movement’. The Kurds may have been fighting for a nationalist cause, but it suited their adversaries to paint them as communists.

It appears that up to 1964, even though there was the opinion in the US that the Kurds might be turned into a client state by the USSR with drastic consequences for the regional Cold War struggle, still the US did not assist the state of Iraq to decisively eliminate Kurdish resistance – as indicated, indeed, by the (mere) provision of ‘some ammo for the Kurd campaign’. The US did not necessarily want to antagonise or even harm the Kurds, but nor did it offer them any kind of support apart from sympathy. It could therefore be inferred that when it came to the Iraqi Kurds, the US policy in the early-mid 1960s was similar to the attitude of the Shah and also Nasser; namely keeping relations with the Kurds in the balance, on friendly terms lest the need arose to pit them against Baghdad in one way or another and especially not to give the USSR an opportunity to exploit their cause within the Cold War framework. The Kurds

244 [...] Department of State to the Embassy in Iraq (June 5, 1964).
246 Memorandum of Conversation (December 10, 1964).
247 ‘[...] to President Kennedy’, (FRUS, July 10, 1963).
themselves, however, as Barzani put it, had few to no options available and would have accepted help even from the ‘devil himself’. Nonetheless, in the final analysis the US were prepared to sacrifice the Kurds in order to win Baghdad’s favour, and no-one wanted to alienate and push them into the Soviet camp were Baghdad’s allegiance to the West not already won and the Kurds no longer needed.

The overall picture seems to demonstrate that the Americans from early on were aware of the unfavourable circumstances of the Iraqi Kurds when the overall geopolitical nature of their region is considered and especially during the Cold War. The US inevitably had to choose between sponsoring or even encouraging a Kurdish entity in Iraqi Kurdistan or offending its Cold War allies: Iran and Turkey, but also Iraq. This would have been in addition to causing an Arab nationalist uproar both against the Iraqi Kurds and also against the US itself had it clearly sided with the Kurds. The US would not have traded all of these for the Kurds or their self-determination and it did not do so. Nevertheless, one other choice that the US could have pursued was to find a settlement to the Kurdish Issue within Iraq (as opposed to the Kurds breaking away) – but it did not opt for this, either, in order to preclude the ramifications that the US thought would come with it. Nevertheless, one might argue, the US could have found a middle ground in this matter, something somewhat closer to justice, as it may be voiced.

A telegram from the State Department signed by Under Secretary of State (George W. Ball) on December 14, 1964 conveyed to the US embassy in Baghdad that the Department was ‘persuaded that Kurdish participation in any scheme to overthrow Iraq government would not guarantee [the] establishment [of a] regime more sympathetic to Kurdish aspirations’. The telegram also warned that if the Kurds were to take part in any plot involving Iran to overthrow the Iraqi government, they would only earn deep Arab suspicion along with resentment of Kurdish aspirations, and that that, in particular, may well end Nasser’s favouring of a peaceful settlement between the GOI and Iraqi Kurds.

The government in question here was Arif’s nationalist government that had come to power in November 1963 after that Ba’athists were overthrown. Therefore, the above suggests to us that while, on the one hand, the US was not prepared to assist the Kurds in any way, on

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248 Quoted in ‘Telegram From the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State’, (FRUS, September 20, 1962).
250 Telegram [...] to the Embassy in Iraq (December 14, 1964).
the other, it did not and was not viewing the (Iraqi) Kurds as such a communist risk as the Iraqis and other regional actors would have liked to portray. As evident, therefore, at these times certain US officials did have a small degree of sympathy for the Iraqi Kurds – which stood no chance in the face of broader US interests, as analysed. While the US did not back the Kurds, also it did not seek to mislead them either, not until the catastrophe of 1975 (Chapter Four).

In fact, the cable from the Under Secretary to the US embassy in Baghdad stated that any Kurdish attempt to engage in a coup seemed that it would be ‘bound [to] backfire and to worsen Kurdish position vis-à-vis GOI’, precisely because the Kurds would expose themselves as willing collaborators of the Iranians in the Arab world.251 This refers to the Shah’s desire for the downfall of the contemporary Iraqi government (the Nationalists) after the Ba’athists, since this was a pro-Nasser, nationalist government. This is a good indication of what could be described as personal sympathies by some US officials with regard to the Kurds in Iraq.

The views of the US ambassador in Baghdad add further evidence to this. When the Kurds reported to the Americans in December 1964 that Iran was urging them to resume the fighting with the GOI, the advice given by the US ambassador to Iraq (Robert C. Strong), in concurrence with that of the State Department, was to ‘avoid appearing [to] act as agents of others or entangling themselves in [the] interests of others’, meaning Iran.252 Further, certain US officials and communications also refer to the Kurds’ struggle within Iraq as the “Kurdish case” as opposed to terms such as the “Kurdish problem”. The term Kurdish “case” as opposed to “problem” suggests a degree of legitimacy in the eyes of some US diplomats. Such nomenclature is evident also in the use of “cause”. In the above telegram from the US ambassador to Baghdad back to the Department, the ambassador stated that ‘we think [the] Kurds’ cause will be severely damaged in Iraq if [the] Kurds appear to act as agents for [the] interests of others’.253

The US also did not take any significant measures to subdue the Iraqi Kurds, and therefore it did not view them as the communist threat that the Kurdish antagonists would have liked to portray them, as stated earlier. This in itself was also because the US had no interest as such

251 Telegram [...] to the Embassy in Iraq (December 14, 1964).
252 Telegram From the Embassy in Iraq [...] (December 16, 1964).
253 Telegram From the Embassy in Iraq [...] (December 16, 1964).
in decisively backing the GOI to overpower the Kurds. Essentially, the US was ready to have the Iraqi government on its side if indeed the Iraqi government opted to work with the US, and the US was ready to sacrifice the Iraqi Kurds for the realisation of this relationship, if necessary. Essentially, Cold War interests trumped all in the related regional politics for the superpowers.

2.5 Iran’s Kurdish Trump Card in Iraq, Israel and the Kurds.

Two years into the era of the nationalist government that took power from the Ba’athists in February of 1963, as early as April 1965, according to the Shah himself, Iran was helping the Kurds but apparently not encouraging them to resume hostilities. At this juncture, as the Shah told Secretary Rusk in Tehran, ‘Iran considered that in its relations with Iraq it held a trump card in the Kurds, which it would not relinquish as long as a “truly national” government was not established in Iraq’. 254 Apparently, the Shah said ‘We are not going to let the Iraqi Kurds down until a national government is established in Baghdad’. 255

As has been noted, according to the CIA, in April 1965 the Shah’s ‘main external concern’ 256 was the expansion of pro-Nasserites in the Persian Gulf area, and it was from this perspective that the Shah was reluctantly coming to embrace the Iraqi Kurds, in addition to the royalists in Yemen and also while cooperating on security matters with Israel. 257 Thus, the Shah was seeking to contain or counteract the rise of Nasserites or, broadly, that of Arab nationalism, and the Iraqi Kurds were instrumental in this insofar as it concerned Iraq. This implies that if Nasser could succeed in hegemonising Iraq, then the Shah would ensure that neither would this Nasserite Iraq be strong enough to pose a serious threat to Iran nor could it all be ruled by pan-Arabists alone (i.e. excluding non-Arabs, meaning the Kurds).

The Shah seems to have felt impelled to prevent the rise of an Arab-superstructure or federal state ruled by Nasser and bordering Iran, with implications also for Iran’s oil-rich Khuzestan region in addition to challenging it (Iran) in the Gulf. Before this could happen, however, it would have only been natural for the Shah to want the Iraqi Kurds on his side with the ability to debilitate Iraq as well as create a buffer, “Kurdish controlled” zone along Iraq’s north-

254 ‘Telegram From Secretary of State Rusk [...]’, (FRUS, April 8, 1965).
255 Quoted in ‘Telegram From Secretary of State Rusk [...]’ (April 8, 1965).
256 ‘Current Intelligence Memorandum’, (FRUS, April 23, 1965).
257 Current Intelligence Memorandum (April 23, 1965).
eastern border with Iran. The Kurds had the potential to tie-down the Iraqi army at home, preventing it from adventures abroad and indeed, this was what was to happen until the Algiers Accord of 1975.  

Concerning the Shah’s worries about Arab nationalism, various American and British state archived sources portray him as a person somewhat obsessed with the risk to Iran of Arab unity. However, an assessment of the extent to which this was a genuine feeling on the Shah’s part or whether he was just exaggerating this risk in order to attain more US armaments and the like goes beyond the aim of this research.

By late 1965, on the one hand, there was already a number of attacks on the Iranian frontier posts by Iraqi armed forces, including by fighter-jets. In these attacks, at least two Iranian servicemen lost their lives. Nevertheless, there were no indications in terms of troop movements that either side wanted to take this to a full-scale war, and each side blamed the other. The Iraqis basically seem to have sought to intimidate Iran to back off from assisting the Kurds. It is important to stress that these were not simply the actions of just any Iraqi government but of a “pro-Nasserite” nationalist government, the Shah’s nightmare.

On the other hand, Iraq also launched a diplomatic offensive to pressure Iran to stop backing the Kurds and seal the border. The Bazzaz government, as it was now, appeared convinced that the only way to deal with the Kurdish Issue was for Iran to seal its border. The Iraqi attempts included asking Britain and the US to mediate between the two sides. To that end, in August 1965, the State Department instructed its embassy in Iran to ask Iran to change its policy towards the Iraqi Kurds, to cease assisting them as had been alleged by Iraq. Iraq was complaining both to the US and also to the UK that their arms were ending up in Kurdish hands, apparently provided by Iran. Furthermore, as early as September 1965, Iran was tying the Kurdish question in Iraq to other disputes that it had with Iraq, namely, the Shatt al-Arab question and Iraqi activities directed against Arabs living in Khuzestan, in addition to alleged

258 For an account of the antagonism between Iranian and Arab nationalism and also the Iraqi Kurds’ place in this, see e.g. Kimche, The Last Option: After Nasser, Arafat & Saddam Hussein: The Quest for Peace in the Middle East, pp. 189-200.
259 See e.g., '[...] Chiefs of Staff Meeting', (FRUS, April 23, 1965); 'FO 248/1617: 1965', (UK: National Archive, no date).
260 See FO 248/1617: 1965. For more details on some of these issues also see Kimche, The Last Option: After Nasser, Arafat & Saddam Hussein: The Quest for Peace in the Middle East, pp. 189-200.
maltreatment of the Iranian community living in Iraq. The Iraqis, of course, rejected and/or dismissed these accusations.261

At this point, in 1965, therefore, what Iran wanted was a comprehensive deal or package with Iraq, which included a resolution of all issues with Iraq, including the Iraqis toning down their “Arabian” gulf rhetoric. However, neither side wanted to compromise, since the Iranian request was not acceptable to the Iraqis and the Shah had a valuable means of influencing developments in Iraq: his Kurdish card.262 While Iran never admitted to supporting the Iraqi Kurds, by mid-1964 it had already established contacts with Mustafa Barzani.

Iran contacted Barzani for the first time in 1964. Before this, it had had contacts with a faction of the KDP politburo that had fallen out with Barzani, these being conducted through an Iranian liaison officer by the name of Isa Pejman. It seems that Iran’s motivations for contacting Barzani were due to appreciation of Barzani as now the leader of the Iraqi Kurds and that by approaching him it would wield an even greater influence in the north of Iraq, and thus pressure Baghdad. This was significant because it denoted the high stakes involved here regarding the Kurds for Iran, as Barzani already had a pending death sentence in Iran due to his role in the Kurdish Mahabad Republic of 1946 (Chapter One). In the interests of establishing relations, therefore, Iran sent a General by the name of Pakravan to meet Barzani in Hacî Omeran, Iraqi Kurdistan, on July 20, 1964. This meeting was the result of an earlier visit by a SAVAK (Iranian secret police) representative to Barzani, who had asked Barzani whether he might like to visit Iran. In Haci Omeran, General Pakravan had an imperial decree with him quashing Barzani’s death sentence in Iran issued in 1947, so Barzani was able to visit Iran to meet with the Shah after this. The Shah had also sent his sympathy for the Kurdish revolution and indicated his willingness to help.263

Meanwhile, Iran was also abetting a breakaway politburo faction of the KDP through Isa Pejman. It not only had an influence on the Iraqi Kurds and thus Iraq, but it could also play a role between the two Kurdish factions, as it saw fit. Barzani was well aware that Iran had its own agenda, but he too needed Iran; although he pretended that he trusted Iran when

261 See folder FO 248/1617: 1965. Also see Kimche, The Last Option: After Nasser, Arafat & Saddam Hussein: The Quest for Peace in the Middle East, pp. 189-200.
262 FO 248/1617: 1965.
263 Barzani, Barzani Ù Bzutnewey Rizgarîxwazi Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşî Yekem 1961-1975, p. 176. Also see: PR 6/10, FCO 51/191; Research Middle East: The Kurdish Problem [...].
dealing with the Iranians, in reality his view of the Shah was a mirror image of the Shah’s view of the Kurds. Essentially, therefore, both sides wanted to exploit the other for their own benefit.\textsuperscript{264} As this section has held therefore, the Shah’s willingness to quash Barzani’s death sentence and to show a readiness to assist the cause of the Iraqi Kurds testifies to the high stakes involved for Iran. It also depicts Iran’s role in the Iraqi Kurds’ affairs, both with Iraq and also with external powers, for Iran’s relations with the Kurds would change as the Iraqi Kurds’ relations changed with other powers.

By 1965, Radio Israel was also taking an extraordinary interest in the fight between the Iraqi Kurds and Iraq by publicising Iraqi losses.\textsuperscript{265} This is an indication of Israel’s interests in the Iraqi Kurds. According to Mahmoud Othman, relations between Israel and the Kurds were established from 1963 (even though David Kimche states these to have started from 1965). This thesis concurs with Othman’s view. What the Kurds hoped for the most was that Israel would be able and willing to use its influence with the US to advance the Kurdish cause and thus invoke a positive change in US policy towards them. However, even this relationship had to go through the Shah due to the landlocked geography of Iraqi Kurdistan. As Othman put it, ‘the key of the matters was the Shah, be it for Israel or the US’, since ‘Iran was the geographical and the political key to the outside world’.\textsuperscript{266} Turkey, in the meantime, with its Kurdish neuralgia, was not even talking to the Kurds.\textsuperscript{267}

Concerning the actual situation in Kurdistan, the war resumed in July 1964; as the Peshmerga took more territory from the army while the ranks of Peshmerga themselves swelled, the Shah’s pledge, which had been made earlier as a result of the contacts mentioned to help the Kurds, materialised. Masoud Barzani notes Iran’s backing to the stationing of an Iranian military representative (Ali Modarisi, a Kurd from Mahabad) with a wireless station in Kurdistan, sending 500 rifles, 8 mortars and munitions to Mustafa Barzani’s Peshmerga. These

\textsuperscript{264} See Barzanî, Barzanî Û Bzutnewey Rîzgarîxwazî Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşî Yekem 1961-1975, pp. 176-78.
\textsuperscript{265} FO 248/1617: 1965.
\textsuperscript{266} Othman, in Telephone Interview A.
\textsuperscript{267} For more on this, see Barzanî, Barzanî Û Bzutnewey Rîzgarîxwazî Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşî Duwem 1961-1975, pp. 185-217; Kimche, The Last Option: After Nasser, Arafat & Saddam Hussein: The Quest for Peace in the Middle East, pp. 189-200; FO 248/1617: 1965.
were in addition to permitting Kurdish casualties to be treated in Iran’s hospitals,\textsuperscript{268} this aid is noted by Entessar to consist of ‘large quantities of arms from the Iranian government’.\textsuperscript{269}

2.6 US Foreign Policy and the Iraqi Kurds in a Wider Context: From Kennedy to Johnson.

When Lyndon B. Johnson became president after Kennedy’s assassination, he inherited a major issue in relation to international communism: Kennedy’s Vietnam problem. On August 7, 1964, Congress passing the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, signed into law by Johnson on August 11, 1964, and thus escalating the war in Vietnam by early 1965. The Vietnam War dominated US public opinion and, alongside the civil rights issue, came to dominate American politics during Johnson’s presidency.\textsuperscript{270} Some 450,000 American troops were in Vietnam by 1966.\textsuperscript{271} This is the broader global context in relation to the Cold War and the US, during the time covered by this chapter. Thus, when an issue such as the fate or justice of the cause of the Kurds is placed alongside the deep concern with containing communism worldwide, the former appears rather marginal, of little advantage or importance to America. Regardless of what was happening in Kurdistan, as long as the Soviets were not gaining from it, it was simply not sufficiently important or directly affecting American interests or perceived thus. Moreover, the Kurds did not have a state in the first place that could have been taken over by international communism, like Iraq or Lebanon, for instance. Therefore, as long as the Soviets stayed away, the US too could afford to overlook the Kurds’ national aspirations and notions such as liberty.

Regarding internal US politics, Joyce Kaufman has observed that ‘In 1952 the United States elected Dwight Eisenhower president based in part on his pledge to ‘bring the boys home from Korea’.\textsuperscript{272} This shows the significance of the connection between domestic US politics and its foreign policy. For the US public, as a people on a remote land in the Middle East

\textsuperscript{268} For more on this relationship, see Barzanî, \textit{Barzanî Û Bzutnewey Rizgarîxwazi Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşî Yekem 1961-1975}, pp. 191-92.

\textsuperscript{269} Entessar, \textit{Kurdish Ethnonationalism}, p. 67.


\textsuperscript{271} Kaufman, \textit{A Concise History of U.S. Foreign Policy}, p. 100.

\textsuperscript{272} Kaufman, \textit{A Concise History of U.S. Foreign Policy}, p. 100.
surrounded by hostiles who were already US allies (Iran and Turkey), the Kurds simply did not garner much attention. There is no indication of there having been any public protest or support from any substantial number of influential figures for the Kurds in the US, apart from one US Supreme Court Associate (Justice William Orville Douglas), as also stated earlier. There may have been a few other figures supportive of the Iraqi Kurds – no doubt there were some – but nothing substantial. There was, therefore, simply no real motivation for US policymakers to extend US idealisms of freedom and democracy, or any such thing, to the “case” or the “cause” and much less to the “problem” of the Iraqi Kurds.

Accordingly, as Frank Costigliola has noted regarding Latin American, ‘the Kennedyites chose anti-Communist stability rather than risk radical change’, and this was also precisely applicable to the issue of the Iraqi Kurds; self-determination or any such right was out of the question in the context of the imperative to maintain whatever stability there was to keep the Soviets at bay. This is how the leading power of the Western world perceived the Kurdish Issue in Iraq in the period covered by this chapter.

Furthermore, the US simply had no interest in supporting Kurdish national aspirations given that these could have had negative consequences for Cold War US allies and thus the Cold War itself, if the Kurds were to be sponsored by the USSR or indeed by the US itself. On the contrary, it was motivated to maintain a discrete non-involvement. Pragmatism therefore, again, took precedence over idealism. This is how the US seems to have perceived the Kurdish Issue in Iraq under the Johnson administration, as under those of Kennedy and Truman before him.

**Conclusion**

Building upon the previous chapter, this chapter has looked at the theme of this thesis focusing on the period 1963-1965. It has examined both internal Iraqi politics and regional developments in the context of the Cold War. Within these, a number of issues have been studied. The chapter’s contributions and the issues studied included the impact of the overthrow of Qasim and the rule of the Ba’athists on the Kurds. These were also considered

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in both the Cold War and regional context. It was found that the US, as a superpower in the Cold War, essentially sacrificed the Iraqi Kurds in return for better relations with the new Ba’ath government. Here, a certain over-sensitivity on the part of the US was demonstrated regarding its apprehension of offending Iraq due to the Kurds. It was also shown that the US under Kennedy did provide military material to Iraq as means of winning over the regime and some of this was indeed intended to be given to Iraq to fight the Kurds. Therefore, this chapter can be taken as having shown that Cold War considerations and keeping the Soviets out of Iraq was the priority for the US.

This chapter has also shown that the Iraqi Kurds were not only Cold War victims, since they were also exploited by Iran in order to advance Iran’s interests in containing Arab nationalism in Iraq and, indeed, to be held as a card for use as necessary. It was found that essentially any and all the powers that had close relations with the Kurds were motivated to do so in order to use the Kurds as means of a significant influence in Iraq. These powers included not only Iran but Egypt under Nasser and also Israel.

Lastly, an overview of the US global policy and the most important issues that it was facing at the time has been presented. The reason for this was to show the overall priority for the US and then to determine where the Kurds were located in this. It was thus established that, as far as the US was concerned, not only that there was no incentive for it to be supportive of the Iraqi Kurds but doing so, at least to any significant extent, would actually have been detrimental to its regional and Cold War interests.

Bringing together a variety of sources – including eye-witness Kurdish accounts and dozens of recently selected declassified American archives, in addition to several UK folder archives and other sources, such as the Kurdish memoirs of Masoud Barzani, which also contain a large volume of documents, and other consulted works, not necessarily cited, such as Asadollah Alam’s memoire and the Metrokhin Archive, among others – this chapter may thus be adjudged to have offered a detailed contribution to the field.
Chapter 3

The Iraqi Kurds, the Cold War and Regional Politics: 1965-1971

Introduction

Like the other chapters, this chapter also starts by presenting a background of the time period covered to pinpoint the most important relevant issues that are to be examined in detail in the rest of the chapter. The following chapter seeks to add to the overall aim of this thesis by showing how the Iraqi Kurds were essentially sacrificed by the US as a function of the Cold War. This, however, is also an issue that is continuously reiterated and developed through the timeline covered in this thesis, as the circumstances changed.

The issue of regional stability is then considered, specifically in relation to the US attitude towards the Kurds. The purpose of this is to demonstrate that the US tied the stability of its Cold War allies, Iran and Turkey, to the Kurds; the US essentially wanted the Kurds to be controlled as it believed that their freedom would affect its allies and consequently, by implication, the Cold War itself. Similarly, this chapter will then show Iran’s increasing apprehension towards Arab nationalism and certain regional developments. This of course is part of the larger picture of the implications of this on Iranian/Iraqi-Kurdish relations.

These are followed by an analysis of the different reasons each of the actors involved had in their interest in the Iraq Kurds. In doing so, further relations between Iran and Iraq (under pro-Nasserites) are considered. In addition to these issues, others, such as the US disregard for the Kurds’ appeal based on human rights, are examined and the reasons behind them determined. The KDP-Bath Accord of 1970, Soviet interests in this, the Iranian and Israeli dislike of this and then the consequences of Britain’s withdrawal from the Gulf are also studied.

3.1 Background

By 1965, following the coup in late 1963 when the Ba’ath regime was overthrown and a pro-Nasser nationalist government came to power, fighting had resumed between the nationalist government and the KDP. This became intense and continued until Abdul Rahman Arif
became the president of Iraq, replacing his brother, Abdul Salam Arif, who died in an air crash in April 1966. The new president declared that under his presidency the Kurds would finally be granted self-rule. This and the failure of the Iraqi military campaign in Kurdistan led to the Bazzaz Declaration of June 29, 1966, a 12-point peace plan offered by Prime Minister Abdul Rahman al-Bazzaz that was accepted by Barzani.

The Bazzaz Declaration essentially promised autonomy for Kurdistan and stipulated what was to be offered, including a freely elected Kurdish legislative assembly. However, this plan was overtaken by events in Baghdad again, as, in July 1968, the nationalist government was itself overthrown by the Ba’athists, before the Kurdish Issue could be resolved. The Kurdish War had continued, notwithstanding the Declaration, and not only was the Iraqi army unable to subdue the Kurds, but its preoccupation in Kurdistan prevented it from making an effective contribution to the Arab-Israeli War of 1967.

Returning to power, the Ba’athists initially vowed to implement the Bazzaz Declaration. It transpired, however, that this acceptance was partly a manoeuvre intended just to consolidate their own grip on power, bringing the Kurds on board given the military stalemate. Voices in Baghdad were soon accusing the Kurds of being agents for imperialists and receiving outside support (from the CIA and from Iran). In January 1969, the Ba’ath government reinitiated the war, dispatching some 60,000 troops to Kurdistan and escalating the bombing of Kurdish villages that had been recommenced in November 1968 to a more generalised bombing campaign by late 1969.

A number of factors again led the government to return to negotiations, however, and the Ba’ath government and Kurdish leadership agreed on an autonomy plan in an accord signed on March 11, 1970. Again, the peace was problematic and the resolution unfulfilled. Some provisions of the plan never materialised and hostilities flared up again, albeit short of full-scale war.

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3.2 The Cold War Victims?

In 1965, Barzani made another attempt to acquire US backing, this time with a change of approach. On April 12, Shamsaddin Mofti and Massoud Barzani (Mela Mustafa Barzani’s son) met with a US embassy officer in Tehran. The two carried an entreaty from Mustafa Barzani to the US administration in which Barzani asked for American financial and military aid, including heavy American armaments and conveyed his willingness to receive American officials in ‘their area’, expressing, moreover, his desire for Iraqi Kurdistan to be regarded as ‘another state of the union’. Barzani’s desperate plea even went so far as to indicate that a direct arrangement should be made for Iraqi Kurdistan oil resources to be handled by an American company. In other words, Barzani therefore was suggesting a Kurdish oil-reach entity sponsored by the US. Regarding Iran, the Shah’s distrust of the Iraqi Kurds, as mentioned (Chapter Two), was reciprocated by Barzani’s representatives, who told the embassy that the Kurdish leader desired direct channels of communication with the US government rather than through the Iranians whom he ‘did not trust to report his views accurately’. The Kurdish leadership was clearly aware that Iran’s interest overlapped theirs and that this was the reason for Iran’s friendly attitude towards the Iraqi Kurds’ national liberation movement.

The response given to Barzani’s representatives, firstly by the embassy officer and then in a telegram from the State Department two days later, emphasised that US policy towards the GOI-Iraqi Kurds had not changed. In other words, the US was still treating this as an internal Iraqi matter, implying that the US would not become involved and support the Kurds beyond offering goodwill, at most (as shown, even this might not be publicly possible due to American considerations of sensitivities in Baghdad). Thus, the Department instructed the embassy to courteously continue to refuse to be drawn into dialogue with Barzani’s representatives and requested that SAVAK be promptly informed of the visit.

Mustafa Barzani had already explored several channels in his attempt to change the US position, including the US embassies in Cairo, Iran and Baghdad as discussed, but now, on a different occasion, he extended also an arm into the US itself by sending a representative

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278 Quoted in ‘Telegram From the Embassy in Iran […]’, (FRUS, May 6, 1965).
279 Telegram From the Embassy in Iran (May 6, 1965).
280 See the footnotes of Telegram From the Embassy in Iran (May 6, 1965).
there. This representative was Ismet Sherif Vanli. Vanli appears from US sources to have travelled independently, with no special privileges, but nevertheless an individual with a mission. An exchange of messages between the US ambassador (Robert C. Strong) in Baghdad and the State Department, in which the ambassador was reporting and seeking clarifications on his meetings with the foreign minister of Iraq (Naji Talib), suggests that Vanli, ‘the Kurdish representative’, was endeavouring to establish a permanent representation in Washington, albeit largely an unwelcomed and lone one.\textsuperscript{281} Unsurprisingly, this did not go down well with the GOI, whose foreign minister (Naji Talib) in the meeting with Strong pressed for the expulsion of Vanli and also for the US to pressure the Shah to refrain from aiding the Iraqi Kurds.

The pressure must have reached an unbearable point on the US ambassador in Baghdad, for in a telegram requesting thoughts on the matter from the Department, he commented that he had ‘about run out of arguments on [the] Kurds-Iran-Iraq triangle except possibly pointing out Arab interference in Khuzistan cannot be ignored by Shah’.\textsuperscript{282} Submitting to the Iraqi pressure, the ambassador also proposed to the Department that Vanli’s US visa be terminated and that he be deported from the US and that he (the ambassador) be authorised to tell Mustafa Barzani to instruct Vanli to leave the US.\textsuperscript{283}

In response, the Department concurred with the ambassador’s proposal, gave him the green light to ask Barzani to have Vanli leave the US and also stated that it was looking into deportation regulations for Vanli ‘including possible bearing registration as foreign agent on deportation proceedings’.\textsuperscript{284} The Department also commented on a meeting between the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near East and South Asian Affairs (John D. Jernegan) and the Iraqi ambassador to Washington (Nair al-Hani) in which Jernegan ‘reiterated that our reply to Kurdish petitions is always the same, we regard their problem [as] an internal affair of Iraq’.\textsuperscript{285}

Here, we see further evidence of the effect of the Cold War and the regional political framework on the Iraqi Kurds when it came to how the US treated their petitioning. This basic

\textsuperscript{281} See ‘Telegram From the Department of State [...] Iraq’, (FRUS, May 6, 1965).
\textsuperscript{282} ‘Telegram [...] Iraq to the Department of State’, (FRUS, April 30, 1965).
\textsuperscript{283} See Telegram From the Department of State (May 6, 1965).
\textsuperscript{284} Telegram From the Department of State (May 6, 1965).
\textsuperscript{285} Telegram From the Department of State (May 6, 1965).
approach had been adopted at least from 1958 and the reasons behind it had not changed, as analysed. The US policy towards the Iraqi Kurds, as established, was not an *ad hoc* policy but lasting and institutionalised. While the US had sympathy for the Kurds, it was up to Iraq to choose how it wanted to resolve its Kurdish question. The US merely wished for a peaceful settlement, if possible, but most of all to keep the Soviets away from Iraq and to avoid offending Cold War US allies Iran and Turkey by favourably looking upon the Kurdish Issue within Iraq. The US was particularly sensitive to Turkey, Iran and even Iraqi Arabs’ sensitivities precisely because it needed these actors on its side against the (perceived) Cold War communist threat of the USSR. The stability of these states was more important for the US than any Kurdish rights, as the next section explains.

### 3.3 Regional Stability, the US, Iran and the Kurds.

As touched upon in the previous section, in August 1965 the State Department succumbed to Iraqi demands for the US to intervene to stop the flow of arms for the Iraqi Kurds. This was after the *chargé d'affaires* of the US Iraq embassy (J. Wesley Adams) had been summoned by the Iraqi Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs (Kadhm Khalaf) ‘to request “in the strongest terms” that the United States intervene with the Iranians to obtain cessation of the flow of arms from Iran to the Kurds’.\(^\text{286}\) The State Department accordingly instructed its embassy in Iran to convey US concerns regarding this to the Iranians.

Consequently, in pursing this, the *chargé d'affaires* of the US Iran embassy (Martin F. Herz) met with Iran’s Foreign Minister, Abbas Aram. However, Aram insisted that Iran was not helping the Kurds. What is more revealing here are the Department’s notations to its Iran embassy in the cable, seemingly authorised by Rusk himself; in conveying that ‘Our consistent policy has been [that] Kurdish insurrection [is a] matter concerning only Iraq and [the] flow of arms and men across [the] border to bring pressure to bear against [the] Iraqi government [is] incompatible [with] our goal [for] area stability’, it stated that a Kurdish victory in Iraq could ‘have only most ominous import for stability if not integrity [of] Iran and Turkey’.\(^\text{287}\) The US was thus linking the Iraqi Kurds’ struggle to ‘area stability’ and the integrity of neighbouring

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\(^{286}\) See footnotes of ‘[...] Department of State to the Embassy in Iran’, (FRUS, August 11, 1965).

\(^{287}\) [...] Department of State to the Embassy in Iran (August 11, 1965). Also see FO 248/1617: 1965.
countries with Kurdish populations. There was no reference to notions like self-determination or liberty.

Concerning regional politics, the forthcoming British withdrawal from Aden and the Gulf were already an additional concern for the Shah by 1965; it further elevated his apprehensions, as he believed that the area could be a weak spot for outside ‘predatory’ powers (i.e. communists and Nasser). Therefore, as early as 1965, the Shah was of the opinion that Iran remained the ‘single constructive free world power capable of protecting commerce and peace in [the] Gulf area’. In other words, it seems that the Shah wanted Iran to fill the gap that would be left by Britain, accordingly forestalling communists and Nasserites expansions into the Gulf.

The Shah’s fears of Arab aims seem to have compelled him to seek to take pre-emptive measures, for it is clear from his Thanksgiving Day conversation with the US Iran ambassador (Armin H. Meyer) in November 1965 that he considered all major Arab powers to pose threats to Iran. The Shah construed that Nasserites could take over Kuwait and other Gulf principalities and that the Iraqis and Syrians all had the same aim, which was an Arab move on Iran’s Khuzestan region. These perceived risk factors also help to explain the Shah’s avarice for Western military hardware, which, he complained to the US ambassador, was being denied him, such as naval destroyers that America had apparently provided to the Turks but not Iran.

The Shah’s worry and somewhat paranoia about Arab nationalism helps us to comprehend his amicable relationship with the Iraqi Kurds. The Shah seems to have calculated that if Arab nationalism, Nasserism in particular, were to be triumphant in the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula, then at least the Kurdish War could preoccupy Iraq. Similarly, the Shah would rather have had Kurdish Peshmerga across a long stretch of Iraq’s frontier with Iran than Arab troops. In the face of Arabs to the south and given their landlocked geography, the Kurds would have been dependent on Iran in any case, so the Kurdish risk to Iran was much smaller than that from the Arabs. Moreover, by embracing the Iraqi Kurds, the Shah could also keep the pressure on Baghdad, and thus encourage the likelihood of Baghdad seeking a

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288 ‘Telegram From the Embassy in Iran […]’, (FRUS, November 25, 1965).
289 Telegram From the Embassy in Iran [...] (November 25, 1965).
rapprochement with Iran rather than taking a hard-line approach. At worst, Iran could contain Iraq through the Kurds, while at best it could even compel Iraq to meet its desires. As this thesis will subsequently show, the latter was ultimately the case; Iran obtained what it wanted at the end.

3.4 Different Reasons and Purposes for Everyone Involved.

An airgram from the US Iraq embassy to the State Department sent by ambassador Robert C. Strong on October 30, 1965 reflected on who was involved and how they had a stake in the Iraqi Kurds’ status. The ambassador offered his own ‘Analysis of the Kurdish Problem’ to the Department. He also reiterated US policy on this and, as well as weighing the pros and cons of the issue, essentially noted that everyone had a stake in the issue for different reasons and purposes.

Pursuant to the ambassador’s assessment, in 1965, while the USSR, the US and Nasser were advocating for a peaceful solution, Iran, Israel ‘and perhaps the British’ were favouring a continuation of the conflict, due to its debilitating effects on Iraq. This both shows the multifaceted nature of the Kurds’ cause in general and the Iraqi Kurds in particular and also confirms that Iran was a major player in terms of the Kurds’ relations with other powers, including the central authority in Iraq, which affected all the balances between the Kurds and all the other actors. For the US, it seemed that a Russian or a communist takeover of the Kurds’ struggle seemed to have been unlikely at the time the ambassador was speaking (1965). Indeed, as examined, US policy in the Middle East during the Cold War and in the context of this thesis in particular revolved around containing the USSR and international communism. Therefore, given that the Kurds were not communists and neither could they have been an effective tool to equate to Iran, Turkey or even Iraq when it came to containing regional communism – since the Kurds were not a sovereign state-actor, those in Iraq did not merit any particular attention.

As the Iraqi Kurds did not predominantly lean towards communism and thus substantiate a major communist threat, this meant for the US, as the ambassador clearly put it, that ‘the consequences do not, at least for the time being, warrant a major initiative by the United

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290 ‘Airgram From the Embassy in Iraq [...]’, (FRUS, October 30, 1965).
291 Airgram From the Embassy in Iraq [...] (October 30, 1965).
States’. Therefore, as seen by the US, the Kurds were neither likely to be a major communist actor at that time nor would they be able to force a military solution upon Iraq or establish their own separate entity that could be of use or otherwise to the US. This was especially so given the uncompromising opposition such a Kurdish entity would have faced from Iran and Turkey, which considered any potential Kurdish entity in Iraq as an existential threat to (what they considered to be) their own territorial integrity.

Therefore, the Iraqi Kurds did not have a particular place in US policy priorities for the region or even in the Cold War itself. Iran and Turkey were already US regional allies whose tasks in the Cold War was to contain the Soviets from moving southwards to the Middle East. On the one hand, it would have been unthinkable for the US to offend these regional power-pillars by assisting the Iraqi Kurds, presumably leading to destabilisation of these countries through their own Kurds. Yet, on the other, had the US being forthcoming towards the Iraqi Kurds and thus offended the GOI, it would also have had ramifications on US-Iraq relations insofar as it would have either driven Iraq deeper into Nasser’s arms with an uproar in Arab anti-Americanism or else forced Iraq into the Soviet camp or even a combination of the two.

Just as the US did not want to offend Turkey and Iran for any kind of Kurdish rights, so also were the above scenarios quite undesirable; losing Iraq to communism during the Cold War divide was simply unthinkable. It was against this backdrop that the Iraqi Defence Minister (Abd al-Aziz al-Uqayli) claimed in 1966 that the Iraqi Kurds were seeking to establish ‘a second Israel’ in the Middle East and that ‘the West and the East’ were both ‘supporting the rebels [Kurds] to create a new Israeli state in the north of the homeland as they had done in 1948 when they created Israel’; thus, he said ‘It is as if history is repeating itself’. This is indicative of the hostility to even the potential for a Kurdish state sponsored by the US, and of opposition that did not just come from Iraq. As Ofra Bengio has noted, ‘An Arab commentator had warned earlier that if such a thing should happen, “the Arabs will face within two decades their second nakba [catastrophe] after Palestine”’.

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292 Airgram From the Embassy in Iraq [...] (October 30, 1965).
294 Quoted in Bengio, ‘Surprising Ties between Israel and the Kurds’. The named Minister was later sentenced to death by the Ba’ath regime, see ‘Airgram 295 [...]’, (FRUS, July 2, 1970).
295 Bengio, ‘Surprising Ties between Israel and the Kurds’.
The ambassador’s view was that ‘For the immediate future, neither the Kurds nor the GOI’ appeared able to ‘force a military solution’ and that ‘even a negotiated solution’ was ‘not likely to be permanent’; indeed, he stated, ‘The Kurdish problem is long-term’.\textsuperscript{296} It is this view that underpins the analysis presented in this chapter. The ambassador also added a second dimension confirming a point made earlier when stating that ‘a high degree of autonomy or independence for the Iraqi Kurds would be disruptive of area stability and inimical to our interests in the long run’.\textsuperscript{297} The US stance in the mid-1960s was that a continuation of the conflict was not in US interest because it would have invited third parties to join in, namely, the Soviets, at least indirectly.

In fact, a high degree of autonomy won by the Iraqi Kurds would have opened the gates for many possibilities in the US view. In addition to the potential for a Kurdish entity to become a Soviet satellite, Iraqi Kurds might have been presumed to assist the Kurds of Iran and Turkey and thus destabilise these US allies, in one way or another. Hence the ambassador’s statement that ‘The central conclusion from the standpoint of the United States is that a high degree of autonomy or independence for the Iraqi Kurds would be disruptive of area stability and inimical to our interests in the long run’.\textsuperscript{298} So far as the US was concerned, therefore, an Iraqi Kurdish autonomous entity would clash with its own interests and even the threat of such was a cause of concern.

3.5 The Government of Abd al-Rahman Bazzaz and the Kurdish Issue.

Abd al-Rahman Bazzaz, who became the Prime Minister of Iraq on September 21, 1965 was, according to Bazzaz himself in a private conversation with an unnamed US Secretary, ‘willing [to] look at [the] Kurdish peoples as [a] nation’.\textsuperscript{299} Nevertheless, for progress to be made, he wanted the US and the UK to put pressure on the Shah to stop aiding the Kurds, while at the same time also ‘predicting’\textsuperscript{300} that there would never be a Kurdish state encompassing all the Kurds. As before, the response given to Bazzaz’s request was that the US had limited influence on other countries, including, in this case, Iran. The US, Bazzaz was told, could not simply ask other countries to do what it wanted. Bazzaz was also seeking a rapprochement with the US,

\textsuperscript{296} Airgram From the Embassy in Iraq [...] (October 30, 1965).
\textsuperscript{297} Airgram From the Embassy in Iraq [...] (October 30, 1965).
\textsuperscript{298} Airgram From the Embassy in Iraq [...] (October 30, 1965).
\textsuperscript{299} ‘Telegram From the Department of State [...] Iraq’, (FRUS, October 26, 1965). And also see FO 248/1617.
\textsuperscript{300} ‘Telegram From the Department of State [...] Iraq’ (October 26, 1965). And also see FO 248/1617.
but while accusing the Shah of ‘encouraging disturbances [in] northern Iraq [Kurdistan] for purely destructive reasons’ and recognising that, as this thesis has also similarly observed, the ‘Shah’s problem’ was his ‘attitude towards Nasser’. 301

Bazzaz raised the issue of Iran’s backing for the Kurds in his meeting with various US officials, including Vice President Humphrey, having earlier raised it with Department officials. However, the VP did not comment on the Kurdish issue here, ‘saying he was uninformed [of the] details’. 302 In a different meeting, ‘Bazzaz raised Kurdish problem in [an] economic sense as [a] drain on Iraq’s finances’. 303 This all shows the importance of the Kurdish issue for Iraq, or rather its effects on Iraq in the absence of a lasting settlement.

Bazzaz’s démarche to the US to pressure the Shah to abandon the Kurds appears to have had some success. According to the US ambassador to Iran (Armin H. Meyer), who met the Shah in January of 1966, there were at least two long-lasting issues between Iran and Iraq: the question of the Shatt and Iran’s aid to the Iraqi Kurds, and the ambassador conveyed to the Shah that the US did not want him to abet the Iraqi Kurds. However, US officials seem to have simply expressed their disapproval of the Shah’s Iraqi-Kurd policy rather than exert any kind of real pressure. This deduction is based on the ambassador’s account of the Shah’s view:

[The] Shah indicated he has no intention antagonizing his Kurds by actions against Iraq's Kurds. He described Kurds as [the] ‘purest Aryan’ segment of [the] Persian race. [The] Shah's point was that [the] problem of [the] Kurds in Iraq is an internal Iraqi problem, not solvable by ‘butchering’ Kurds and not exportable to Iran. 304

This indicates that while the ambassador may have expressed disapproval of the Shah’s backing for the Iraqi Kurds, the Shah had come up with his own reasons to counter the ambassador’s point. According to the Shah, if he were to take action against the Kurds of Iraq it would antagonise the Kurds of Iran. In other words, the Shah was essentially implying that he was reluctant to take action against Iraqi Kurds as this would be counter-productive at home. However, it is to be recalled here that twenty years earlier the Shah’s forces had smashed the Kurdish Mehabad Republic and hanged its founders, as mentioned (Chapter

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301 Telegram From the Department of State [...] (October 26, 1965); FO 248/1617.
302 Telegram From the Department of State [...] (October 26, 1965); FO 248/1617.
303 Telegram From the Department of State [...] (October 26, 1965).
304 ‘Telegram From the Embassy in Iran [...]’, (FRUS, January 20, 1966).
One). The Shah did not have a *bona fide* interest in the Iraqi Kurds winning autonomy from Iraq, but only really wanted to exploit the Iraqi Kurds for Iran’s own interests.

The two issues mentioned, as confirmed by the US ambassador to Iran, therefore, were the most outstanding issues between Iran and Iraq at this juncture, in early 1966, and had the potential to decide the Kurds’ fate in Iraq. The Shah also considered both of these matters unresolved, but he did not see any urgency to resolve them. The Shah remarked that Iran had waited for decades to resolve the Shatt question and that it could ‘afford to wait [a] few more years’.

### 3.6 The Question of Human Rights: Not Applicable to the Kurds?

In January 1966, Mustafa Barzani appealed again to the US president. In a letter to Johnson, he first explained the origins of the Kurdish Issue and how the Iraqi Government was intent on the destruction of the Kurds’ lives and property in a scorched earth campaign – having failed to declare a victory over the Kurds on the ground. Then, Barzani tried to challenge the established US policy by stating that ‘if the Iraqi government defends itself by stating that the Kurdish case is an internal problem it will be false, because the Kurdish nation form a language, customs and possessions and because the League of Nations recognised the rights of the Kurdish people [...] in a special agreement on the rights of Southern Kurdistan in Iraq’.

Barzani’s letter appealed to the US leader by evoking US values, stating that the Kurdish demands corresponded ‘with the traditions of your country concerning the freedom of peoples and your government’s positions on human rights’. He asked Johnson to prevent the supply of arms to the Iraqi government, to support the Kurds in their war with Iraq and for the President to use his ‘great influence and effort’ to solve the issue. Barzani ended his letter by stating, ‘I ask this for the sake of peace and the basic constitutional rights of my people’.

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305 Telegram From the Embassy in Iran [...] (January 20, 1965).
307 Herz Martin, ‘Iran-Iraq: Letter to President Johnson’
308 Herz Martin, ‘Iran-Iraq: Letter to President Johnson’.
309 Herz Martin, ‘Iran-Iraq: Letter to President Johnson’.
However, the letter was not forwarded until March and then in the same cable with a US Iranian embassy request and recommendation that it to be authorised to give Barzani the same reply as had been given previously, in 1965, outlining US policy vis-à-vis the Iraqi Kurds (Chapter Two). The embassy relayed to the Department that they saw ‘no advantage in a written response or acknowledgement of Barzani’s letter’. A fortnight later, on March 23, 1966, the Department concurred on the response proposed by its Tehran embassy. Barzani’s appeal and the response given demonstrated – again – that the policy remained unchanged. It also confirms the pragmatic nature of this policy, in which “US values” had no place.

Again, also we see that there was an institutionalised US policy towards the Iraqi Kurds, at Departmental as opposed to field diplomat level, devised against the backdrop of the Cold War and (its) regional politics. While US field diplomats did play a part in the formation of this policy – in this case by proposing the action to be taken, or the lack thereof – the ultimate decision was made back in the US, above embassy level. This also raises interesting questions of how policy is formulated and the manner in which diplomats’ views and proposals contribute to policymaking, but which cannot be covered here.

Throughout the next two years until the Ba’ath coup of 1968, and in fact beyond, the Kurdish Issue in Iraq and GOI-Kurdish settlement was one of the key issues in meetings between US and Iraqi officials. Iraqi officials relentlessly requested the US to put pressure on Iran to cease assisting the Kurds, even though a ceasefire with the KDP was reached in June 1966. The Iraqis were also aware that Iran had ambitions in the Shatt. However, as had been the case earlier, there was no indication to show that the US brought any kind of significant pressure on Iran to stop backing the Iraqi Kurds, even though the US was aware of the Shah’s relations with them. In the words of the US ambassador to Iraq reporting of his conversation with Iraqi Prime Minister Naji Talib on August 18, 1966, ‘Iran gave limited help to Kurds for limited

310 Herz Martin, ‘Iran-Iraq: Letter to President Johnson’.
312 See e.g. ‘Telegram From the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State’, (FRUS, May, 17 1966); ‘Telegram From the Department of State [...]’, (FRUS, October 8, 1966).
objective[s]. The ambassador’s opinion also confirms that the Shah has had his own objectives in aiding the Iraqi Kurds.

The recommendations of the Country Director for Israel and Arab-Israel Affairs (Alfred L. Atherton) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Raymond A. Hare) in 1966 succinctly described the reasons why the US was taking the posture that it had with the Iraqi Kurds in the 1960s. They were an ‘attempt to offset Soviet influence in the Kurdish area by maintaining a friendly though correct relationship with the main body of the Kurds [Barzani], who constitute a sizeable proportion of the population and hold strategic Iraqi territory’ (emphasis added).

In February 1967, Barzani sent yet another letter to Johnson, urging the US president to use his influence for a final and just settlement for the Kurdish Issue within Iraq. Barzani and Iraq had reached an agreement in June 1966 with the Bazzaz Declaration, which was largely the result of a crushing defeat for Iraq in Kurdistan on 12-13 March, 1966, in the Battle of Mount Handren, where Peshmerga forces had ambushed a large army column. The Iraqi army catastrophically suffered somewhere between one and two thousand casualties as well as the loss of large quantities of arms to the Kurds. Handren shook the Iraqi army’s morale. Towards the end of 1966, Barzani sent a memorandum to the Iraqi President complaining that the government had not implemented the Bazzaz agreement or acted in good faith. Barzani’s messenger, Mahmoud Othman (interviewed for this research), also delivered a copy of this memo to the State Department, ‘at the desk level, where Kurds and Kurdish emissaries are received,’ together with another letter from Barzani to Johnson.

This time the letter was forwarded to the President’s Special Assistant, although again not without a recommendation from the Executive Secretary of the State Department stating that because Barzani ‘has technically still not submitted to the Iraqi Government,’ the Department recommended that no written acknowledgment be sent to Barzani and that, as usual, an officer at Desk level should ‘orally acknowledge receipt of the letter on behalf of the President and reassure the Kurds of [the] United States Government’s concern on a

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313 ‘Telegram From the Embassy in Iraq […]’, (FRUS, August 19, 1966).
314 ‘Memorandum From the Country Director for Israel […]’, (FRUS, November 1, 1966).
316 ‘Memorandum From the Executive Secretary […]’, (FRUS, February 16, 1967).
317 Herz Martin, ‘Iran-Iraq: Letter to President Johnson’.
humanitarian basis as evidenced by the continuing flow of surplus foods to the destitute Kurds in Iraq. Indeed, the US had been running a programme of providing surplus US food to Kurdish refugees in Kurdistan affected by the war since 1964. This also tells us that the US was well aware of the humanitarian costs of the conflict. However, there is no sign to suggest that the US at any point insisted on cessation of hostilities. The US was worried that even a presidential reply to Barzani would offend the Iraqis, let alone demanding cessation of hostilities.

Concerning Barzani’s letter of 1966, in May 1967 the White House eventually deemed it unnecessary to reply. This also shows that this decision on how to deal with the Iraqi Kurds came directly from the top, regardless of the nature of the decision. Certainly it appears that the US increasingly took the Iraqi Kurdish Issue at a higher and more senior level towards the end of the 1960s. This may have been in part due to the notion that, as laid out by an Intelligence Note from the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence of the State Department (Thomas Hughes) to the Secretary of State (Dean Rusk), if Iran and Israel were successful in persuading the Kurds to renew hostilities with the Iraqi army, and if this was exposed by the Arabs, then ‘Arab radical propaganda would no doubt claim that this [was] a new “plot” against the Arabs instigated by the US’. This is not to say that there was a change in US policy, but US officials do seem to have observed the Iraqi Kurds with an increasing interest. Iranian and Israeli aid along with this concern about renewed Iraqi-Kurdish hostilities in the latter parts of 1967 began to develop as before, but for different reasons.

Tahir Yahya, the new Iraqi Prime Minister, who took office in July 10, 1967, was seen as pro-Nasser by the Shah. The Shah naturally, therefore, wanted him replaced by someone he thought might be more amicable. One way of doing this was to persuade Barzani to renew the fighting with the GOI to generate more internal friction and political instability in Baghdad, thus leading to the toppling of the Yahya government. Also, the Shah could exploit the Kurds as a bargaining tool for concessions from Iraq in the Shatt, which was what the Shah had wanted in 1965 (Chapter Two).

318 Herz Martin, ‘Iran-Iraq: Letter to President Johnson’.
319 Herz Martin, ‘Iran-Iraq: Letter to President Johnson’.
320 ‘Intelligence Note [...]’, (FRUS, September 1, 1967).
Regarding Israel, before its war with Arab countries in June 1967 it had urged Barzani for ‘some Kurdish action’\textsuperscript{322} to tie down the Iraqi army and thus prevent it from joining the impending conflict. This was unsuccessful, but the bulk of the army had already been deployed in Kurdistan in any case, as explained. On the Kurdish side, according to Thomas Hughes, the GOI was defaulting on its promises given, leading to more militant and younger Kurds after the June War to call for action, especially at a time when Arab armies had just been badly defeated in the war with Israel.\textsuperscript{323} Also, just before the Arab-Israeli war, the Iraqi Government had for a second time requested Barzani to send a force of some 3,000 Peshmerga to join Iraqi troops in Jordan, which Barzani refused (this was, of course, when the ceasefire between the GOI and the KDP was still in place).\textsuperscript{324}

3.7 The Road to Totalitarianism: The Return of the Ba’athists in July 1968 and their Search for a Bogeyman.

The inability of the nationalist government to solve internal problems – the Kurdish Issue included – was the excuse given by the Ba’athists for the coup of July 1968. From its onset, the Ba’athists reached out to Mustafa Barzani in an apparent effort to secure a settlement, but this was only a tactical move to facilitate their seizure of power, as before. According to the State Department’s Director of Intelligence and Research in 1969, ‘This initial effort [to make peace with Barzani] by the Ba’athists was soon nullified by a Ba’ath decision to support the “progressive” rival Kurdish group of Jalal Talabani in a rather crude divide-and-rule campaign designed to undermine Barzani’.\textsuperscript{325} The Iraqi armed forces had been unable to overpower the Kurds since hostilities in Republican Iraq started, in 1961, so the government now wanted to drive a wedge in between them. The government wanted to capitalise on the inter-Kurdish rivalry involving the breakaway faction of the KDP led by Talabani and Ibrahim.

\textsuperscript{322} Intelligence Note [...] (September 1, 1967).
\textsuperscript{323} Intelligence Note [...] (September 1, 1967); Osgood, ‘Eisenhower and Regime Change in Iraq: The United States and the Iraqi Revolution of 1958’, in America and Iraq: Policy-Making, Intervention and Regional Politics.
\textsuperscript{325} ‘Research Memorandum RNA-6’, (FRUS, February 14, 1969).
Ahmad, on the one hand, and Barzani, on the other. From November 1968, also, Iraq’s military campaign in Kurdistan was resumed.326

Soon after retaking power from the Nationalists in July 1968, the Ba’athists embarked on a demagoguery policy, aiming to consolidate their own grip on power, to justify their actions, minimise threats (having been overthrown in 1963) and to also rally public support. They expelled a number of Americans from the country and even detained one on espionage charges for several weeks with his wife. He is said to have been a technician with the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC). Their release was only secured under considerable American diplomatic pressure through third party channels. The exact number of Americans working or living in Iraq that were expelled or detained is unknown, but it seems to have numbered at least in the dozens. Among those detained included American wives of Iraqi citizens as well as the American wife of a British UN official. Government propaganda painted the US and Israel as ‘the relentless foe of Iraqi and Arab aspirations’.327

The Ba’athists sought to escalate tensions with Israel by accusing it (and the US) of seeking to bring down the government. On January 17, 1969, 24 Iraqi citizens were convicted by a revolutionary tribunal in Baghdad on charges of spying for Israel and hanged; nine of them were Jews. According to one of the convictions, as publicised by the Baghdad Radio, the “Israeli spy group” was apparently linked to another clandestine Iraqi group, consisting of various individuals, that was plotting to bring down the new Ba’ath government and reignite the Kurdish conflict in order to preoccupy the Iraqi army so that it could not face the Israelis. This group had been accused of aiming to make peace with Israel if it succeeded in establishing a government consisting of Kurds and Arabs and allegedly was to be supported by CENTO members. Therefore, this group was meant to have been a pro-Israel, pro-Western organisation that would also been at peace with the Kurds. The truth of these allegations or otherwise is beyond the scope of this thesis, but these events serve to depict the wider picture and the political context of the developments that followed.328

326 See ‘FCO 17/408, Iraq: Political Affairs- Internal Kurdish Affairs, EQ1/4: 1966-68’, (UK: The National Archives, No date); Entessar, Kurdisch Politics in the Middle East, pp. 68-77.
327 Research Memorandum RNA-6 (February 14, 1969).
The Ba’athists, it is evident, were still furious over their 1963 overthrow; they seem to have turned on anyone that they considered an obstacle. The new regime engaged in arbitrary arrests, the execution of prominent figures and replacement of military commanders. Coup rumours also played into their hands. In this way, the regime tied the alleged internal threats to the external threats which Iraq was supposed to be facing. The cycle of violence would provide the Ba’athists the excuse they needed to consolidate their power. The new President, al-Baker, told a mass meeting in Baghdad that while Iraq was facing the Israeli enemy on the front the US and Israeli agents were striking from behind. This fearmongering seems to have been intended to rally the public to the Party, essentially on its route to absolute power. One figurehead of the Ba’ath Party at this time was Saddam Hussein.

Strikingly, the US was aware of these developments and the anti-Americanism, so one would expect that the rise of such a government in Baghdad must have at least led to a review of US policy towards the Iraqi Kurds. This was not to be the case, however, until 1972. On the Israeli front, meanwhile, as the Director of Intelligence and Research of the State Department recognised, by escalating tensions with Israel, Iraq seemed to be almost wishing for an Israeli strike. This would have proved its point to the Iraqi people – that Israel and the US were seeking to weaken the country – and thus allow the Party to justify a new level of totalitarianism and further strengthen its power. An Israeli attack, that is, would have given the Ba’ath an excuse to be harsher on its perceived adversaries within Iraq. The Iraqi action seems to have been successful in somewhat provoking Israel. For instance, the Israeli premier, Levi Eshkol, denounced the (mentioned) executions and told the Israeli Parliament that nothing ‘apart from Israel and her strength’ stood between the Jewish communities (presumably in Iraq and elsewhere) and annihilation.

Meanwhile, in March and April of 1969 tensions between Iran and Iraq flared up over the Shatt. It is beyond the aim of this research to determine the blame for this new escalation, but the events seem consistent with the Ba’athists’ brinkmanship, to exploit external issues in order to garner favour at home and hence cement their powerbase. A diplomatic war of words between Iran and Iraq had led to Iraq declaring that it would search Iranian vessels in

329 FCO 17/408. For more on the Ba’ath and their ideology see Ghareeb, The Kurdish Question in Iraq, pp. 44-69.
330 Quoted in Research Memorandum RNA-6 (February 14, 1969).
the Shatt. This prompted a response from Iran, most importantly in the form of denouncing the 1937 Treaty on April 19, 1969 which delineated the pertaining border, in addition to a large troop movement to the Shatt area and Khuzestan. Iraq took other measures to irritate Iran, such as giving an Iraqi diplomatic passport to the Shah’s foe, General Bakhtiar, as well as mistreating and expelling Iranian citizens from Iraq as part of the larger Ba’ath campaign. Bakhtiar was a former head of the Iranian intelligence service who had fallen out with the Shah and was exiled in 1961. After Iran abrogated the 1937 Treaty, Bakhtiar is said to have sent messages of support to the Iraqi President Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, and a message allegedly from Bakhtiar was publicised by the Iraqi press urging the people of Iran to rise up against the Shah.331

The Deputy Chief of Mission of America’s Iranian embassy was of the view that while it was Iraq that had initiated this new crisis it was that Iran escalated it to the level of a risk of armed conflict. Against that, he also noted that Iran may not have really intended to go as far as an actual military engagement over the Shatt at the time but merely wanted to exploit the opportunity to denounce the Treaty of 1937 and hence give the Iraqis the signal that the issue was yet to be resolved as far as Iran was concerned – this in addition to simply displaying its military prowess to the Gulf States and monarchies and thereby aiming to strengthen Iran’s leadership in the Gulf.332

Meanwhile, in April 1969, Barzani was visited by two distinguished Assyrians from the US in order to ‘to ascertain the condition of Assyrians in Kurdish territory’. 333 The men’s journey to Kurdistan had been facilitated by the Iranian government, including helicopter transportation, which unquestionably also portrays Iran’s close relationship with the Iraqi Kurds, albeit fluctuating. According to one of the American Assyrians, Sam Andrews, they held long talks with Mela Mustafa every evening during April 20-23 in which Barzani simply told them that Iran’s support for the Kurds was directly proportional to tension between Iran and Iraq, and that at times it became ‘a mere trickle’.334 Barzani’s statement and the account given by the

331 See ‘Airgram 386 From the Embassy in Lebanon [...]’, (FRUS, September 22, 1969). For background information, also see Kimche, The Last Option: After Nasser, Arafat & Saddam Hussein: The Quest for Peace in the Middle East, pp. 189-200.
332 ‘Telegram 1925 From the Embassy in Iran [...]’, (FRUS, May 19, 1969).
334 Memorandum of Conversation [...] (May 29, 1969).
visitor offers further proof for the analysis developed in this thesis, that the Shah’s backing of the Iraqi Kurds was intended to influence Iraqi politics for the Shah rather than for the Kurds and at any one time was dependent upon the dynamics of this influence.

Also, according to the same individuals, who had also reportedly met Israelis while in Iran, Israel was providing arms to the Kurds while Iran was providing them with other necessities. Israel’s involvement here and Iran’s stratagem may not have been anything new, but this nevertheless confirms other reports and, just as importantly, shows the drastic effect of regional politics on the status of the Iraqi Kurds. The Kurds were essentially used by all parties involved for the advancement of their own interests and with scant regard to the Kurds themselves.

As mentioned, given the Ba’ath anti-Americanism and the fact that they had broken off diplomatic relations with the US after the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war, one might have expected an inclination towards the Iraqi Kurds from the US, but these internal developments and also the regional tensions provoked by the Ba’athists failed to cause a rethink in US policy at this point. In terms of stability, too, one could think that it was only logical for the US to move towards a rapprochement with the Iraqi Kurds since, as implicitly expressed, the State Department’s view was that the new Ba’ath regime was basically rather paranoid.335 The paragraph below assesses why and how the character of the second Ba’ath government did not prompt some sort of realignment of US relations with the Iraqi Kurds, especially as they now enjoyed close relations with both Iran and Israel.

In relation to this, in June 1969, Barzani made one more attempt to garner US support while Iraqi planes were randomly bombing Kurdish villages. This time, a team of Assyrian notables in the US joined a Kurdish spokesperson to plead for US assistance for their peoples in Iraq. Among the group were the two Assyrians that had travelled to Kurdistan in April to see Barzani and ascertain conditions (as discussed),336 and the Assyrian group was joined by Shafiq

335 See e.g. Research Memorandum RNA-6 (February 14, 1969).
336 Among these were William Yonan, President of Assyrian American Federation, Sam Andrews, Secretary of Assyrian-American Federation and Zaya Malek Isma’il, Representative of Assyrians in Syria. The latter two were the individuals that had visited Barzani in Kurdistan in April of the same year (i.e. 1969), see ‘Memorandum of Conversation […]’, (FRUS, June 13, 1969).
Qazzaz, ‘Representative of the Kurdish Revolution in the USA’, as a Department memo described him.\textsuperscript{337} They carried with them a letter from Barzani to the Secretary of State (William Rogers). As in previous meetings in the State Department, US backing for the Iraqi Kurds was requested in a cordial conversation – and again the result was unhelpful, as the group was informed by one of the State Department’s Country Directors that while the US was ‘sympathetic toward the sufferings of the Kurds and the Assyrians’, they did not, however, ‘support an independent Kurdish/Assyrian state’ and they were ‘not prepared to support this objective \textit{either overtly or covertly}’ (emphasis added).\textsuperscript{338} The best organised diplomatic move in the US by the Kurds to date was met by the most forthright response yet, a plain rebuff, in fact.

Shafiq Qazzaz then told the Department officials that they (the Kurds) might feel impelled to attack IPC oil installations (around Kirkuk) to prevent the Iraqi government from gaining revenues it would employ to fund the purchase of weapons (for use on the Kurds). This indication to the Americans of Kurdish intentions to disrupt the flow of oil certainly appears as a sign, a warning, perhaps, that the Kurds had the potential to disrupt the flow from Kirkuk’s oilfields and again demonstrate to the Americans that the Kurds occupied a strategic location.

According to Qazzaz, the Kurds had also made an unsuccessful appeal to the UN Secretary General (U Thant) to have their issue heard by the Human Rights Commission.\textsuperscript{339} In a sign of what must have been utter frustration with the US, Qazzaz also told the Department officials that ‘if the Kurds succeeded in gaining limited autonomy or independence, they would not forget who had refused them aid when they needed it’.\textsuperscript{340}

Barzani’s letter had conveyed the usual appeal, perhaps more forcibly expressed, for the US to help the Iraqi Kurds:

\begin{quote}
Any serious step you [Rogers] may take towards this end will ensure for your country the generous gratitude and support of our people, as well as prove the best
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{337} Memorandum of Conversation [...] (June 13, 1969).
\textsuperscript{338} Memorandum of Conversation [...] (June 13, 1969).
\textsuperscript{339} Memorandum of Conversation [...] (June 13, 1969).
\textsuperscript{340} Memorandum of Conversation [...] (June 13, 1969).
application of the policy of the United States, whose objective is to serve humanity and stand by small nations subjected to distress and suffering. Barzani also wrote that he had authorised the representatives to speak on his behalf and expressed his hope that ‘the delegation will enjoy the favor of an audience with you [William Rogers]’. State Department officials assured the delegation that the letter would be forwarded to the Secretary. What should also be noted here, of course, was that from January 1969, and hence during this meeting too, the US had a new President, Richard Nixon. The foreign policy of the Nixon administration in the context of the subject of this thesis is discussed in Chapter Four.

Despite the totalitarian and violent nature of the Ba’ath regime, of which the US was fully aware, the US not only refused to look at the Kurds’ request favourably but, in fact, it even refused to offer any support to a group of Iraqi émigré coup plotters planning to overthrow the regime with forces inside Iraq through 1968-69. Barzani and Kurdistan were supposed to have been the pivot in this endeavour. According to one of the individuals involved (Loutfi Obeidi), his understanding was that Saudi Arabia had also put some money into this operation, which was destined for Barzani. However, he believed that the money did not reach Barzani but was pocketed by junior Iranian officials.

The question that arises here, then, concerns why the US did not even take any steps towards bringing the Ba’ath regime to an end, a regime that had made an enemy of almost every player in Iraq and also many others outside Iraq, including itself (the US) – a question directly linked to the US-Iraqi Kurd relations, since Iraqi Kurdistan was supposed to be the base in the coup attempt mentioned, its launching pad. The US position of not proactively seeking the downfall of the new Iraqi regime is clear; this is confirmed by a telegram from William Rogers to the US Lebanese embassy, which concluded that

In summary, [the] USG [is] unable to become involved in plotting against current Iraqi regime nor in making advance commitments. Should [the potential] new government prove to be moderate and friendly, however, we would be prepared to consider

341 Memorandum of Conversation [...] (June 13, 1969).
342 Memorandum of Conversation [...] (June 13, 1969).
343 Memorandum of Conversation [...] (June 13, 1969).
344 Loutfi Obeidi was an Iraqi Émigré and businessman; this data is extracted from a documented exchange between Obeidi and Talcott W. Seelye (Country Director, NEA/ARN), ‘Memorandum of Conversation [...]’, (FRUS, October 15, 1969).
prompt resumption of diplomatic relations and would certainly be disposed to cooperate within the limits of existing legislation and our overall policy.  

The reason that the US did not assist the coup plotters, which also included the Kurds, in their plans to overthrow the Ba’athists is not clear. It may have been simply that the US did not see the likelihood of a replacement government as being sympathetic to the US or much different from the past governments. Too many actors had a stake in Iraq to herald the rise of a new government that could provide internal stability as well as being pro-Western. According to this view, therefore, the US would not gain any advantage from entangling itself in this affair. Essentially, nothing good was likely to come out of it for the US, while the risk of failure was also considerable. Had the coup failed and its plotters been arrested, the Ba’athists would have been even further alienated, presented with apparently good reason for further repressive policies and possibly even pushed into the Soviet camp. Any US involvement in a coup attempt would have come with considerable risks and no certain advantage for the US.

Another consideration complicating this scenario, however, involves an actor that may have benefitted from all this, Iran. The Shah was now stating that it needed the capacity for ‘over-kill’, meaning the threat of overpowering force as a deterrent, so that anyone considering attacking Iran ‘would think twice or even three times’, as the Shah put it in a meeting with Secretary Rogers. The Shah was demanding this capacity since, in his view, ‘many of them [the Arab counties] were now in the hands of unprincipled bandits who either for their own purposes or in the misbegotten belief that Communism was a wave of the future were disposed to cooperate with the USSR’. Of course, one may suspect that the Shah was playing the Cold War communist card here – but his main point was not without truth. Thus, when the Shah was challenged by Rogers suggesting that Iran was already much stronger than Iraq and that it would be madness for Iraq to attack Iran, the Shah replied, ‘those fellows in Iraq are mad,’ adding that Iraq had amassed all its troops but one division on the border with Iran.

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346 Quoted in ‘Memorandum of Conversation [...]’, (FRUS, October 22, 1969).
347 Quoted in Memorandum of Conversation […] (October 22, 1969).
348 Quoted in Memorandum of Conversation […] (October 22, 1969).
349 Quoted in Memorandum of Conversation […] (October 22, 1969). For more on the Shah’s desires for US arms, see Kimche, The Last Option: After Nasser, Arafat & Saddam Hussein: The Quest for Peace in the Middle East, pp. 189-200.
Further to making this case for Iran to be given an over-kill capacity, the Shah also complained to the US in October 1969 that the USSR was backtracking on its decisions on the sale of arms to Iran and was instead equipping Iraq.\textsuperscript{350} This may have helped bolster the case against US support of the Ba’ath regime, but events were to overtake any such possibility of what, it seems clear, would have been a major change of position for America. What this narrative undoubtedly does show, however, is that the wider context of the Cold War and superpower rivalry continued to have a profound effect on the situation of the Iraqi Kurds.

\textbf{3.8 KDP-Ba’ath Negotiations, the Soviet Role and Iran’s Objections.}

After the Iraqi army had failed to succeed in Kurdistan, another round of negotiations, initiated from Baghdad, started between the Ba’ath government and Barzani in December 1969. According to Nader Entessar, this was due to President al-Baker being convinced that the Kurdish Issue could not be resolved through military means.\textsuperscript{351} However, there was also another side to this which was the Soviets’ desire for the issue to be resolved. Accordingly, on December 8, 1969, a Soviet representative (Yevgeny Primakov) travelled to Kurdistan to meet the Kurdish leadership with a letter from the Soviet leadership. The letter stated that Moscow desired the (apparently) golden opportunity that had arisen to resolve the Kurdish Issue to be utilised and that the Soviet leadership would exert all of its influence to press Baghdad to accept a lasting solution.\textsuperscript{352} Thenceforth and in early 1970, the Soviet embassy staff in Baghdad were to play a mediating role between the Ba’ath government and the KDP. Ultimately, when Saddam Hussein visited Kurdistan in January 1970, he told Barzani that he had gone there to reach a solution with him and not merely a ceasefire, as with the previous Iraqi governments. Saddam asked Barzani to help him strengthen his own position in Baghdad, stating that in return he would resolve the Kurdish Issue based on the ‘principle of autonomy’.\textsuperscript{353} The USSR thus seems to have played a significant role in Ba’ath-Kurdish negotiations at this time, and Massoud Barzani confirms that the USSR did indeed pressure the Ba’ath to reach a settlement.\textsuperscript{354} And indeed, on March 11, 1970, an accord was reached.

\textsuperscript{350} Memorandum of Conversation [...] (October 22, 1969).
\textsuperscript{351} Entessar, \textit{Kurdish Ethnonationalism}, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{352} Barzanî, \textit{Barzanî Û Bzutnewey Rizgarîxwazi Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşî Duwem 1961-1975}, pp. 23-40. Mahmoud Othman also notes the mediating role that the Soviets played in this: Othman, in \textit{Telephone Interview B}.
According to Israel’s Foreign Ministry, the Soviets had put intense pressure on Iraq to make a deal with the Kurds. The Soviets were said to have put their arms-supplies and energy cooperation on the line with the Iraqi government. The Director General of Israel’s Foreign Ministry apparently voiced the opinion that, in the end, the ‘Iraqi negotiators had literally asked [the] Kurds to state their terms for agreement and then signed [it] without further discussion’.\textsuperscript{355} The State Department believed – initially, at least – that this was an exaggeration of the Soviet role,\textsuperscript{356} but the analysis of Soviet pressure was later confirmed by the observation of the Deputy Chief Representative of IPC in Baghdad (Mike Gardiner) when he explained, in July 1972, that the Ba’ath in fact had surrendered to Soviet pressure in an unwelcome deal with the Kurds.\textsuperscript{357}

Having become aware of the potential for a KDP-Ba’ath agreement, the Shah had sent a letter to Barzani promising Iran’s assistance in every way as long as Barzani did not sign the initiative into an agreement with Iraq, on the basis that this would strengthen the USSR’s hegemony. Iran’s endeavour to prevent an agreement between the KDP and the Ba’ath extended to inviting and warmly receiving Barzani in Tehran, where the Shah then promised him – on behalf of Iran but also of the US – that whatever Barzani required the Shah would provide, as long as he did not sign the agreement. Were the need to arise, apparently, Iran would practically commit to defending Barzani and the Kurdish movement. When Barzani returned to Kurdistan, the Shah sent repeated letters making the same offer – or request – or warning. According to Massoud Barzani, ‘the last letter was even of a threatening nature’.\textsuperscript{358}

Asadollah Alam, the Minister of Iran’s Role Court at the time, also confirms this, reporting the Shah’s worrying about the issue even when on a holiday in Switzerland.\textsuperscript{359} For his part, the Shah was still advocating a coup to overthrow the Ba’ath. The Kurdish leadership was not convinced by the Shah though, and went ahead with the negotiations that led to Saddam Hussein himself visiting Barzani, and again and staying overnight in order to reach a deal and

\textsuperscript{355} ‘Telegram 54598 From the Department of State […]’, (FRUS, April 14, 1970).
\textsuperscript{356} Telegram 54598.
\textsuperscript{357} See Airgram 295.
\textsuperscript{358} Barzani, \textit{Barzani Û Bzutnewey Rizgarîxważi Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşî Duwem 1961-1975}, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{359} Alam, \textit{The Shah and I: The Confidential Diary of Iran’s Royal Court, 1968-77}, p. 129.
sign the final agreement, on March 10, 1970. Following this, the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Leonid Brezhnev himself, sent a congratulatory letter to Barzani via the Soviet embassy, while in Baghdad the agreement led to mass public celebrations.

After the agreement was signed, a number of hostile actions perpetrated by radical anti-Kurdish Ba’athists occurred. The most significant of these was a failed assassination attempt on Mustafa Barzani’s life at his headquarters in Hacî Omeran in September 1971, along with an attempt on his son’s, Idris’ life, in Baghdad. The KDP’s intelligence agency (Parastn) had already warned that such actions were impending, and, as tensions and distrust heightened, the Soviets sent an envoy to Hacî Omeran led by a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and other Soviet diplomats. The envoy conveyed a letter to Barzani from the Soviet leadership stating that the assassination attempt was work of imperialists and conservative forces and that it was important that the Kurds and the Ba’ath honour the settlement. The Ba’ath was said to have been given the same message. The Soviet envoy orally advised Barzani that a re-ignition of hostilities would not be in the Kurds’ interest, acknowledging that certain elements of the Ba’ath leadership were unwise, ignorant and did not wish for a peaceful settlement of the Kurdish Issue. Indeed, the Kurdish leadership seems to have kept to the agreement, despite the hostile acts committed against them.

In 1983, Saddam Hussein admitted that he had been aware of the plot to assassinate Barzani back in 1971 and was upset that it failed. An assassination was “successfully” carried out though, of the Şingal mayor, which the Ba’ath blamed on the KDP but Massoud states to have been the work of ‘a foreign power’ – Iran, it would appear – seeking to derail the peace process. Several other failed assassination attempts were also made and evidence was produced to the Ba’ath by the Kurds that at least some high-ranking military and security personnel in Baghdad were behind them. SAVAK, through mercenaries, also tried to derail

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the March 11th Accord by killing a number of Iraqi officials in Kurdistan and carrying out sabotage acts, such as blowing up a train on the Kifri-Qeretepe railway, again to sabotage the peace process.\footnote{As reported by Massoud Barzani, see Barzani, \textit{Barzanî Û Bzutnewey Rizgarîxwaźî Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşî Duwem} 1961-1975, pp. 73-83.}

In response to SAVAK’s acts of sabotage, the Ba’ath government arrested and brutally executed innocent KDP members. This included murdering a Kurdish man accused of the train bombing by having his eyes gouged out in public, including in front of his family.\footnote{Barzanî, \textit{Barzanî Û Bzutnewey Rizgarîxwaźî Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşî Duwem} 1961-1975, pp. 85-90.} For SAVAK, the rationale behind these savage acts was that the Iraqi government would blame the Kurds, and this would then lead to renewal of hostilities and ultimately the collapse of the Accord.\footnote{Barzanî, \textit{Barzanî Û Bzutnewey Rizgarîxwaźî Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşî Duwem} 1961-1975, pp. 105-06.} Iran was therefore strongly against the Kurds’ Accord with Baghdad and it negatively changed its relations with the Kurds until the signing of the Soviet-Iraqi Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 1972. Iran then perceived this treaty to be a serious threat to it; thus, it restarted its relations with the Iraqi Kurds with a new vigour in order to counter that threat (Chapter Four).\footnote{Othman, in \textit{Telephone Interview B}; ‘Muhsîn Dzeyî – Nwênerî Pêşûy Mes’ud Barzanî – Beşî Sêyem’, in \textit{Pencemor}. For more on the terms of the 1970 agreement see the latter source. Mahmoud Othman was the head of the negotiating Kurdish delegation to Baghdad that led up to the Accord and Dizaei was also a member of the same delegation.}

3.9 The British Withdrawal and Heightened Regional Tensions: The Correlation between Events in the Gulf and in Iraqi Kurdistan after the Britain’s Withdrawal.

The British withdrawal from the Gulf of late 1971 was a milestone in the international relations of the Middle East during the Cold War, particularly those of the Gulf region – at least, this is what one discerns from US archives pertaining to that era and the area, as will here be explicated. This development had the potential to reshuffle regional politics, and, as seen, the Iraqi Kurds’ political status was deeply affected by the wider context and their relations with all of the principal states mentioned in this work were dependent on those states’ relations with Baghdad.

Indeed, regional and international politics, such as the Cold War and, in its simplest form, Persian versus Arab nationalism had profound regional implications generally. American attempts to counteract the spread of communism through principled positions like that
expressed in the Eisenhower Doctrine indicated the effect of the Cold War in the region, while the establishment of CENTO to help containing the Soviet Union is another example, in addition to Iranian-Iraqi disputes and the Shah’s unease with Nasser. A significant point to note here is that even within this generally zero-sum political context, none of these actors’ existence as political entities (states) was decided by any of these dynamics. Why, therefore, should this political setting have such a profound effect on the status of the Iraqi Kurds? The answer, simply, was that while regional states were caught in the struggle between greater powers for influence and dominance, nevertheless, they were still sovereign states, they enjoyed a minimum degree of de jure and de facto rights under international law. No state-actor in the international community recognised the (Iraqi) Kurds as a sovereign actor (i.e. a state) and accorded them these rights.

For instance, the contemporary Iran versus Iraq dispute as an expression of a longstanding Arab-Persian power rivalry did not have an existential effect on Syria or Jordan in terms of these states as political entities, regardless of into whose camp these actors fell. Equally, the Cold War struggle did not imply that states such as Jordan or Kuwait would somehow lose their sovereignty were a strongly pro- or anti-Soviet or Western government to take power. While the Cold War and associated regional issues did have significant effects on the those countries, these struggles did not go as far as determining the very existence of these states as de facto or de jure political entities. Because the Kurds were not recognised as a state actor, they could not control an officially sanctioned geopolitical entity the sovereignty of which could be protected by a claim to international law as construed or honoured by the international community. The right to self-determination was simply not extended to the Kurds, even though they did have that right under international law, like any other people.\(^{368}\)

The question here, therefore, concerns not whether it was right for the Kurds to be treated this way or that, but how the international community perceived them at that time: essentially, as an actor with no sovereignty. Thus, they were basically given no say in their own future; the future was decided for them.

The reality of the international system in this case may be regarded as closer to respecting power than justice. Iraq itself is a good example of a territory that, despite a number of coups

\(^{368}\) For more on the Kurds and the right of self-determination in international law, see Ali, Hawraman, ‘Self Determination for the Kurds?’, Coventry University Law Journal, 16 (2011).
and recurrent political turmoil, continued to exist as a sovereign state whose minimal sovereign rights were respected. There was a limit on the implications that regional and international politics could have on a state that was already recognised by the international community to be sovereign, but concerning the Kurds there was almost no boundary for the degree of this effect. This analysis is not related to the question of the legitimacy of the Kurdish claim but rather to the pertinent fact of the matter, that the international setting was one in which ‘free-will’ was not accorded to the Kurds.369

The scheduled British withdrawal was a matter of anxiety and rigorous consideration for the Shah, the US and Iraq, too. Essentially, as much as it concerned Iran and the other Arab states (the UAR and Iraq, for instance), it appeared to be old matters with new dimensions: namely tensions between Arab and Persian nationalism and thus the question of who would fill the gap and replace Britain as the principal power in the Persian Gulf. For Iran, this entailed not only precluding Arab nationalists from dominating the Gulf but also reaffirming Iran’s claim over the Islands of Tunbs and Abu Musa. It was important for the Shah to ensure that a hostile power did not take over the Trucial Shaykhdoms once the British had departed. Antagonist powers hostile to Iranian regional hegemony could have been Iraq under the Ba’athists, the UAR under Nasser or local ‘reactionaries’ as opposed to the conservative regimes.370 A consequence of the British withdrawal, therefore, was heightened regional tensions.

In the late 1960s and early 70s generally, Iraq was reaching out to the Gulf states and Shaykhdoms, which must have further antagonised the Shah, if not confirming his apprehension of a hostile Arab takeover of the Gulf in the post-British era. In the last few years of the 1960s, for instance, as a sign of Iraq’s intentions and increased activity in the Gulf, Saddam Hussein (VP at the time) and other Iraqi officials made numerous trips to the Gulf Shaykhdoms and states, such as Kuwait. According to the US intelligence at the time, Iraq was seeking to expand its presence in the Gulf through visits by its officials, such as Saddam, to the area, which were reciprocated in Baghdad, and also through developing Iraq’s economic

370 See e.g. ‘Memorandum from the Country Director for Saudi Arabia [...]’, (FRUS, February 27, 1970); Kimche, The Last Option: After Nasser, Arafat & Saddam Hussein: The Quest for Peace in the Middle East, pp. 189-200.
ties to these regions, such as with the opening of a branch of Iraq’s Rafidain Bank in Bahrain. Like the Shah, the Ba’athists in Baghdad seem to have had their own strategy for the Gulf in view of the scheduled British withdrawal.\(^{371}\)

The Shah’s view in March 1970 was that hostility could come about in the Gulf either as a result of ‘(a) weakness of moderate riparian [Gulf] states and/or (b) miscalculation on [the] part of radical [A]rabs’ unless there was a ‘strong and credible [I]ran deterrent’.\(^{372}\) Considered in the broader context, what the Shah was implying was that in the case of the latter, radical or revolutionary local Arab elements would take over these Shaykhdoms, while in the case of the former, the British withdrawal would lead to hostilities between Iran and Arab states as each or any tried to establish authority in the Gulf. As seen from Iran, therefore, the likelihood of its having to face hostile Arab actors meant that it needed a credible deterrence. To this end, the Shah demanded an increase in US military credit; according to a telegram sent from the US embassy in Iran, he also told the Soviet ambassador that Iran had no intention of attacking Iraq but ‘if Iraq created trouble in the Gulf Iran “would punish Iraq very badly”’.\(^{373}\) This was another reason for why the Iraqi Kurds were needed by Iran more than ever to distract Iraq from the Gulf. This also helps to explain for why the Shah tried so hard with Barzani to prevent a settlement with Iraq (above).

Without an Iranian-Iraqi agreement, a Kurdish-Iraqi settlement would have only meant that Iran would have had to directly face Iraq in the Gulf to thwart its ambitions, and Iran would have lost its Kurdish card. In the absence of the British, however, Iraq was now backed by the USSR in the Gulf. An agreement between the Iraqi Kurds and Baghdad leading to a settlement would have also meant that Iraq would have had its hands free to divert forces from Kurdistan to the Gulf, or elsewhere, as desired. It is to be recalled that since 1961, in fact, the bulk of the Iraqi army had been pinned down in Kurdistan – which in itself had created deep problems for successive Iraqi governments.\(^{374}\) According to the Shah, a Kurdish-Iraqi agreement in 1970


\(^{372}\) ‘Telegram 1019 From the Embassy in Iran [...]’, (FRUS, March 19, 1970).

\(^{373}\) Quoted in Telegram 1019.

\(^{374}\) See Barzani, *Barzani Ù Bzutnewey Rizgarixwazi Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşî Duwem 1961-1975*, pp. 99-102. Also see the relevant letter written from Barzani’s representative in Baghdad back to Barzani in Kurdistan in April 1973 in the footnote of the same source.
would have freed some 20,000 Iraqi troops for deployment in the Gulf. Asadollah Alam confirms the Shah’s worries of an agreement between the Kurds and Baghdad that would have freed up Iraqi troops.

Indeed, it could be argued that the Iraqi and Soviet attempt to reach a settlement with the Kurds, even if temporary, was also influenced by these states’ desires to strengthen their respective positions in the Gulf by freeing Iraq’s hands from its Kurdish Issue, just as the Shah feared. The Soviets’ would thereby be able to dominate the Gulf through their client (Iraq) and Iraq could challenge Iran. Certainly we may conclude that the fact that the USSR pressured Iraq to reach the March 1970 Accord with the Kurds shows the Soviets’ desire for Iraq to play a role in the Gulf after Britain’s withdrawal.

What can be deduced from all this for the Kurds, therefore, is that the Russian pressure already alluded to (above) on the Ba’athists to offer the autonomy promised in the Accord of March 11, 1970 came in the context of other regional factors (related to the British withdrawal). Indeed, as Iran’s posturing suggests, Iraq was increasing its activity in the Gulf in the late 1960s, which indicates another Ba’athist motivation (a specific reason to want to free up its military) for shelving its Kurdish problem in the north (to fill the gap in the Gulf left after Britain’s withdrawal). It may be worth noting here too that the government of Iraq was under pressure from the Soviets to pay back overdue loans. This may also have played a part in the Ba’athists’ acceptance of the Soviet push for an agreement with the Kurds.

It should further be emphasised here that for nine years, between 1961 and 1970, Iraqi troops had not been able to access the border with Iran along much of the Kurdistan or ‘northern’ front, which was solidly in the hands of the Peshmerga (see map, Figure 3.1). Effectively, therefore, this was a buffer zone between the Persian rulers of Iran and Arabs in Iraq, one that the latter had repeatedly tried and failed to capture. Implicitly, if the Iraqi Kurds and Iraqi government in Baghdad were to come to a lasting settlement that would have allowed Iraq’s military forces to reach the border with Iran from the north, and if these two countries were to go to war with each other, then, in the absence of the “Kurdish buffer zone”, Iran would have a longer front to defend. In other words, and simply, if Iraq were to secure internal

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375 ‘Telegram 928 From the Embassy in Iran [...]’, (FRUS, March 12, 1970).
377 See Airgram 295.
harmony and a war were to start between Iran and Iraq, then this war would not only be along the entire length of the shared border (not just that of Iran with Arab Iraq but of Iran with Kurdish Iraq).

![Kurdish inhabited area map](https://example.com/kurdish_lands_92.jpg)

**Figure 3.1.** CIA map showing the Kurdish inhabited area.\(^{378}\)

In September 1971, the CIA certainly believed that if Iraq were to attempt to invade Iran, it would do so from the southern Abadan-Khorramshahr region in the south or possibly on the Kermanshah region, the centre of the border. Iraq, the CIA assumed, would attack Iran, if it did, largely from its Arab part, since the border with Iran in the Kurdish north was out of bounds for Iraqi troops and had been for several years, notwithstanding Iraq’s vigorous efforts to change this.\(^{379}\) This was if the March Accord of 1970 had led to a solution of the Kurdish Issue with Iraq. In such an event, moreover, the Iraqi Kurds would also have sided with Baghdad rather than fighting against it with Iran, at least in theory. Iraq would have played its “Kurdish card” and, to make things worse, it could have turned the tables on Iran by supporting its own (Iranian) Kurds against Tehran.

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\(^{378}\) CIA, ‘kurdish_lands_92.jpg’, (University of Texas at Austin, 1992).

\(^{379}\) “Special National Intelligence Estimate 34-70 [...]”, (FRUS, September 3, 1970).
In his March 18, 1970 meeting with Douglas MacArthur, the US ambassador in Iran, the Shah said that the March Accord would ‘improve’ the Iraq government’s ‘capacity for mischief in the Gulf and, for present at least, strengthen its overall position’. According to the ambassador, the Shah had hoped that the Accord would not last long but only time would tell. In March 1970, the Shah was again advancing his idea of the USSR’s ‘Grand Design’ for the Middle East that he had believed (or at least professed) prior to the 1958 Iraqi Revolution. According to the Shah this Soviet strategy included the USSR dominating the Middle East via Iraq and with the long-term objective of a Soviet-sponsored Kurdish state stretching all the way from Iraqi Kurdistan through to the borders of the Soviet Union, thus incorporating the Kurdistan of Iran and Turkey. The Shah believed that ultimately this would give the Soviets a land-bridge to the Middle East.

This was the same argument that the Shah and Turkey had presented in the early years of the Cold War, as discussed in Chapter One. Regarding the 1970 Accord, the Shah therefore ‘wanted top level USG to know that [the] agreement between [the] Kurds and [the] Iraq[i] Govt was [a] very grave development greatly increasing [the] threat to [the] gulf area and Arabian Peninsula’. It is important to underscore that the sources referred to here are the minutes of actual meetings between the US ambassador to Iran and the Shah himself. The ambassador then forwarded the contents of these meetings to the Secretary of State as a matter of priority. It is quite clear that there was a direct link being made at the highest levels between the Gulf, what was happening in Kurdistan and Iran’s objection to a potential Iraqi Kurdish-Iraqi government settlement.

The Shah’s worries about these developments were such that he put immense pressure on the US ambassador in Tehran for the US to increase its military sales credit to the country so as to appear as a credible deterring force in the Gulf. Most importantly here, it was Iran that ultimately played a pivotal role between the US and the Iraqi Kurds in the years after the

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380 Telegram 1019.
381 Telegram 1019.
382 See Telegram 1019 and also Telegram 928.
383 Telegram 928.
According up until 1975, framing the struggle in Iraqi Kurdistan as a Cold War issue. Iran was the maker and the breaker of this relationship (Chapter Four).

Against this backdrop and that of the actual situation for the Kurds, Iran, Israel and the US, British governmental archives, in addition to US sources, provide conclusive evidence to back up the assertion made in this thesis, that Iranian assistance for the Iraqi Kurds was given to weaken its adversary Iraq and also to pre-empt any Soviet assistance.\(^{385}\) Israel’s support for the Kurds was similarly based. For Israel, too, if the Iraqi army was to be pinned down in Kurdistan (i.e. ‘at home’), Iraq would not be able to participate significantly in Arab-Israeli hostilities.\(^{386}\) As mentioned, this was indeed the case in the 1967 war. The interests of both parties here lay with the Iraqi Kurds simply absorbing Iraqi state’s energies.

While Israel and Iran both had a stake in continuance of the Kurdish War, the US had not sought to support the Iraqi Kurds and thereby undermine the government in Baghdad up until this point in time (1971), either implicitly or explicitly. The US had neither made any promises to the Kurds and thereby misled them to expect US support nor exploited them to exert pressure on Iraq. On the contrary, the US saw its primary interests – those dictated by Cold War considerations – as best served by a strong Iraqi state, which precluded helping the Kurds and thus resulted in repeated rebuttals of their supplications.

On March 4, 1970, just days before the autonomy Declaration of March 11, 1970, SAVAK, according to the CIA, invited Idris Barzani (Mustafa Barzani’s son and a high ranking Kurdish leader) and other Kurdish figures 'for discussions concerning the future of the Kurdish Revolution'\(^{387}\) and also to meet representatives from the government of Israel. In Tehran, Idris and his delegation met the Israelis, who ‘pushed hard’ for a ‘resumption of hostilities in Northern Iraq’.\(^{388}\) Israel also promised the Kurds that they would provide anti-aircraft weapons and light artillery; the Kurds asked for armoured vehicles, and the Israelis promised these too, including ‘tanks with crews’, as long as the Kurds first captured at least two Iraqi

\[^{385}\] See e.g. PR 6/10, FCO 51/191; Research Middle East: The Kurdish Problem in Iraq 1963-1971; ‘Central Intelligence Agency Information [...]’, (FRUS, March 9, 1970); Special National Intelligence Estimate 34-70 [...] (September 3, 1970).

\[^{386}\] For Israel’s interest in the Iraqi Kurds and a history of this, see Kimche, The Last Option: After Nasser, Arafat & Saddam Hussein: The Quest for Peace in the Middle East, pp. 189-200; Bengio, ‘Surprising Ties between Israel and the Kurds’.

\[^{387}\] Central Intelligence Agency Information [...] (March 9, 1970).

\[^{388}\] Central Intelligence Agency Information [...] (March 9, 1970).
tanks to be used as a cover. Idris responded that they (the Kurds) preferred entirely Kurdish crews for the tanks; the Israelis ‘readily consented to this request’ too, implying that Israel would have accepted training Kurdish tank crews. 389

On March 6, Idris Barzani also met with the head of SAVAK, General Nematollah Nasseri, who told Barzani that ‘Iran was fully behind the Israeli plan to renew the fighting in northern Iraq, and Idriss [sic] should carefully note what the Israelis were suggesting’. 390 Nasseri also discussed Iran’s concerns over the negotiations between Barzani – the father – and the Iraqi government, in addition to discussing ‘Iranian plans for further aid’ for the Iraqi Kurds. 391 In terms of financial assistance, as reported by the CIA, Israeli and Iranian support to Barzani totalled some $3,360,000 during the month prior to the meeting (i.e. in February 1970). 392 However, Iran and Israel’s attempts to prompt Mustafa Barzani into reigniting the conflict were ineffective. The Declaration of March 11, 1970 was made despite Iran and Israel’s contrary desires. The above “concern” conveyed to the Kurds by the head of SAVAK is consistent with other sources reporting on the Shah’s worries on this matter, as cited.

While the Shah was involving himself in the implications of the end of hostilities in Iraqi Kurdistan, the superpower behind Iran at this time, the US, did not believe that the settlement would last. Indeed, only three days after the Accord, the State Department sought to comfort the Shah to this effect. A cable, apparently from Secretary Rogers to the US Tehran ambassador conveyed the message thus:

[We] [d]oubt therefore that [the] Iraqi government will feel free for long to make [a] significant shift in its attention and resources away from [the] Kurds to Iran and [the] Persian Gulf area. Furthermore, any easement on this score might well see troops being redeployed in Jordan and Syria rather than southern Iraq. 393

The Department’s assessment regarding the impermanency of the agreement was to be proven accurate, as will be described in the next chapter. Indeed, the Department’s expectation was already materialising by the autumn of the same year (1970), when the Kurds wanted the acceleration of the implementation of the Accord and also ‘freedom for political

389 Central Intelligence Agency Information [...] (March 9, 1970).
390 Central Intelligence Agency Information [...] (March 9, 1970).
391 Central Intelligence Agency Information [...] (March 9, 1970).
392 Central Intelligence Agency Information [...] (March 9, 1970).
393 ‘Telegram 37806 [...]’, (FRUS, March 14, 1970).
This leads to a question: seemingly, what the Kurds wanted was a multiparty political system (i.e. a democratic Iraq) and the US (the Nixon administration) was aware of this, yet the US was still disinclined to view the Iraqi Kurds’ cause favourably by assisting them as a democratic force let alone supporting their secession – and this despite the fact that US officials were aware not only of the Kurds’ desire for a free, multiparty political system but also of the Ba’ath government’s adamant opposition to this. Instead, it stuck to its policy of ‘non-intervention’, while all the time gathering detailed information on the state of affairs between the parties.

In fact, by the end of October 1970, the US was also fully aware that the Iraqi government had postponed a census scheduled for October 25, 1970 that was meant to determine the Kurdish majority areas that would be included in the territory designated for ‘Kurdish autonomy’, as stipulated by the March Agreement – and the US was also aware that this postponement was jeopardising the settlement. Instead, it stuck to its policy of ‘non-intervention’, while all the time gathering detailed information on the state of affairs between the parties.

One should be quite clear here that the US knew perfectly well the nature of the Iraqi regime, as a totalitarian government, that is, since this was precisely what the Assistant Secretary of State (Joseph J. Sisco) asked the Belgian ambassador to Iraq in a question: whether the government of Iraq was a totalitarian government or not. The latter replied in the affirmative, with the exception of the Kurds and their newspaper (al-Ta’akhi), which were permitted: ‘this is [the] only form of freedom permitted in Iraq today’, the Belgian ambassador replied.

The freedom granted the Kurds and their newspaper cannot have been due to the Ba’athists somehow believing in freedom for the Kurds as a good, of course, since they did not allow it even for their own people (Iraqi Arabs); rather, it was a necessary measure for the Accord. In

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394 ‘Central Intelligence Agency [...]’, (FRUS, August 10, 1970).
395 Central Intelligence Agency [...] (August 10, 1970). This source also reports that the Kurds’ Al-Ta’akhi newspaper’s appraisal of Secretary Roger’s peace Arab-Israel proposal and President Nasser’s acceptance of a peaceful solution for the Palestinian issue was now another source of contention between Baghdad and the Kurds, as the government had asked the newspaper to attack the peace proposals, but the newspaper did otherwise.
397 See e.g. the following document, which asks the US ambassador to Iran (Douglas Macarthur) to inquire about the views of the Israeli Mission in Iran when they meet regarding the ‘deteriorating situation between Barzani and the GOI: Charles W. McCaskill, ‘Meeting with Meir Ezri, Head of the Israeli Mission [...]’, (DNSA, December 19, 1970).
398 ‘Telegram 67409 [...]’, (FRUS, October 21, 1971).
fact, the relaxation on this matter is a further indication that the government must have been under pressure from outside (i.e. from the USSR) to work with the Kurds, as indicated. The Ba’ath government was not acting in good faith though – it simply needed to buy time, as events would ultimately prove. The US was also aware that Soviet influence on Iraq was increasing – another consideration that failed to lead to a rethink in US policy vis-à-vis the Iraqi Kurds during the period covered by this chapter, up to 1971.399

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at a range of issues related to the research question between 1965 and 1971. It has contributed to the broader aim of the thesis by examining a number of considerations guided by the primary sources obtained for this period. Firstly, after presenting a background, the chapter demonstrated how the situation of the Iraqi Kurds was essentially ignored by the leader of the Western world due to Cold War and regional politics. This was because the US preferred to work with the internationally recognised states in appeasing its regional allies and winning over Iraq to its side (which in 1965 was still pro-Nasserite). The US did not hesitate in sacrificing the Kurds to this end and the central Cold War concern of keeping the Soviets out in the region. In this context, the Kurdish movement’s further attempts to gain US support through claims to justice and human rights were detailed. The reasons for the failure of these attempts were established.

Further to the investigation of US relations, the attempts of regional powers to portray the Kurds as a risk were also considered. The question of area stability and how the Kurds were seen or portrayed to be a danger to this was studied, followed by an analysis of why and how the several actors involved at this stage had a stake in the Kurdish Issue in Iraq. Here, the dynamics of internal Iraqi politics was also taken into account, including reasons for ceasefires, regime changes and hostilities.

The chapter also explored another change of government in Iraq: the coming to power of the Ba’athists again, in 1968, and how this party viewed the Kurdish Issue, among others. The role of the USSR in KDP-Ba’ath negotiations was focused on and the reasons behind the Soviet desire for a settlement established. It was also found that the Ba’ath were under pressure

399 Telegram 67409.
and had other plans in the Gulf; therefore, their March 11, 1970 Accord with the Kurds was rather less than wholehearted. Iran’s strong objections to a Ba’ath-Kurdish agreement were also thoroughly analysed.

Lastly, this chapter established a clear link between Britain’s withdrawal from the Gulf in 1971 and events in Iraqi Kurdistan. It was demonstrated that Iran desired to keep Iraq preoccupied in Kurdistan so that it could not focus on the Gulf after Britain had withdrawn. Overall, therefore, this chapter has continued consideration of the subject at the interrelated internal Iraqi, regional and international (Cold War) levels, while also taking into account some other issues, including Israel’s interest in the Kurds and its attempts, together with those of Iran, to derail the Accord of March 11, 1970.
Chapter 4

The Iraqi Kurds, the Cold War and Regional Politics: 1971-1975

Introduction

This chapter covers the subject of this thesis for the period 1971-1975. After a background section, it investigates how and why the US did not support an initiative to overthrow the Ba’ath regime while there was still a chance to do this. The closer relations between the USSR and Iraq will then be examined in the context of this research and their implications determined.

The chapter will then demonstrate how some outside powers essentially wanted the Iraqi Kurds to be a stumbling block for the Ba’athists and Soviets in Iraq in order to minimise the impact of Iraq and Russia on the region. Issues such as KDP-Baghdad negotiations and the role of regional powers, including Iran, are also investigated. Additionally, all these are, of course, considered in the context of the Cold War and regional politics.

The reasons behind the renewal of the war in 1974, how, and why this happened are then studied together with the roles of the actors concerned. This is followed by an examination of how the Kurds were betrayed by their backers in 1975. Finally, the broader US foreign policy under Nixon and Ford is analysed in order to determine the connection between this and the specific US policy on the Iraqi Kurds. These aspects and issues are what the primacy sources suggest to be most relevant to the theme of this thesis and thus enable this chapter to best contribute to addressing the broader research question.

4.1 Background

As stated in Chapter Three, the Ba’ath government and Kurdish leadership agreed on an autonomy plan in the Accord of March 11, 1970, but that some provisions of the plan never materialised and hostile acts, including an attempt to assassinate Barzani, soon remerged, although short of a full-scale war. On March 11, 1974, four years to the day after the Accord was signed, the Iraqi government unilaterally announced a different autonomy plan and gave Barzani or the KDP a fortnight in which to accept it. Before this, Iran and Israel had convinced
Barzani of their unwavering support in the case of war and also arranged for covert US involvement. In the early 1970s, Iraq and the USSR had also further strengthened their bilateral relations, culminating, in the case of the latter, in the 1972 Iraqi-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.

In addition to the gap that was left by Britain’s withdrawal in the Gulf, the upgrade in Iraq-Soviet relations after 1972 was an additional motivation for Iran to back the Iraqi Kurds in order to contain Iraq or to even work for the demise of the Ba’ath regime. The Soviets initially wanted the Ba’athists to establish a national unity government, to include the ICP and also the Kurds. The Ba’athists went along with this idea to share power but only to neutralise internal threats and to secure Soviet backing. The Soviets had made it very clear to the Ba’ath that their continued support was conditional on the ICP taking part in the government, and it was the Soviets, similarly, that wanted the Ba’ath to bring the KDP into the new power-sharing arrangement. Alvandi sees this as due to the Soviets wanting to have a strong client in Iraq, a view with which this thesis acquiesces.400

Related to this implied Soviet design of a strong, united and somewhat pluralistic Iraq, the Soviet Union sent a delegation to Barzani’s headquarters in Kurdistan following the 1970 Accord (as discussed in the previous chapter). This was led by the VP of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Rumanystev), the delegation had as its purpose the aim of both pressuring Barzani and also reassuring him of Soviet support if he joined the National Front Government. However, the Shah responded by intensifying his efforts to prevent Barzani from joining. SAVAK conveyed messages to the Americans that if Barzani or the KDP were to join a national government in Iraq, this would instigate a further Soviet domination of the Gulf.

In 1971 and early 1972, the Iraqi Kurds repeatedly requested US backing, and, as previously, all requests were turned down.401 The Kurdish leadership, however, insisted the US join in backing the Kurds if they were to reject the Soviet demand. The Kurdish leadership’s insistence on the involvement of the US was desired to gain the insurance of a “superpower guarantee”, so that they would not be summarily abandoned by the Shah, since the Kurdish

leadership did not fully trust him. In fact, it was at the Shah’s behest that the US agreed to receive a Kurdish delegation in Washington. This occurred on June 30, 1972, with Idris Barzani and Mahmoud Othman representing the Kurds.\textsuperscript{402} Mahmoud Othman has been interviewed for this work, while Idris Barzani is deceased. Plainly, this concession comprised a major revision of a long-standing policy of non-intervention in Kurdistan by the US, albeit it a covert one. The upshot was the US, Iran and Israel all providing weapons, munitions, financial aid and training to the Kurdish Peshmerga under Barzani – although each did so for their own, different objectives. Declassified US documents, the presence of Israel’s military personnel in Kurdistan, and meetings between Kurds and high ranking Israeli officials all point to a significant Israeli involvement in this affair, which is examined in this chapter.

Meanwhile, when the Iraqi ultimatum expired, Baghdad sent troops, newly armed by the USSR, to attack the Peshmerga in an offensive intended to dislodge the Kurds from their mountain strongholds. As previously, the Iraqi state forces were unsuccessful. On March 6, 1975, however, Iraq and Iran signed the Algiers Accord, upon which Iran sealed its Kurdish (northern Iraqi) border and gave the Kurds three options: to surrender to the Iraqis, to the Iranians or to keep fighting the Iraqi army, now fully backed by the USSR. Suddenly unsupported by the US, Iran and Israel, the Kurdish leadership took a majority decision to abandon the armed struggle for a more suitable time, rather than risk a physical annihilation of its fighting force. The Kurdish national liberation movement was thus betrayed, primarily by Iran and then by the US and Israel. Over 100,000 Kurds fled to Iran, joining additional refugees there. According to the Red Cross, the war had also cost Iraq the lives of 7,000 of its troops and some 10,000 casualties.\textsuperscript{403}

The Iraqi government declared the Turkish and Iranian borders prohibited security zones, extending into the country by up to 30 kilometres. The inhabitants of the territories now made into security zones, some 600,000 or more people, were relocated to collective settlements, and anyone caught in the zones was summarily executed. The Kurdish revolution, which had proven formidable since 1961, was thus decisively crushed. The Iraqi government also depopulated and then Arabised a number of Kurdish inhabited areas, in particular around the

\textsuperscript{402} Alvandi, Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War, pp. 65-125. Also Othman, Mahmoud, in Telephone Interview B.

\textsuperscript{403} Stated in McDowall, David, A Modern History of the Kurds, p. 339.
fault lines where Kurdish land met Arab Iraq, such as oil-rich Kirkuk. It expelled Kurds from their homes and their property was given to Arabs, among other such measures, like giving financial rewards to Arab men who took Kurdish wives. This became known as the ‘Arabisation campaign’.  

4.2 The Kurds and the US: A Missed Opportunity to Overthrow the Ba’ath?

In July 1971, Barzani sent another deputation to the US embassy in Lebanon. This time, too, as before, Barzani offered a covert relationship with the US and requested that either a US government representative go to his headquarters in Hacî Omeran some three kilometres from the Iranian border in Iraqi Kurdistan or else a Kurdish representative be permitted to travel to Washington on his behalf to meet with US officials. As well as desiring a relationship with the US, Barzani wanted it to know that he was ‘ready to consult with the US in every political matter, to implement U.S. policy, and to sweep anti-U.S. elements [i.e. communists] from his area of influence’.  

Specifically, Barzani wanted a mutual friendship with the US in order to counter the Ba’athists and for the US government to understand that ‘Kurdish justice will not be satisfied until Iraq is governed by a democratic regime representing both Arabs and Kurds and protecting the principles of Kurdish Society by according the Kurdish community its national rights of autonomy’. Indeed, what the Kurds called ‘Şorşî Eylül’, the September Revolution, an armed struggle for Kurdish self-determination that had started in September 1961, had the motto of ‘Democracy for Iraq and autonomy for Kurdistan’. Besides the Kurds wanting a democratic system in Kurdistan, the rationale on the side of the Kurdish leadership was that only a fully functioning democratic system in Iraq could assure respect for Kurdish rights in the country.  

Barzani this time wanted the US to assist him, and also other non-Kurdish actors seeking sanctuary in Kurdistan in areas under Peshmerga’s control, in overthrowing the Ba’ath

405 ‘Airgram 222 [...]’, (FRUS, July 16, 1971).  
406 Airgram 222.  
government, as Barzani’s representative, Zayid Uthman, explicitly stated to the embassy officer. Because the Ba’athists had now tightened their grip on power, an internal coup was not a viable option, so the plan was to launch a revolt from Kurdistan with other non-Kurdish anti-Ba’ath elements. Uthman also wanted the US to know that the Kurds had never trusted the Ba’ath regime to honour the March Agreement, that ‘circumstances [had] forced them to sign’, and he conveyed that Iran had provided support in the past but only on the proviso of controlling Kurdish affairs and in a very heavy-handed manner.\footnote{Airgram 222.}

Uthman had also visited Saudi’s King Faisal on the same matter; the King had endorsed the revolt idea in principle but asked for more information. The response given to Barzani’s representative in the US, however, was unforthcoming, as the US again communicated its policy of non-intervention in the affairs of other countries.\footnote{Airgram 222.} Essentially, Barzani wanted the US backing on the grounds that, as reported to Washington, the Ba’ath regime was ‘mistreating the Iraqi people’ and the ‘government that would emerge from such an uprising would be pro-American’.\footnote{Airgram 222.}

As alluded to earlier in this dissertation, the Kurds’ desire for a democratic parliamentary Iraq went back to before the 1970s, as confirmed by other sources, including British archives. This was one of the Kurds’ principal demands in the 1967 negotiations, for instance, which essentially amounted to a claim for constitutional, parliamentary and pluralistic democracy, when the central government had instead sought to capitalise on inter-Kurdish rivalry between Barzani and Talabani’s splinter group.\footnote{FCO 17/408, Iraq: Political Affairs – Internal Kurdish Affairs, EQ1/4: 1966-68.} Both USINT (representing the USG) in Baghdad and the KDP newspaper al-Ta’akhi confirm this. A number of al-Ta’akhi’s editorials early in 1973 called for the establishment of a national assembly that would be empowered to approve a permanent constitution, hold elections and adopt legislative powers, as recognised by internal US documentation.\footnote{‘Kurdish Problem 1973BAGHDA00214_b’, (WPLUSD, April 17, 1973).} Indeed, major decisions of the Kurdish leadership of the KDP were taken by consensus or majority vote.\footnote{See Aziz, ‘Mhemmed ‘Ezîz - Beşî Sêyem’, in Pencemor; Dzaei, ‘Muhsin Dzeyi - Nwênerî Pêşûy Mes’ud Barzanî - Beşî Sêyem’, in Pencemor.}
Following this path, the Kurdish leadership also submitted a proposal in May 1973 calling for a high degree of autonomy for Kurdistan with a legislating assembly and an executive body and also the establishment of a national (Iraqi) constitutional court; the Kurdistan legislature was to have been freely and directly elected by the people. So far as the Kurds were concerned, indeed, short of Kurdish statehood, only a democratic Iraq could guarantee their rights.

It has been argued in the earlier chapters that US policy towards the Iraqi Kurds was based on pragmatic grounds rooted in strategic Cold War considerations and that while the US did not respond to the Iraqi Kurds’ appeals for assistance positively, it also did not intend to mislead or endanger the Iraqi Kurds. This line of “non-intervention” was again confirmed by the State Department when, in early November 1971, Barzani sent out yet another feeler for assistance to the US, this time to its embassy in Lebanon. The emissary conveyed the likelihood of a widespread popular uprising against the Ba’ath regime and was told that the US was following a policy of non-intervention and that this applied to Iraqi politics as a whole, not just the Kurds. The emissary asked the embassy for the State Department’s confirmation. This confirmation was provided, with the Department adding that ‘a meeting between Barzani and U.S. officials would only nurture false hopes of U.S. assistance’.

At this point, the US was aware that the Ba’athists were not communists, that the communists had no chance of taking an effective part in the government let alone hijacking power and that, moreover, with their Arab-nationalism tendencies, they would be most unlikely to capitulate to Soviet influence. The US, therefore, did not have a fear of Iraq becoming a full USSR client, and in fact, as the Department expressed, it saw ‘little likelihood’ that Iraq would be able to ‘expand its influence very much in the Arab world’. On the other hand, were the US to assist the anti-Ba’ath forces and usher a new democratic pro-US government as envisaged by Barzani, it is unlikely that this would have led to a government sufficiently well established as to resolve its territorial disputes with Iran. A US-friendly government in Iraq would have left the US in a difficult position with the Shah. The US priority thus far had been Iran, so sponsoring a pro-US government in Iraq would have ultimately created a dilemma for

\[416\] ‘Telegram 9689 […]’, (FRUS, November 3, 1971).
\[417\] ‘Telegram 213299 […]’, (FRUS, November 24, 1971).
the US over which of two uncompromising, opposed allies to support. This is assuming that any attempt to overthrow the Ba’ath would have resulted in a democratic pro-US government, which was an unrealistic expectation in the first place. Taking these factors into account, therefore, it is clear why the US view was that its regional approach could coexist with the Ba’ath regime.\textsuperscript{418}

It is understandable, therefore, that the chances of a ‘pro-American’ government coming to power were so slim that this did not seem to have been worthy of a serious consideration by the US. Since 1958, Iraq had seen the rules of Qasim, the Nationalists and the Ba’athists (now for the second time), and none of these had resulted in a government that was really pro-Western or that enjoyed lasting stability, so there was no real prospect of a US-friendly government gaining power being established without the nationalists, Ba’athists and the ICP, let alone one that would be democratic. While Barzani’s proposal may have appeared interesting, US officials must have been aware that the chances of its success were so slim as to be unworthy of serious consideration; there was no point in replacing one government with a similar one.

Furthermore, Iraq had severed diplomatic relations with the US after the 1967 war, so it could hardly suddenly become pro-American. One may also consider that the internal instability in Iraq was also indirectly beneficial for the US, as one consequence of this was Iraq not being able to participate effectively in Arab-Israeli hostilities or to pose a threat to US regional allies, such as Iran or in the Gulf (see below). Nevertheless, it is not unreasonable to suggest that there was a chance of overthrowing the hostile Ba’ath government, providing that anti-Ba’ath elements came together backed by the US. This is because the Ba’ath had not yet taken absolute power and eliminated all other non-Ba’athist factions, as is evident by what is covered in this chapter.


The US was aware that the Soviet Union’s influence was increasing in Iraq in the early 1970s, of course. Indeed, the Soviets had signed and were carrying out multimillion dollar projects

\textsuperscript{418} This analysis is drawn from US archives, such as the cable from the State Department to its Embassy in Tehran, Telegram 213299.
in Iraq, ranging from the energy sector to agriculture and defence and to an extent, it would appear, that the Soviets were seeking to make a client of Iraq under the Ba’ath.\textsuperscript{419} However, despite warning by figures such as Lebanese journalist Edward Saab that the Iraqi regime, having strengthened its roots at home, was about to embark on a mission of expanding its influence in the Gulf and eastwards into the Arab world, US regional diplomats and the State Department were not convinced that the Ba’athists could exert a significant impact beyond Iraq’s borders. The US embassy in Lebanon took any possible Iraqi ambitions beyond its borders as conditional upon its internal stability – which was where this concerned the Kurds. US diplomats were not convinced that the March 1970 agreement between Barzani and Baghdad would last for long, and thus fully expected that Iraq would have little time for adventures abroad – especially now that anti-Ba’ath Arab elements had joined the Kurds’ camp in wishing the downfall of the Iraqi regime (as indicated by Barzani’s plan).\textsuperscript{420} Iraq’s perceived need for internal stability to realise any possible external ambitions, therefore, may also have had an effect on the US decision not to look upon Barzani’s proposal any more favourably than it had his previous entreaties.

On the other hand, frictions between the Soviets and Barzani are reported to have grown. According to informants of the US embassy in Lebanon, Barzani was aware of the growing ties between the Iraqi and Soviet governments and correspondingly, in the US perception, was ‘no longer disposed to pay much attention to Soviet advice’.\textsuperscript{421} This implies that Barzani had lost faith in the Soviets’ sincerity as a mediator between Baghdad and Kurdistan and the Americans knew it. Masoud Barzani confirms that the Iraqi Kurds knew that the Soviets were only interested in a settlement to serve their own interests and were unconcerned about any possibility of the Kurds having to be the ones to pay for this. The Soviets simply tried to convince the Kurds to commit to the March Accord, even after the failed assassination attempts – including one on Mela Mustafa himself. The Soviets knew that at least some of these acts were the works of high-ranking Ba’ath figures, but all that was important for them was to ensure that the Kurds remained committed to the March Accord, regardless. The USSR

\textsuperscript{419} For more on (American knowledge of) these projects, see the telegram from the US Embassy in Lebanon to the State Department, ‘Airgram A-38 [...]’, (FRUS, February 2, 1972).
\textsuperscript{420} See the assessment by the US Embassy in Lebanon in Airgram A-38 [...].
\textsuperscript{421} Airgram A-38 [...].
had indeed initially put pressure on the Ba’ath also to reach a deal, but as relations between with the Ba’ath had strengthened, the Kurds were simply gradually side-lined.422

As the Soviets and the Ba’ath developed closer ties, the former armed Iraq with their latest advanced weaponry, such as TU22 bombers, MIG25 aircraft and T60 tanks, among others. The Soviets also encouraged the ICP to form an alliance with the Ba’ath, which duly occurred in June 1973. Soviet diplomats also went to Kurdistan to ask Barzani to participate in this apparently coalition government, but when Barzani asked for a guarantee from the USSR that the Ba’ath would honour all agreements, they declined. The Ba’ath-ICP partnership must have been a great political triumph for the Ba’ath, for this now weakened the anti-Ba’ath front and strengthened the government’s base both among the Iraqi public and also politically. Soviet designs and relations with the Ba’ath government, meanwhile, point to larger ambitions in the country and, indeed, in the region. Naturally, this had repercussions; Iran was particularly unsettled and looked to the US.


Throughout 1971 and early 1972, and in fact going back to the years prior to this, SAVAK, and ultimately the Shah, alarmed by the rising influence of both the Ba’ath and the USSR in Iraq, petitioned the US to help Barzani lead an anti-Ba’ath initiative aimed at disposing the Ba’ath government.423 In February 1972, after Saddam Hussein’s visit to Moscow, the Soviet delegation visited Barzani’s headquarters asking Barzani to join the National Front Government in Baghdad that was supposed to be led by the Ba’ath Party, and to include the KDP and the ICP, as mentioned (Chapter Three). The Soviets gave Barzani a number of assurances, including that the Soviets would station a liaison mission with Barzani with communication equipment and that Barzani would be invited to Russia with Soviet guarantees for his safety (Barzani was extremely distrustful of the Ba’athists, and especially so since their attempt on his life).424

423 For SAVAKs and the Shah’s repeated attempts in this, see ‘Memorandum From Harold Saunders of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Deputy Assistant for [ ... ]’, (FRUS, March 27, 1972); ‘Memorandum From the Chief of [ ... ] to the Director of Central Intelligence (Helms) [ ... ]’, (FRUS, June 12, 1972); ‘Memorandum [ ... ] to President Nixon [ ... ]’, (FRUS, July 12, 1972).
424 ‘Iranian Approaches to U.S. [ ... ]’, (FRUS, March 27, 1972); Memorandum From the Chief of [ ... ] to the Director of Central Intelligence (Helms) (June 12, 1972); Memorandum [ ... ] to President Nixon (July 12, 1972).
In Iran, as mentioned, the perception was that if the so-called national government that the Soviets wanted were successful and the Kurdish Issue resolved, then Iraqi troops would be freed up for the Gulf. According to a memorandum from Harold Saunders of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Alexander Haig), ‘al-Barzani had asked SAVAK to inform [the] USG that if the present trend continued, Iraq would assume a status similar to that of the East European satellites’. Forthcoming events were to reveal this as a fair assessment.

One other such request by SAVAK urging US backing for the Kurds reached Kissinger via Saunders in March 1972. However, Saunders recommended that he ‘tell [the] CIA we concur in their judgment that we should not involve ourselves’. Kissinger approved the recommendation. It was the view of the CIA, the Department and also that of Harold Saunders that, as Saunders noted, any assistance that may be required from the US was apparently perfectly well within the capabilities of Iran and Israel to provide. For his part, Barzani appears to have foreseen the growing capabilities of Iraq as backed by the USSR. The Ba’ath government in Baghdad had never implemented the 1970 Accord fully, apart from a construction programme of social facilities (building schools, hospitals, etc.), whose purpose was to drain support for Barzani’s national liberation movement. According to informants of the US embassy in Lebanon, moreover, Barzani was convinced that the Soviets were at least aware of the assassination attempt on him, if not behind it, along with, of course, the Ba’athists in Baghdad. Evidently, therefore, Barzani did not only distrust the Ba’ath but was also suspicious of the Soviets.

Although he distrusted Iran also, Barzani sought to acquire its backing and ultimately US backing through Iran as a counterweight to the developing Soviet-Iraqi axis. As Saunders had noted, it surely was within the capabilities of Iran and Israel to back Barzani without the US, but it was precisely the guarantee that would come with the superpower’s commitment that Iran sought. This, together with Barzani’s insistence, may explain why Iran seems to have genuinely wanted to involve the US in this matter. Also, Iran wanted Barzani to be convinced

425 See Memorandum From Harold Saunders [...] (March 27, 1972).
426 Memorandum From Harold Saunders [...] (March 27, 1972).
427 For the CIA, the Department and Saunders’ views, see Memorandum From Harold Saunders [...] (March 27, 1972).
428 Airgram A-38.
of Iran’s resolve in backing the Kurds, impelling it to arrange for US support, and it was motivated itself by the aim ensuring that Barzani did not join the Soviet Iraqi plan.

With the USSR pressing Barzani to join the National Front and Saddam Hussein’s visit to Moscow in February 1972 resulting in the Soviet-Iraqi Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, Barzani must have discerned a developing danger. Iran, meanwhile, was pressing Barzani not to join the National Front. Barzani, therefore, was effectively caught in a dilemma in which he trusted neither side. And as well as having this choice, there was also the option of a renewal of hostilities were both to be rejected. By the end of March 1972, Iran, making every effort to stop Barzani from joining the National Front Government, had already asked Idris Barzani to ‘send them a list of requirements of their current military and material needs’.429

As the subject (title) of a memorandum from the Director of the CIA to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), to Secretary Rogers, and to Secretary Laird of Defence put it, Barzani sought to ‘Recruit International Support for [the] Kurdish Position in Their Drive To Combat Closer Soviet-Iraqi Relations and Resulting Pressure on the Kurds’.430 Barzani also sent an emissary to Jordan to see an unidentified Jordanian figure to explain and convey the nature of the perilous situation that was arising as a result of the Iraq-Soviet alliance.431 Consequently, Jordan also conveyed to the Americans that the Iraqi Kurds were pressed by the potentially perilous implications of the Soviet-Iraqi friendship and that the West, therefore, ought to reconsider its position.

In May 1972, King Hussein of Jordan sent his secretary to visit Barzani with a letter stating that, among other things, the purpose of the visit was to offer, as it was expressed, ‘complete support and unconditional inclination in anything that you are trying for’.432 The King also asked to see Barzani the following month when he visited Tehran, and the substance of the letter was also orally conveyed to Barzani by the emissary. More importantly, the King’s secretary stated that the King had put a feeler out to the US Administration (regarding the Iraqi Kurds) and received a positive response. The King and Barzani finally met. As reported

429 ‘Memorandum From the Director of Central Intelligence (Helms) to [...] (Kissinger) [...]’, (FRUS, March 29, 1972).
430 ‘Memorandum From the Director of Central Intelligence (Helms) to [...] (Kissinger) [...] (March 29, 1972).
431 ‘Memorandum From Andrew Killgore [...]’, (FRUS, April 3, 1972).
432 A copy of the original letter is available from Barzani, Barzanî Û Bzutnewey Rizgarîwazî Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşî Yekem 1961-1975, p. 299; for a Kurdish version, see the same source, p. 84.
by Masoud Barzani, all that is known about this meeting is that the King had played an important role in convincing the Nixon administration to assist the Kurds. Therefore, it was not only Iran and Israel that pushed for this to happen; Jordan was also involved in the plan that Barzani was to propose.

What Barzani wanted was assistance on all fronts – political, military and financial – albeit covertly, with the aim being to unseat the Ba’ath regime for a constitutional government comprised of both Kurds and Arabs. This government was initially to be based in Kurdistan until the Iraqi army was enlisted. The KDP had already won over the support of a number of prominent Iraqi figures who would join the new government. Reportedly, support among elements of the army had already been ensured, too. From another American memorandum – passed from the CIA to Kissinger – we also learn that the Kurds reported further information on the developing relations between the Soviet Union and Iraq, including in the military sector, weapons to be acquired and the forthcoming date for the signing of the Treaty of Friendship as well as the nature of the Treaty. The fact that Kurdish intelligence already knew these details in advance according to the Americans also lends credibility to the rest of the story as reported by the Kurds.

In early April 1972, Barzani sent one last representative to the US. Carrying a letter to the Secretary of State, the representative (Uthman) explained the pressure being brought on Barzani by the USSR and the Ba’ath, which he could no longer withstand, and that neither could he rely on the Shah’s assistance, which ‘blows hot and col[d] in his support of the Kurdish national liberation movement’. Continuing, Uthman asserted that ‘Barzani cannot commit himself to an all-out struggle against the Ba’ath regime in Baghdad on the basis of such unpredictable support’. King Hussein, he added, had not been able to offer any material assistance, but the Kurds trusted him nonetheless (this was before the King’s secretary met Barzani in May and offered strong support).

Uthman requested an answer be given to him for this ‘final appeal’ by April 6, as the Soviets and the Ba’ath were pressing Barzani for an answer within the next calendar month. Barzani’s

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433 Barzani also asked for scholarships for Kurdish students at Western universities; see Memorandum From the Director of Central Intelligence (Helms) to [...] (Kissinger) [...] (March 29, 1972).
434 For more on these, see ‘Memorandum From the Director of Central Intelligence [...] (Kissinger) [...]’, (FRUS, March 31, 1972).
representative also stated that if a reply for this final appeal were not positive, then Barzani would be obliged to join the National Front even though he did not trust the Ba’athists, since only the US had the capacity to turn the Soviet tide in Iraq. The purpose of this assistance would initially be to establish what he called a “liberation” government in Kurdistan as a stepping-stone that would subsequently topple the Ba’athists in Baghdad.  

When Nixon and Kissinger visited Iran on May 30-31, 1972, after the Moscow Summit, the Shah raised the question of the Kurds with them and the possibility of the Soviets establishing a coalition of the KDP and communists with the Ba’athists. The Shah once again referenced Cold War motivations telling Nixon that ‘the Kurdish problem instead of being a thorn in the side could become an asset to the Communists’. When Kissinger asked what could be done, the Shah replied that ‘Turkey needs strengthening [...] Iran can help with the Kurds’. Prior to Nixon and Kissinger’s visits to Iran in May, unidentified sources had proposed to Kissinger that he and Rogers should meet Barzani while in Tehran, but this was rejected on the grounds of Kissinger not having sufficient time. The unidentified source (not declassified) is likely to be the Shah himself, King Hussein or else Israel.

It seems that the Shah had an in-depth talk with Nixon and his companions while in Tehran regarding the developments in Iraq, for on June 5, 1972, and following on from their discussions in Tehran, the Shah sent a message to Kissinger requesting that the Kurdish representatives who would be travelling to the US be personally received by him; the Shah even wrote that he ‘expects’ Kissinger to share with him his views on the meeting, as well as expressing the view that ‘the Kurds should be protected from Communist influence and prevented from following the same policies as those of the Iraqi government’. In forwarding the memorandum, however, Saunders added his views, stating, among other things, ‘The balance is fairly fine on the question of whether we should support the Kurds’. According to Saunders, the argument to support the Kurds was to ‘permit or encourage them

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436 Memorandum From Andrew Killgore (April 3, 1972).
437 For a chronology of Nixon’s visit see; Richard Nixon, ‘Chronology of Visit [...]’.
440 ‘Memorandum From Harold Saunders [...] to (Kissinger), [...]’, (FRUS, June 7, 1972).
441 Quoted in Memorandum From Harold Saunders [...] to (Kissinger), [...] (June 7, 1972).
442 Quoted in Memorandum From Harold Saunders [...] to (Kissinger), [...] (June 7, 1972).
443 Quoted in Memorandum From Harold Saunders [...] to (Kissinger), [...] (June 7, 1972).
to remain a source of instability in Iraq’, to thwart USSR efforts for a stable united Iraqi government, and also, since Iran, Israel and Jordan were US allies, to have the Iraqi army tied down.

Indeed, as we have seen, internal instability in Iraq was not necessarily unwelcomed by the US, for the reasons stated here, again, by Saunders. The Kurds’ ability to preoccupy the Iraqi army and the geopolitical significance of this was also confirmed by Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Egypt’s contemporary Chief of Staff, who, according to Kurdish sources, said that whenever Egypt asked for Iraq’s participation in an Arab-Israel war before 1973, the response was that it was busy fighting the Kurds and so was unable to participate.444 In addition to this regional complexity, the belief was that domestic instability in Iraq would also weaken Iraq’s potential meddling in the Gulf, as examined.445

During the 1973 war, Israel unsuccessfully enquired of the Kurds if they could launch an offensive on the Iraqi army; this was rejected by the US and the Shah on the grounds that the Kurds were not properly equipped to attack the Iraqi army beyond their mountain strongholds. The American ambassador to Iran considered this to be ‘a reckless undertaking’446 while the Shah had ‘no desire to have the Kurds branded as mere henchmen of Israel and the USA’.447 Indeed, had the Kurds launched such an offensive in 1973 as Israel requested, they would surely have appeared as pawns of Israel and thus would have lost whatever sympathy there may have been for them in the Arab world.

Saunders’ memorandum to Kissinger reveals a number of other points. First, in stating that ‘US policy for some time has been to avoid involvement in Kurdish affairs’, Saunders again confirmed the contention of this thesis as explained in relation to the Cold War and regional politics.448 Second, he voiced the assessment that ‘if the battle turned against the Kurds, we would have neither the assets nor the interest to provide decisive support’.449 Even if the US were to intercede on the Kurds’ behalf, apparently it would necessarily not be a decisive

445 Memorandum From Harold Saunders [...] to (Kissinger), [...] (June 7, 1972).
448 Memorandum From Harold Saunders [...] to (Kissinger), [...] (June 7, 1972).
449 Memorandum From Harold Saunders [...] to (Kissinger), [...] (June 7, 1972).
commitment – the gap between Barzani’s hopes and even the likely maximum support of the US was really quite wide, it would seem. Finally, Saunders counselled that ‘One would have to consider the implications of supporting the Kurds in the context of the Moscow summit talks’, arguing that ‘Since the Soviets have made an effort recently to persuade the Kurds to join the Ba’ath Party in a national unity government in Baghdad, support for the Kurds would be a direct counter-Soviet move’. This seems to be a clear warning about the significant consequences of taking an action in the context of consideration about Russian intentions and the signal that such a move would send. Saunders’ views, therefore, further supports the argument of this thesis in respect of the Americans assessing their strategy regarding the Iraqi Kurds in the regional context as it pertained to the Cold War.

On the visit of the Kurdish emissaries scheduled to travel to Washington, ultimately Saunders recommended to Kissinger that he did not personally meet them; rather, Saunders himself should be tasked with that. He proposed this because, as he stated, ‘My own feeling is that it would be better not to involve you personally at this stage since that comes so close to involving the President at least by implication’. Also, Saunders did not want Kissinger to meet the Kurdish representatives to prevent the Kurds from expecting significant support. Ultimately, moreover, not involving Kissinger and Nixon gave room for plausible deniability on the part of the Administration in this affair (see below).

4.5 Iraqi Kurds: A Stumbling Block for the Ba’athists and the Soviets?

Subsequent to the Shah persuading Nixon and Kissinger during their Tehran visit to grant the Kurds a proper hearing of their proposal and the Shah’s telegram asking Kissinger to personally meet Barzani’s representatives in Washington, a reply was given to the Shah that the CIA Director (Richard Helms) and Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (Alexander Haig) would meet the visiting Kurds. It is recalled here that in the recent months prior to this, SAVAK and the Shah together with Barzani had intensified their efforts to obtain US backing. This was in conjunction with other actors, as alluded to in the last section. The name of at least one of those actors remains classified in the US archives, but as

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450 Memorandum From Harold Saunders [...] to (Kissinger), [...] (June 7, 1972).
451 Memorandum From Harold Saunders [...] to (Kissinger), [...] (June 7, 1972).
452 For this reply, see Memorandum From the Chief of [...] to the Director of Central Intelligence (Helms) (June 12, 1972).

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evidence of the involvement of King Hussein of Jordan is available, in light of Israel’s involvement in this affair and the sensitivity of this matter, one must assume the unnamed other actor to be, indeed, Israel.\footnote{See the following memo, for instance, which, from 1971, repeatedly shows at least another actor petitioning the US government to back the Kurds and whose name remains un-declassified: Memorandum From the Chief of [...] to the Director of Central Intelligence (Helms) (June 12, 1972).}

Under pressure to respond to the Soviet scheme of the KDP joining the coalition government, as explained (above), Barzani agreed to the meeting, which was arranged for July 30, 1972. The meeting took place in Washington, between Dr Mahmoud Othman and Idris Barzani, on the Kurds’ side, and Richard Helms and Richard Kennedy of the NSC staff. This was the highest-level meeting between the US and the Kurds.\footnote{‘Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, July 5, 1972’, (FRUS, July 5, 1972); Othman, in Telephone Interview B.} In the words of Kennedy, the Kurdish visitors gave their hosts ‘an excellent presentation’ in which they explained the state of affairs and why it was important for the US to back the Kurds.\footnote{Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, July 5, 1972.} They then requested that the US assist them in all spheres, as mentioned (earlier). Politically they asked for US recognition of their objective for autonomy and maintenance of ongoing (but covert) direct contact, and militarily they requested that the US provide sufficient armaments at least for them to keep the Iraqi army at bay in Kurdistan – or, scaling up, that they be given the offensive capabilities to engage the main part of the Iraqi army with a view to causing a reaction in Baghdad that would result in the toppling of the Ba’ath regime in coordination with other anti-Ba’ath non-Kurdish elements in Iraq (the Barzani plan, in other words).

The Kurdish representatives warned that the Kurdish leadership believed that without outside support for the Kurds, the Soviets would overcome the last non-Soviet fortress in Iraq (i.e. Kurdistan). Once the Soviets had a tight grip over all of Iraq, they stated, this would have dire consequences for the region and the Kurds would not be able to ‘resist this combination of Soviet and Iraqi pressure for much more than six months without significant foreign assistance’, warning that ‘If such aid is not forthcoming, the Kurds believe that within six months they will either have to reach a political compromise with the Iraqi central government or fight to a sure defeat’. Finally, they conveyed Barzani’s wish for ‘increased foreign assistance not just to defend his area from the Soviets and Iraqis, but preferably to...
make Kurdistan a positive element on the side of the United States and its friends and allies in the Middle East, notably Turkey, Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the Persian Gulf states’. 456

Thus, the Kurds did indeed make an attractive case, culminating with recognition of the full regional and Cold War ramifications of what was being proposed. Helms responded that the US would consider it once they had details of the aid that the Kurds needed, that Kissinger had authorised conveyance of US sympathy for the Kurdish movement and also that such contact or potential aid from the US must be kept absolutely secret - failure to honour which would sour ‘this new relationship’. Also, any assistance from the US was to be provided through proxy countries. 457

After the above meeting, Helms and Kennedy favoured support for the Kurdish movement for a variety of reasons, among which were the growing aggressiveness of the Ba’ath regime and the believe that if the regime were to eliminate the Kurds, either by forcing them into the government with the Ba’ath (and ICP) or by military means, Iraq would then turn its attention to its neighbours. In a memorandum to Kissinger, his Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs also recalled that during the 1960s, the Kurds had tied down two thirds of the Iraqi army and thus effectively paralysed it from manoeuvres abroad, conditions that caused a number of military coups. The rational, therefore, was now to agree to what Barzani had in mind: to push the army to a limit that would cause it to turn on the Ba’ath government in coordination with the other anti-Ba’ath non-Kurds, as before. 458

The most important point to draw from the above correspondences between the Nixon administration officials is that the primary reason to back the Kurds was not for the Kurds as such but to paralyse Iraq in order to secure US regional allies and prevent Soviet expansion. The Nixon administration wanted to exploit the Kurdish need for American support for the advancement of its own interest and that of its allies. There were, therefore, motivating elements here both of the Cold War and of protecting the security of US allies in the region through debilitating the Iraqi army.

458 ‘Memorandum From the President’s Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Washington, July 28, 1972’, (FRUS, July 28, 1972).
Haig and the other two named US officials were all convinced that Soviet influence on Iraq had reached a level that needed to be countered; Iraq could put the entire region at risk if it eliminated the Kurdish movement. Haig thought that the alternative to US support for the Kurds would be for Barzani to join the National Front, in which case the Ba’athists would gradually erode the Kurds’ resistance. What Haig and others were suggesting to Kissinger was that essentially the Kurds could be a stumbling block for the Ba’athists and the Soviets in Iraq. If the Ba’athists were to overcome the Kurds, by any means, they would not stop there and would then turn to Iraq’s surroundings. As perceived by the US and Iran, therefore, the Kurds were a means of containing both Iraq itself and the USSR’s regional desire through Iraq. The idea that internal instability in Iraq was not necessarily against US interests, considered already in this thesis here receives further confirmation.

Haig and Kennedy also forwarded a proposal for action after listening to the Kurds’ needs. The proposal stated that while the Kurds had asked for some $60 million a year in order to raise and maintain an army and to fund a local government, in order to finance 25,000 Peshmerga Barzani only needed $18 million. They also recommended that the US not involve itself with the Kurds’ plan for a local government, as that would surpass a covert operation. Essentially, they argued that the aim was to keep the Iraqi army off balance, as has been explained in this section. Also on the military sphere, they suggested that an estimated total of $2 million worth of ordnance, which was in the CIA stocks, could be delivered. This comprised of light weapons, weapons that the Kurds were most familiar with and which were not attributable or else used also by Iran and Iraq’s armies. It was recommended that heavy weapons, such as anti-aircraft and tanks, should not be supplied. Iran was speculated to be ready to pay half of the $18 million while the US would pay $3 million and unidentified sources would pay the rest.

However, there were a number of issues to be cautious about, which concerned Russia, Turkey and the Kurds themselves. First, assistance for the Kurds, it was recommended, must not be in such a manner and quantity as to draw in the Soviets on the side of the Iraqi regime, as this could lead to a major international confrontation; for instance, the Soviets could

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459 Memorandum From the President’s Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig), Washington, July 28, 1972.
460 Memorandum From the President’s Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig), Washington, July 28, 1972.
deploy their pilots to help the Iraqi regime. Here, the Soviets’ recent investments in Iraq in all sectors was noted, as well as its role in the nationalisation of the IPC. Second, there was a concern about the Turks, whom Haig stated were ‘acutely sensitive to any manifestations of Kurdish nationalism on their borders’. Despite the risks that Iraq as a Soviet client posed to all its neighbours, Turkey still considered Kurdish nationalism as a more challenging threat, even though, as Haig noted, the Kurds in Turkey had ‘been vigorously suppressed’ and ‘were now called “Mountain Turks”’. Haig’s ‘mountain Turks’ comment, it may be noted, shows clearly that US policymakers were well aware of who the Kurds were, their desires and how they were treated by the “parent state”, in this case, Turkey, an important Cold War ally and NATO member. Similarly, in the context of this research, the way the Iraqi Kurds were treated was beyond any reasonable doubt based on decisions made quite consciously. Finally, there was a worry about Kurdish factionalism and an ideological divide. Haig and Kennedy suspected that some Leftist-Marxist Kurds, still under Barzani’s leadership, might leak the secret support to the Soviet Union.

Ultimately, Alexander Haig, Kissinger’s assistant, proposed two courses of action to initiate the operation. These were

i) To go directly to the President (Nixon) who would authorise this policy and then direct Helms (CIA Director) and the Office of Management and Budgetary of the State Department (OMB) accordingly;

ii) Or to inform the leading figures of the 40 Committee but ‘avoid any paper and tell them that the President wants this done’, the task would then be handed over to the CIA and OBM for execution, with the insurance of plausible deniability were any information regarding the operation to leak.

Haig suggested the latter course, and Kissinger also subsequently opted for it. Back in Kurdistan, by July 1972, sporadic apparently spontaneous skirmishes between the

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461 Memorandum From the President’s Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig), Washington, July 28, 1972.
462 Memorandum From the President’s Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig), Washington, July 28, 1972.
463 Memorandum From the President’s Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig), Washington, July 28, 1972.
Peshmerga and Iraqi army were breaking out.\footnote{Telegram 7605 [...].} On implementing the operation, by October, according to Kissinger himself, Iran had received 111 (imperial) tonnes of arms and ammunition from the US destined for Iraqi Kurdistan, in addition to another 71 tonnes from an unidentified (not declassified) country, presumably Israel or Jordan. Either or both of these countries could have been involved, since the weapons were ‘captured Fedayeen ordnance’\footnote{‘Memorandum From [...] (Kissinger) to President Nixon [...]’, (FRUS, October 5, 1972).} (having been captured from the ‘Fedayeen’, these weapons, largely of Soviet origin, were not attributable to the donor itself. Barzani had also received a monthly cash subsidy for his Peshmerga from July 1972. Regarding this course of action, Kissinger also indicated to Nixon that the rationale behind it was that Barzani would continue to pin down two thirds of the Iraqi army ‘and deprive the Bathists [sic] of a secure base from which to launch sabotage and assassination teams against Iran’.\footnote{Memorandum From [...] (Kissinger) to President Nixon (October 5, 1972).}

The US also continued to bolster Iran’s military capabilities on the Shah’s insistence, the Shah either concerned to prepare for a brewing war with Iraq or at least wanting a credible deterrent. For its part, the US appeared keen to preserve Iran’s military superiority over Iraq, which would be unsurprising given the relationship between Iraq and the USSR, which had the potential to affect the military balance. Thus, there developed what was effectively an arms race between Iran and Iraq – and the Iraqi Kurds were in the middle, instrumental in affecting the balance insofar as they had the potential to debilitate and thereby prevent Iraq from properly fighting on a second front, as analysed here already and again noted in internal US communications.\footnote{See e.g. ‘Telegram 210666 [...]’, (FRUS, November 18, 1972). And also ‘Memorandum From David A. Korn, NEA/IRN [...]’, (FRUS, September 20, 1972); ‘National Intelligence Estimate [...]’, (FRUS, December 21, 1972).}

By August 1972 Nixon had personally authorised what was a highly covert CIA operation to provide arms and financial assistance to Barzani’s forces, and by March 29, 1973, according to the CIA, more than 1000 tonnes of non-attributable essentialities, including medicine and blankets, had been supplied in addition to a monthly subsidy for Barzani in order to maintain his force of 25,000 Peshmerga, continuing from the year before. Iran also provided $4.8 million per year, together with an unspecified amount of arms and materials, and the supplies
from the US were all channelled through Iran.\textsuperscript{469} There was also at least a third actor involved in aiding the Kurds, the details of which are largely excised (not declassified) in the American archives, which we may again assume to have been Israel or Jordan, as explained (above).

In March 1973, Kissinger made a request to Nixon for the President to authorise the continuation of the CIA operation, since he was satisfied that it was pinning down the Iraqi army and for providing the Shah with ‘a strong buffer force against Iraqi-directed infiltration teams of saboteurs and terrorists’.\textsuperscript{470} From Kissinger’s correspondence with Nixon, it is evident that the Shah was the pivotal factor behind this whole affair, although Kissinger also seemed to have come to loathe the Iraqi regime by this time. Nixon approved Kissinger’s proposal on the same day.\textsuperscript{471} Meanwhile, according to the US Interest Section in Iraq, Baghdad had received more than $1 billion worth of Soviet military assistance since 1965 and over $500 million in economic assistance, making Iraq only second to Egypt in the Middle East in terms of Soviet aid received; the US and Iranian support for the Iraqi Kurds was thus simply incomparable to the Russia’s backing of Iraq.\textsuperscript{472}

Further explanation as to why US decision-makers decided to change their minds in this matter is provided in the record of a conversation between Kissinger and Helms and Saunders in which Kissinger stated the following:

> What I want is for the Politburo in Moscow to be in a frame of mind not to want to get involved in further adventures in the Middle East. I want them to recall that they were run out of Egypt and that Iraq turned out to be a bottomless pit. I want them to tell anyone who comes with a recommendation for renewed activity in the Middle East to go away. I want the Shah to help in this strategy. We do not want to push the USSR against the wall. We just want them in a frame of mind where they judge that the costs for activity in the Middle East seem excessive. We also want the Arabs in the area to feel that they cannot get a free ride by linking up with the Soviet Union. We want the Kurds to have enough strength to be an open wound in Iraq.\textsuperscript{473}

The key figure in the US behind this decision to extend US military and financial assistance to the Kurds was Kissinger, for regional as well as international reasons. Having being perceived as a trump card by the Shah of Iran from the early 1960s, the Iraqi Kurds were now similarly

\textsuperscript{469} See e.g. ‘207. Memorandum From [...] (Kissinger) to President Nixon’, (FRUS, March 29, 1973).
\textsuperscript{470} 207. Memorandum From [...] (Kissinger) to President Nixon.
\textsuperscript{471} See 207. Memorandum From [...] (Kissinger) to President Nixon.
\textsuperscript{472} ‘208. Telegram [...] Baghdad to the Department of State’, (FRUS, March 31, 1973).
viewed by Kissinger. Meanwhile, the Shah clarified his intention in a meeting with Kissinger during his July 1973 state visit to Washington, when he said, ‘We are preventing a coalition of the Baaths [sic], the Kurds, and the Communists. We are preventing this’. 474

The Shah also noted that Turkey had been ‘a little reluctant to cooperate,’ and that it had ‘always had a weakness for Iraq and a fear of the Kurds’. 475 The Kurds in Iraq requested more aid from the Shah, while also conveying that US backing was essential as they could ‘see how clearly and completely the other front [Ba’ath] has the backing of the Soviet Union, and how hard they are trying to strengthen the influence of the Soviets and of Communism in the area’. 476 As indicated, however, this was also because the Kurds considered the Shah untrustworthy and thus not to be relied on alone. This appeal was subsequently forwarded to Kissinger. 477

During his state visit, the Shah also conveyed to Kissinger that he had told Barzani that he did not want him to create an independent Kurdish state, for, according to the Shah, ‘It would make the Turks terribly afraid. We don’t want to frighten the Turks unnecessarily’. 478 What the Shah did not tell the Americans, however, was that he too did not want to see an independent Kurdish state. Regarding the Iraqi Kurds, the Shah told his hosts that they were ‘a trump card’ that they (the Iranians) did ‘not want to let go’. 479 It should be recalled here that, since the early years of the Cold War, the Shah had been apprehensive about the Soviets creating a Kurdish state. The Shah also told Kissinger that the Kurds offered their only leverage in Iraq, and Kissinger replied by stating that the problem the Americans faced was that they did not know exactly what needed to be done (for the Kurds) and it was for this reason that the two sides (US and Iran) would have to cooperate together on this. Essentially, therefore, Kissinger entrusted the Shah to take the lead, and he also conveyed Nixon’s assent to this. 480

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474 ‘Memorandum for the President’s File by [...] (Kissinger)’, (FRUS, July 24, 1973).
475 Memorandum for the President’s File by [...] (Kissinger) (July 24, 1973).
476 ‘225. Memorandum From Acting Director of Central Intelligence [...] (Kissinger)’, (FRUS, July 26, 1973).
477 See 225. Memorandum From Acting Director of Central Intelligence [...] (Kissinger); and also ‘227. Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence [...] (Kissinger)’, (FRUS, August 7, 1973); ‘Minutes of Senior Review Group Meeting’, (FRUS, July 20, 1973).
479 27. Memorandum of Conversation.
480 27. Memorandum of Conversation.
In a separate meeting on July 27th between the Shah and Kissinger, among others, the Shah told Kissinger that he had told the Kurds ‘absolutely not to participate in a coalition government’ and to ‘stop receiving Soviet representatives or the Ba’ath representatives from Baghdad’. However, he added that if the two sides (Iran and the US) were going to ask that of the Kurds then they must increase their financial assistance. Kissinger agreed to this request in principle, with Helms also concurring. It is to be noted that the initial request for increased assistance had come from the Kurds themselves, as indicated earlier. Furthermore, as a contingency plan and pertaining to regional politics, if Jordan were to be attacked by Iraq and Syria then, the Shah suggested, they ‘could play the Kurdish card and encourage them to begin skirmishing’. Again, we see the potential of the Kurds as a regional player, or rather, their usefulness for manipulation by the bigger powers.

Not only was it the Shah who took the lead for the US in its change of policy regarding the Iraqi Kurds from 1972, but also, while the US had its own motivations for the covert operation, these were again instigated by the Shah, who convinced the Nixon administration that it was in the interest of the US to join him and back the Iraqi Kurds. But the Kurds, we know, were desperate to gain the support of America, and indeed it was Barzani who used the Soviet backing for Iraq and the importance of US ‘moral support’ to convince the Shah to bring the US on board. Thus, Barzani seems to have convinced the Shah that a superpower’s might was essential to balance that of another (i.e. the US was needed to counteract the Soviets in Iraq), the Shah then argued this with the Nixon administration and the support was granted, although only for that limited objective. Neither the Shah nor the Nixon administration had in mind, as an objective, the establishment of the Kurdish entity that Barzani was fighting for, and neither were prepared to approve this.

In fact, although Kissinger was persuaded by the Shah, he was himself eminently biddable, for wider strategical reasons. Elsewhere, he confirmed his reasoning for why the US now wanted to back the Kurds after so many years of resisting this option. In the Senior Group Meeting (July 20, 1973), just days before the Shah visited the US, Kissinger told the Group that ‘[k]eeping the Kurds active in Iraq would not be contrary to our interest’. Kissinger was

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482 30. Memorandum of Conversation.
483 30. Memorandum of Conversation.
484 Minutes of Senior Review Group Meeting (July 20, 1973).
responding to the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Joseph Sisco), who had argued that the US should continue its support for Iran and Jordan while ‘keep[ing] the door open to Iraq and Syria’. Kissinger agreed that the door should be kept open, but Iraq should be made to ‘pay a price’, namely, through the Kurds. This strategy was designed to essentially serve as a carrot and stick approach with Iraq in connection to the USSR’s position in the region, and in this case, particularly in connection to Iran.

Thus, we should appreciate Kissinger as sending an indirect signal to Iraq and other regional states that relations with the Soviets would be counterproductive, so they should keep close to the US and not the USSR. Basically, his idea was that ‘if we could get the Soviets to suffer a mis-adventure in Iraq it could curb the Soviet appetite in the Middle East’. The matter had to be executed skilfully, however, for all parties concerned to buy into it. Indeed, the affair with the Shah and the Iraqi Kurds was so secret in the US that even both of the Director of the Office of Iraqi et al Affairs (David Korn) and the Country Officer for Iraq (Edward Djerejian) of the State Department were not aware of it. Were the Russians to get wind of what was going on, see through the ruse and call the US bluff, in essence, the Kurds could be rendered highly vulnerable – which was, basically, what happened.

Following the Shah’s July visit to the US and the request to increase the backing for the Kurds, the CIA presented the administration with four options. Kissinger then sought Helms’ opinion on August 17, 1973 in an exclusive ‘eyes-only’ back channel message to ambassador Helms in Iran. Kissinger also wanted Helms to discuss the options with the Shah and relay back his views. Additionally, Kissinger also asked Helms to ascertain whether the Shah wanted to do more himself, to which Helms replied that the Shah had pledged to increase his own subsidy for the Kurdish movement by more than 50%. Helms recommended the first two of the options proposed, which were to replenish the CIA stocks of ordnance as a contingency measure and also to increase the Kurds’ subsidy from the US by 50%, stating that ‘the increase of our subsidy in response to the Shah’s recommendation is symbolic of our support for the Shah and he likes this reassurance too’. 

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485 Minutes of Senior Review Group Meeting (July 20, 1973).
486 Minutes of Senior Review Group Meeting (July 20, 1973).
488 ‘229. Backchannel Message From [...] (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to Iran (Helms)’, (FRUS, August 16, 1973). Also for the Four Options recommended by the CIA see the same source.
As a result, the KDP rejected joining the National Front unless Baghdad fulfilled certain conditions.\textsuperscript{489} At the behest of the US, Saudi Arabia also gave assistance in the summer of 1974, providing a one-off contribution estimated at $1 million.\textsuperscript{490} Therefore, what was developing into a new phase of the Kurdish Revolution began with the backing of several parties. As this section has shown, however, each actor that came forward with material support for the KDP and the Iraqi Kurdish movement did so for different reasons and thus with different aims – and none actually supported the final goal held by Kurds of its democratically-based autonomy or even independence.

4.6 Renewal of War and the Great Betrayal.

In March 1974, a high-ranking Kurdish delegation met Saddam Hussein in Baghdad upon the latter’s request. The Kurdish delegation offered a counter-proposal to Saddam’s on how to resolve a number of contentious issues, which Saddam dismissed, thus:

These proposals are not appropriate and are rejected. The only exit left is that you agree to the autonomy plan the way we have authored it and you have 15 days. During this period, we will have no activity and business. After that whoever does not agree to it, we will consider them an enemy of us.\textsuperscript{491}

Saddam also warned the Kurdish delegation that if Iraq were pushed, then it would yield to the Shah, but – notably – ‘If we are forced to yield to the Shah you will then pay a high price’.\textsuperscript{492} In other words, Saddam was quite open about involving the Kurds in the ongoing game with Iran. Tellingly also, the Soviet ambassador was present at the meeting, thus indicating Russia’s support and, by implication, the larger Cold War game in play. Clearly, the Ba’ath thus must have received Soviet backing for this push and was essentially seeking to renew the Kurdish War.

Two days later, Iraq unilaterally promulgated its version of an autonomy plan for Kurdistan and gave the Kurds until March 26 to accept it. This was effectively the end of the ceasefire agreed upon in March 1970. The Kurds objected to the Iraqi plan, since it did not include

\textsuperscript{489} 229. Backchannel Message From [...] (Kissinger) to the Ambassador to Iran (Helms) (August 16, 1973).
\textsuperscript{490} Othman, in Telephone Interview B.
\textsuperscript{491} Quoted in Barzanî, Barzanî Ü Bzutnewey Rizgarîxwažî Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşî Duwem 1961-1975, p. 112 (trans. by author).
Kirkuk and was perceived as insufficient.\textsuperscript{493} For its part, the USSR noted ‘outside’ interference as an impediment to a final settlement between the Iraqi government and the Kurds. In fact, when it came to Iran-Iraq disputes and border clashes, the Soviets were not as supportive of Iraq as they were in its Kurdish policy and indicated their preference for a mutually agreed settlement.\textsuperscript{494}

Then came what, in retrospect, appears to have been a key moment. According to the then head of Parastn, the KDP’s intelligence agency, the Soviets learnt about the Kurds’ relations with the CIA. Quite when this occurred is not clear, but the main point is that the Russians were able and motivated to increase the stakes. They immediately sent several envoys to Kurdistan to warn the Kurds against the course they were taking, advising the Kurds ‘not to believe the Americans’ promises without actions to back up these promises’.\textsuperscript{495} Meanwhile, Alexi Kosygin insisted that the Kurds must join the National Front Government in Baghdad. The KGB discovery of the Kurds’ relations with the CIA does seem to have changed the Soviet perception of the Kurdish movement and, ultimately, its fully backing the Ba’ath against the Kurds. That said, however, it should also be noted that Soviet-Iraqi relations had already reached a new level with the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 1972, so US support for the Kurds’ through the CIA essentially strengthened rather than changed the Soviets’ resolve in backing Iraq, as evidenced by the developments that followed.\textsuperscript{496}

The Kurdish leadership several times requested an increase in the US-Iranian subsidy and arms in anticipation of war.\textsuperscript{497} On a number of occasions, the Kurds also wanted to unilaterally declare autonomy, but they were advised against this by the Shah and Kissinger.\textsuperscript{498}

\textsuperscript{493} See e.g. ‘243. Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence […] (Kissinger)’, (FRUS, March 21, 1974). Also, Barzani, \textit{Barzanî Û Bzutnewey Rizgarîxwazi Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşi Duwem 1961-1975}, p. 112.
\textsuperscript{494} This position was indicated by the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Deputy Chief for Near East Countries (Pyrlin) in his meeting with a US Embassy officer in Moscow on March 16, 1974; see ‘Soviet Views on Kurdish Problem and Iraqi-Iranian Frontier Clashes, Cable: 1974MOSCOW03744_b’, (WikiLeaks, March 16, 1974); also, Pravda’s Middle East Specialist (Demchenko) expressed a similar view on March 13; see ‘Pravda Supports Iraqi Government […] Cable: 1974MOSCOW03590_b’, (WikiLeaks, March 14, 1974); this was also the take of the US Embassy in Moscow as based on the actual meeting with Pyrlin.
\textsuperscript{495} Barzani, \textit{Barzanî Û Bzutnewey Rizgarîxwazi Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşi Duwem 1961-1975}, p. 92 (trans. by author). For more on these, see p. 300 of the same source for a letter written in Kurdish by Talabani to Barzani on June 22, 1972. For more on the names of the envoys, see p. 92.
\textsuperscript{496} Barzani, \textit{Barzanî Û Bzutnewey Rizgarîxwazi Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşi Duwem 1961-1975}, pp. 207-08.
\textsuperscript{497} See 243. Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence […] (Kissinger).
\textsuperscript{498} See e.g. ‘247. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to Iran (Helms) to […] Kissinger’, (FRUS, April 17, 1974); ‘246. Memorandum From […] (Kissinger) to President Nixon’, (FRUS, April 11, 1974).
Kurdistan, by now, up to 250,000 people, including white-collar Kurds, from Kurdish areas under the control of the Iraqi government had migrated into Peshmerga-held territory.499

In early 1974, meanwhile, just as the four-year truce of March 1970 was expiring, Soviet-Iraqi relations underwent a further enforcement, as indicated by the visit of several high-ranking Soviet officials. These included the Minister of Defence (Marshal Grechko), who stayed in Iraq for three days.500 The speedy developments and the well-planned Ba’ath schemes show that the Kurdish Issue must have been the agenda of these visits. Also, the type of equipment that the Soviets had provided to the Iraqis demonstrate the extent of the USSR’s backing for Iraq, this being listed by the US Interest Section in Baghdad thus:

Soviet supply of Iraq with highly sophisticated military equipment; to [the] best of USINT’s knowledge Iraq is [the] only country outside USSR to have received TU-22 supersonic medium bombers and one of very few to receive MIG-23s and SU-20 fighter bombers. It has also received SA-2, SA-3, and SA-7 missiles.501

In late August 1974, the long-anticipated ground Iraqi ground invasion finally got underway, with eight Iraqi army divisions, according to the Kurds, in addition to other independent brigades.502 The American Newsweek magazine put the number of Iraqi troops taking part in the assault to be an estimated 60,000, stating also that Iraq had ‘undertaken round-the-clock bombing of civilians’.503 Independent aid agencies, and also the UK Foreign Office were reporting the use of phosphorous and napalm bombs by the Iraqi troops.504 In Masoud Barzani’s words, the Army was ‘not distinguishing between suckling children and fighting-men’.505 Iraq’s excessive and indiscriminate use of force was thus well known and widely reported by multiple sources.

Other sources, such as captured Iraqi pilots, reported that Russian pilots flew regular bombing sorties in their TU-22 supersonic bombers, and also that Russian pilots and planes were

501 ‘263. Telegram From the Interests Section in Baghdad to the Department of State’, (FRUS, October 24, 1974). For more indications of the USSR’s support to Iraq up until the collapse of the Kurdish resistance in March 1975 see: Barzanî, Barzanî Û Bzutnewey Rîzgarîxwazi Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşi Duwem 1961-1975, pp. 162-65.
502 For more on the plan of the invasion by the Iraqis see ‘261. Telegram From the Consulate in Tabriz […]’, (FRUS, September 4, 1974).
supporting Iraq in a total effort to overcome the Kurdish movement. One such report detailing this was published by the British *Daily Telegraph* newspaper in September 1974. By September, British intelligence sources noted that Iraq had made some gains against the Kurds but that the cost of these gains had been high in terms of army casualties. A UK intelligent report, moreover, did not see it as unreasonable to infer that Russians were present among the Iraqi ground forces, if, indeed, the reports of Russian pilots and planes were true.\footnote{FCO 8/2534: British Embassy Tehran’, (UK: National Archives, January 9, 1975).}

In the meantime, large numbers of Kurds had already relocated to areas under Peshmerga control. The following excerpt from a memorandum in September from the US consul in Tabriz explained the morale on the Kurds’ side; it is imperative to mention this here, as later the Shah and US were to claim that the Kurds were not fighting, and thus were basically to be blamed for their own sell-out. The memorandum stated that:

> Foreign correspondents, Iranians, and personal observations all agree that Kurdish morale [is] extremely high. According to doctor and Governor Otmishi, Kurds leave hospital as soon as they can move and return to front lines. More volunteers are supposedly available to join [the] Pish Merga [sic] than there are guns to supply them. Kurds said to be far more unified than in [the] past with heavy movement of urban educated Kurds to Barzani. [...] many Kurdish Communists [are] now fighting with Barzani side by side with Christian Kurds, some of whom I met.\footnote{261. Telegram From the Consulate in Tabriz to the Department of State.}

By December 1974, the above source reported that ‘The Iraqi offensive [which] begun in August appears to have sputtered, flared and finally gone out’.\footnote{Iraqi Kurdish War: Failure of Iraqi Summer Offensive, Cable 1974TABRIZ00032_b’, (WLPLUSD, December 2, 1974).} The consul noted that the Iraqis had not been able to push much beyond Qelladze and Rewanduz, with Barzani’s headquarters in Hacî Omeran remaining secure. Indeed, the focus of the Iraqi assault was to capture the KDP headquarters in Hacî Omeran and also gain control of the Hamilton Road. Again, regarding Kurdish morale, the consul stated – emphatically – that there were ‘no rpt [repeat] no signs of weakening of Kurdish morale or unity’.\footnote{FCO 8/2534: Soviet Involvement in the Iraqi-Kurdish War.} He went on to convey that there was no reason to expect an early end to the war short of an Iranian change of policy or a change of government in Baghdad.\footnote{FCO 8/2534: Soviet Involvement in the Iraqi-Kurdish War.} This fortitude was maintained despite the eye-witness
accounts of aid workers from the UK and volunteers who had been to Kurdistan ‘coming back to tell the press how badly Kurds are suffering’ and that Iraqis were ‘using “inhuman” methods such as phosphorus and napalm, etc., against some of which UN Resolutions exist’. The use of phosphorus and napalm was also confirmed by Iranian hospitals treating Kurdish casualties.

The British military attaché in Baghdad paradoxically confirmed the overall failure of the offensive. In stating that ‘The Iraqi offensive has been a considerable success, although it failed, and in some cases failed very badly to accomplish its original goals’, He was reporting success because the Iraqi army offensive had penetrated deeper into Kurdish territory than any before had been able to since the September Revolution began, in 1961. More importantly, however, it failed insofar as it did not achieve its primary aims of cutting Kurdish access to Iran and capturing Barzani’s headquarters in Hacî Omeran. In addition to these, the areas it had captured were insecure, so the slow gains seem not have been worth the losses. The USINTS in Baghdad also countered Iraq’s claims as magnifying its successes.

Among Kurdish sources, there is to be found no talk of defeat or any such thing; in contrast, as indicated, morale was extremely high. In fact, the Iraqi army would have had to overcome five consecutive defensive zones that the Kurds had put in place in order to achieve its named objectives and had not even effectively broken through the first. The attitude on the Kurds’ side was such that, by the end of 1974, they had devised a plan to encircle a large number of Iraqi troops in Rewanduz and take them as prisoners.

The Iraqi losses were such that leading elements within the military began to blame Saddam Hussein for wanting to ‘get rid of both the Kurds and the army’ – the claim being made in seriousness, the suggestion being that once the army had been so weakened that it would not be able to interfere in politics as before, Saddam would become the unchallenged ruler of Iraq. In short, Saddam’s plan, like those before him, was about to backfire and the army

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513 ‘269. Letter From the Consul in Tabriz [...]’, (FRUS, December 26, 1974).
514 269. Letter From the Consul in Tabriz [...].
516 For more on these details, including the names of Soviet advisors mentioned, see Barzanî, Barzanî Û Bzutnewey Rizgarîxwazî Kurd: Bergî Sêyem, Beşi Duwem 1961-1975, pp. 162-65.
turn on the government, again, as it had done more than once since 1958. Saddam Hussein therefore seems to have put his own life on the line, as dependent on overpowering the Kurdish movement. Iraq by now had also taken a more reconciliatory approach towards the US, with high secret meetings taking place outside the country, from at least April 1974. 517

Despite the Kurds’ fighting ability, for which the evidence is overwhelming and consistent across multiple sources, by February 1975, the Shah was wavering – even according to his own Minister of the Royal Court, who confirmed that the Shah was the reason the Kurds had rejected joining the National Front Government in the first place. 518 Secret talks between Iran and Iraq, on the one hand, and the attempts of intermediaries, on the other, were giving the Shah a second thought. This was after his November 1974 visit to Moscow; according to his own testimony, the Soviets had complained about Iran’s support for the Kurds. 519 Assessing the evidence as a whole, this appears to have been the turning point in the diplomacy behind the ongoing conflict and thus, ultimately, in the Kurdish Revolution in Iraq, for thereafter, the Shah completely changed his tune.

In a meeting with Kissinger in mid-February 1975, the Iranian leader stated that the Kurds had ‘no guts left’ 520 and that their resistance was weakening. Further, he admitted to Kissinger that he intended to meet Saddam Hussein, in response to an Iraqi overture. The following passage, from a report of Kissinger’s meeting with Gerald Ford, now president upon Nixon’s resignation in August, helps to clarify the Shah’s real analysis of the situation:

The Shah said he cannot accept an autonomous Kurdish state [...] In short, he seems tempted to try to move in the direction of some understanding with Iraq regarding the Kurds, but is understandably sceptical that much is possible. In the meantime, he intends to continue his support for the Kurds. 521

As reported by another memorandum, Kissinger ‘attempted to talk the Shah out of abandoning the Kurds’ 522 when they met; however, Kissinger also reported that the meeting

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517 For a full account of this and Iraq’s “desire” to improve relations with the US, see ‘252. Telegram From the Mission at the United Nations [...]’, (FRUS, June 5, 1974). Also ‘251. Telegram From the Interests Section in Baghdad to the Department of State’, (FRUS, May 30, 1974); ‘Section in Baghdad to the Department of State’, (FRUS, June 25, 1974); ‘257. Telegram From the Interests Section in Baghdad [...]’, (FRUS, August 9, 1974).
520 Quoted in ‘103. Memorandum From the President’s Deputy Assistant [...] to President Ford’, (FRUS, February 19, 1975).
521 103. Memorandum From the President’s Deputy Assistant [...] to President Ford.
522 See footnotes of 103. Memorandum From the President’s Deputy Assistant [...] to President Ford.
was ‘very satisfactory in all major respects’ (emphasis added). According to Masoud Barzani, Kissinger had assured Mustafa Barzani in 1972 that the Shah would remain faithful to the Kurds regardless of developments. He had made this commitment, of course, on behalf of the Nixon administration, but it is hard to believe and there is no evidence for the suggestion that American policy regarding Iraq and the Kurds veered wildly into a radically new direction following the inauguration of the new President Ford. On the contrary, there is clear evidence that it was the Shah who reneged on the agreement, and in contrast to sources which appear to be pro-Iranian and attempt to vindicate the Shah of betrayal by essentially arguing that he had no other choice than to abandon the Kurds. In contrast to Alvandi, another scholar whose work has been drawn upon here (see Chapter One), Kimche also considers that Iran exchanged the Kurds for Iraq’s compromise on the Shatt al-Arab boundary.

Debate around responsibility for the Kurdish defeat thus centres not so much on identifying the guilty party – clearly, that was the Shah, and this was a betrayal – but rather on attempts by the Shah to justify this betrayal. Dr Othman rejects the Shah’s excuses for selling out the Kurds as fabrications and excuses. In the last few months before the betrayal, the Shah had also sent small units of his army, armed with artillery and anti-aircraft missiles, across the border in order to maximise Iraq’s concessions in the secret talks that had begun, by means of increasing the pressure on Iraq’s army in the War. Therefore, as Saddam’s “Plan A” was failing and his political ambitions were on the line, Arab countries, such as Egypt and Jordan, and even figures like the former French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac, at Iraq’s behest, all tried to bring Iran and Iraq together to a settlement. Chirac conveyed messages from Iraq to Iran in his visit to Iran and discussed Iraq with the Shah. This rapprochement was further catalysed by the Shah’s visit to Cairo in January of 1975, in which Sadat had an influence on the Shah regarding Iraq.

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523 103. Memorandum From the President’s Deputy Assistant […] to President Ford.
525 Kimche, David, The Last Option: After Nasser, Arafat & Saddam Hussein: The Quest for Peace in the Middle East, pp. 189-200. Also see, for instance, Alvandi, Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War, p. 110 and p. 112.
526 Othman, in Telephone Interview B.
527 ‘271. Telegram From the Interests Section in Baghdad to the Department of State’, (FRUS, February 1, 1975).
528 As reported by the Egyptian Ambassador to Baghdad, see 271. Telegram From the Interests Section in Baghdad to the Department of State.
Ultimately, following the Arab mediation efforts, Saddam Hussein and the Shah met twice for lengthy talks during the OPEC Summit held in Algiers on 4-6 March, 1973. In the communiqué that followed, on March 6th, both sides committed to ‘maintain strict and effective control over their joint borders in order to put a final end to all acts of subversion wherever they may come from’. With that communiqué, one may say, the Revolution was effectively over – for now, at least. The Kurds depended on Iran for sustaining their resistance, for the inflow from the US, and with that lifeline cut, realistically, there was no way to continue.

On March 8th, the head of SAVAK conveyed the following ‘information’ to US ambassador Helms, who in turn forwarded it to Kissinger. The ambassador was scheduled to meet the Shah later that day, at 17.00 local time. The ‘information’ unveiled what had taken place both in Algiers; essentially, this was an explanation of the communiqué in which the Shah sought to make a partial justification for his decision, for why he had abandoned the Kurds. He essentially portrayed the Kurds as being unable to fight and Iran as no longer willing to send its own troops across the border to man heavy weaponry. He claimed that the Kurds themselves had said they were unable to fight and that ‘[t]he Iraqi Army, with the equipment received from the Soviet Union could easily annihilate the Kurds this coming summer’. The detail on the equipment could well speak of Moscow’s input into this assessment of the situation, one may hazard.

The Shah also informed Helms that Saddam Hussein, President Boumedienne, President Sadat and King Hussein had ‘told us the Iraqis were ready to settle all their disputes with us provided that we discontinue aid to the Kurds’. Again, and especially bearing in mind the Soviet pressure successfully applied on Baghdad to seek to incorporate the Kurds in the National Front deal, one may detect the influence from Moscow working behind the scenes here. Further, the Shah continued, it was not in Iran’s interest to back the Kurds any more. Only a few months earlier, in December 1974, he had ordered the head of his army to pull out their long-range guns from Kurdistan were the Kurds to prove to be incapable of

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530 273. Defense Intelligence Notice [...].
531 Quoted in ‘275. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to Iran (Helms) to the President’s Deputy Assistant for [...]’, (FRUS, March 8, 1975).
532 Quoted in 275. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to Iran (Helms).
533 Quoted in 275. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to Iran (Helms); also see Alam, The Shah and I: The Confidential Diary of Iran’s Royal Court, 1968-77, p. 382.
withstanding further Iraqi army offensives (so that these guns would not fall into Iraqi hands). However, the guns were not, in fact, withdrawn until the Algiers Accord – which actually constitutes further proof that the Kurds were capable of fighting on and Iran’s army was aware of that.

When the Shah met Helms, he stated that the Kurds would be given one week to consider the situation, after which whoever wished to come to Iran or to stay in Iraq and fight or to surrender to the Iraqis could do so. The Kurds that would come to Iran would be allowed to bring their weapons but ultimately disarmed; then, he announced, after two weeks, the border would be ‘completely closed’. The Shah also told Helms that had he not done this, he might have been accused of having destroyed a chance of pulling the Iraqis out of the Soviet orbit – an odd detail, it would seem, since if anything the reverse would seem to have been the case. And again, we have to note that it concerns the USSR. Overall, the Shah’s reasons here are quite inconsistent and entirely unconvincing.

The Shah then arranged to meet Barzani together with Mahmoud Othman, Mohsin Dizaei and Shafiq Qazaz, on March 11, 1974. The Shah only reluctantly met Barzani, as, according to his Minister of Royal Court, ‘Naturally he was a little embarrassed to meet the man face to face’.

Indeed, given what he had done – was doing – one might easily imagine that he would feel a little awkward, that would be quite natural. But perhaps not. Othman believes that the Shah may have chosen this day (March 11) as a punishment to the Kurds for their declaration of the March 11, 1970 Accord with the Iraqi government, to which the Shah had strongly objected.

When the Shah met the Kurdish leaders, he spoke ‘very arrogantly’. He basically told them that the settlement was now a fait accompli and that Iraq had compromised regarding the Shatt al-Arab waterway. Othman, who was among those that met the Shah that day, recalls it thus:

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535 Quoted in 275. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to Iran (Helms).
536 For the Shah’s account, see ‘276. Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to Iran (Helms) to [...] National Security Affairs (Scowcroft)’, (FRUS, March 8, 1975).
We saw the Shah with Barzani in 1975. With regards to the Algiers Accord of 75, he told us face to face that, he said, in the past 42 years we [Iran] have had territorial problems with Iraq and no other Iraqi government has resolved this for us, not even that of Nuri Said. Saddam has come, and he is resolving it and I have accepted it. He told us face to face indirectly that you have lost, that is, you have become the sacrifice. He was straight forward in that, therefore, the matter [of Iran backing the Kurds until this point] was about interest [for Iran], it was not about pan-Iranism or any such thing, but some Iranian sources may think that way because they are not aware of the details.540

One obvious interpretation would seem to be that the Soviets had used their influence to broker a deal between Iraq and Iran – settling the freedom of navigation in the Shatt, an issue unresolved, despite the 1937 border treaty, since 1934 (hence the reference to 42 years) – and thereby establish their position in Iraq. Be that as it may, the Kurds were certainly the losers in the deal. For Othman, therefore, this was a clear-cut sell-out in return for Iran’s settling with Iraq; this is consistent with the account given by Dizae who also participated in the meeting.

There is one high-ranking source from the ICP citing other unidentified sources claiming that Kissinger came to Baghdad secretly before the Algiers Accord was arranged to meet with Saddam Hussein and, therefore, implying that the Accord had actually already been agreed upon as a result. Essentially, this implies that Kissinger was involved in the basic framing of the Accord.541 However, this researcher has not been able to verify that claim, which therefore is treated as such (i.e. uncorroborated, so no more than a claim). It should also be noted that Kissinger visited Iran on November 1, 1974 and met and Shah for over three hours in a private meeting attended only by the American ambassador to Iran; even Iran’s own Foreign Minister was excluded from this meeting.542

As the Kurdish leaders returned to Kurdistan, they decided to fight on without Iran, despite Iran having withdrawn its two artillery battalions and anti-aircraft batteries. However, a few days later, an Iranian representative visited the Kurds and informed them that Iran had agreed with Iraq for the latter to use Iranian territory to attack the Kurds from behind. According to Mohsin Dizaei, he had personally seen Iraqi military officers on the Iranian side of the border, close to Hacî Omeran, with maps and planning an offensive from Iran. Under these

540 Othman, in Telephone Interview B. (trans. by author)
circumstances, the Kurdish leadership took a majority decision to cease fighting, since continuation of the War in the present form would lead to unacceptable losses. It was thus decided that the struggle should be abandoned until resumption in the future, at a more favourable time. The issue was not only a military one, as the KDP also had the responsibility to care for large numbers of urban Kurdish families who had relocated to areas under its control, as mentioned (earlier).\(^{543}\)

Following the Accord, the CIA Director (William Colby) wrote to Kissinger and explained that the fundamental nature of US aid for the Iraqi Kurds was that it was channelled via the Iranians; this is how they disguised their relations with the Kurds. However, with the Shah scrupulously implementing the Accord ‘by complete cessation of assistance to Kurds’,\(^{544}\) the US faced a dilemma as to how to continue this effort, even assuming the Shah would permit it at all. And regardless, Colby stated, there was the ‘very serious question’ of whether it was ‘justifiable’ to continue.\(^{545}\) Colby also alluded to more desperate Kurdish pleas for help by the US in stating that the Shah’s strict adherence to the Accord was further reflected by the ‘impassioned character of Kurdish pleas to us for direct, unilateral, military and financial assistance’.\(^{546}\)

Subsequently, Colby recommended that the decision on the US relationship with the Kurds be delayed due to its complexity pending further study of the situation. He also proposed that since the Kurds had been ‘caught short’ and were ‘hurting badly’ by being abandoned by their ‘friends’ so abruptly, the US should take some measures intended to have a ‘calming effect’\(^{547}\) – although given the extent of the betrayal, it is hardly very cynical to note that such support promised to avert the possibility of the Kurds publicising the whole affair. Among the measures Colby proposed was, with the Shah’s consent, to still send the Kurds’ March payment, which, he noted, was also justified on humanitarian grounds.\(^{548}\)

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545 280. Message From the Central Intelligence Agency [...].
546 280. Message From the Central Intelligence Agency [...].
547 280. Message From the Central Intelligence Agency [...].
548 280. Message From the Central Intelligence Agency [...].
The agreement not only gave the Shah what he wanted (i.e. abrogation of the 1937 treaty), which no other Iraqi government since then had been prepared to negotiate, but it also strengthened both of Iran’s *de facto* and *de jure* prestige in the region as Saddam Hussein had now publicly agreed to Iran’s demands, as studied.\(^{549}\) For Saddam, of course, his Kurdish Issue was now dealt with.

Barzani wrote a letter to Kissinger on March 10\(^{th}\) pleading for the US to intervene, but in vain.\(^{550}\) Forwarding Barzani’s message to Kissinger, Helms suggested that ‘it may be desirable for you to send him some kind of comforting message’,\(^{551}\) still concerned, no doubt, about the risk of adverse publicity, because basically the deal had already been done.

Consequently, when replying to Barzani and stating that they would respond, Kissinger also agreed that ‘there would seem to be some responsibility not to cut them [the Kurds] off suddenly and completely’ but took no further action; nor did he attempt to do anything, apart from requesting Helms to ask the Shah ‘how Iran intends to handle its future relationship with the Kurds’.\(^ {552}\) In fact, some Peshmerga crossed the border and surrendered to Iran, some others to Iraq and some fled to Syria, while another faction went underground to renew the struggle at a later date. Finally, March was indeed the last month in which the US and Iran provided the Kurds with the monthly subsidy.\(^ {553}\)

In the meantime, with the Kurdish leadership having decided to abandon the war, Turkey moved troops to the border to prevent Kurds from crossing into Turkey. The UNHCR, the Dutch embassy and other actors approached Turkey to let in unarmed Kurds from Iraq before the two-week deadline given to the Kurds expired; these proved futile. Given the geography, some of the Kurds could make it to Turkey within that (two weeks) time but not to Iran. Even Iran’s own Foreign Minister (Khalatbari), the country that initially betrayed the Kurdish...
movement, described Turkey’s attitude here as ‘unreasonable and inhumane’.Iraq later executed some of the Kurds that had taken advantage of an amnesty and had surrendered. The Shah and Kissinger were personally aware of this; but when Kissinger was informed of it, he replied, ‘Well, it could be true. In fact, it is inevitable, sooner or later. It doesn’t surprise me’. The US was now more concerned about hiding the operation from the public than anything else.

According to Saddam Hussein, the conflict had cost the Iraqis some 10,000 troops. This is in addition to the misery and the loss that the conflict had caused the Kurds, of course, the exact scale of which may never be known. As a consequence, Kimche has noted that

The victorious Iraqi soldiers wreaked terrible vengeance on the abandoned Kurds. Hundreds were massacred; many thousands more were forcibly displaced from their homes and transported to camps in the arid south of the country while their own homes and villages were taken over by Iraqi Arabs.

Back in the US, by early November 1975, news of the covert Kurdish operation had already been leaked to the media and the House of Representatives established the House Select Committee on Intelligence (the Pike Committee) to investigate abuses by the US intelligence community. Throughout the whole affair, Israel officials, including the Prime Minister, Golda Meir, and Israel’s successive ambassadors to Washington petitioned the US and


555 ‘Secretary’s Staff Meeting; Attached to Decision Summary’, (DNSA, May 16, 1975).

556 See ‘299. Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence […] to (Kissinger)’, (FRUS, September 26, 1975). Also see ‘[NATO Event; Kurds in Iran; Thomas Morgan]’, (DNSA, July 17, 1975). ‘293. Memorandum From Rob Roy Ratiliff of the National Security Council […] Kissinger’, (FRUS, July 24, 1975).


559 See ‘301. Telegram From the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State’, (FRUS, November 3, 1975); ‘[Discussion with President Ford […]’, (DNSA, October 31, 1975).
Kissinger for more assistance to what Golda Meir called ‘our friends, the Kurds’,\textsuperscript{560} when she met Kissinger in Israel.

In fact, Israel had promised the Kurds that it would continue its supplies even if the Shah terminated his, that this would be via airdrops and even two locations were chosen (the Qasre and the Hirt plains). However, after the Algiers Accord, Israel too informed the Kurds that it could not fulfil its commitment due to strategic and practical obstacles. It was following this, with all doors closed to them, that the Kurdish leadership decided to officially abandon the struggle.\textsuperscript{561} Even countries like Jordan that had earlier promised support for the Kurds were implicit in the abandonment of the Kurds, specifically by mediating between Iran and Iraq with no regards for the Kurds’ fate. Such was the effect of the Cold War and regional politics in Kurdistan.

4.7 US Foreign Policy and the Iraqi Kurds in a Wider Context: From Nixon to Ford.

Patrick Kiely has observed that when Nixon became President in January 1969, he inherited at least three major issues. These were the achievement of parity of strategic missiles with the USSR, dealing with the Vietnam War and handling the implications of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.\textsuperscript{562} Through the Nixon Doctrine, the Administration sought to empower American allies, aiming to extricate the US from having to police communism. The way this was to be achieved was to extend military and economic aid to the allies, and Iran and Israel were among those that benefited. Meanwhile, Nixon pursued détente with the USSR. The purpose of simultaneously empowering allies while pursuing détente was to contain international communism while engaging in reconciliation with the USSR. Instead of US troops facing or confronting communist threats, therefore, US allies would be empowered to take on this role.\textsuperscript{563} Increased Soviet encroachment in Iraq and the reluctance of the US (under both Nixon and Ford), to become involved in backing the Iraqi Kurds in any meaningful way, then

\textsuperscript{560} ‘[Meeting with Israeli Officials; Includes Israeli Memorandum Entitled ‘The Situation in Kurdistan’],’ (DNSA, May 7, 1974). Also see e.g. ‘Discussion with Israeli Leaders in Jerusalem [...]’, (DNSA, November 7, 1974); ‘[Talk with Simcha Dinitz; Includes Tabs A and B; Tab C Not Included]’, (DNSA, December 23, 1974); ‘[Meeting with Israeli Ambassador Dinitz]’, (DNSA, March 21, 1974).


\textsuperscript{563} For more on the Nixon administration’s foreign policy, see Hahn, Peter L., Missions Accomplished? The United States and Iraq since World War I, (NY.; Oxford: OUP, 2012), pp. 102-08; Kaufman, A Concise History of U.S. Foreign Policy; Crabb, The Doctrines of American Foreign Policy: Their Meaning, Role, and Future pp. 278-324.
becoming involved but clandestinely, only to abandoning the Kurds after the Shah had (during Ford’s presidency), must also be viewed against the backdrop of external and internal issues facing the US in the Cold War context for a better understanding of the topic.

Foremost among these major issues was the Vietnam War, which had cost some 59,000 American lives. Internally, therefore, there was no appetite for war among the US public in 1975. Moreover, following the 1973 ceasefire and communist takeover of South Vietnam in 1975, Congress repealed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1971, overrode Nixon’s veto and passed the War Powers Act, which essentially required US presidents to consult with Congress before committing US troops to combat. In short, Congress reinstated its authority during Nixon’s presidency, and open war was a less easy option. The USSR and the US also signed SALT 1 in 1972 as part of détente, while Nixon was also facing a potential impeachment over the Watergate Scandal. This political context, internal and international – notwithstanding Nixon’s resignation in August 1974, may also help to explain why the US was unwilling or not in a position to escalate the Kurdish War in Iraq at the time, even against a Soviet ally (Iraq) and even if it had wanted to. In this Cold War context, therefore, with the US both pursuing détente with the USSR and committed to contain communism through its allies – and in combination with the (post-)Vietnam framing – it is understandable that Kissinger might have wanted to push the Ba’ath government but not to the extent of escalating to a full conflict with the USSR.

In relation to the Iraqi Kurds, as examined in this chapter, it was only from 1972 that the Nixon administration opted to back them. While this was primarily due to the Shah’s lobbying, it fits very well with the overall strategy of empowering US allies to contain communism by themselves in the Cold War framework. The Nixon administration essentially assisted the Kurds because this meant backing the Shah who in turn was making his case to challenge Soviet hegemony over Iraq and consequently containing Iraq itself as a potential Russian client. The Nixon administration never considered the Iraqi Kurds themselves as an ally, the evidence for which lies in the fact that once Iran turned its back on the Kurdish movement,

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564 For more on these issues see Kaufman, A Concise History of U.S. Foreign Policy; Crabb, The Doctrines of American Foreign Policy: Their Meaning, Role, and Future, pp. 278-324.
the Nixon administration simply did the same. Iran was the ally that the US wanted to support, as per the Nixon Doctrine, not the Kurds.

When the period before 1972 is considered, the Nixon administration, like others before it, refused to look favourably on Kurdish pleas. The question that then arises concerns why the Nixon administration did not back the Kurds before 1972. Fundamentally, the Nixon administration never considered the Iraqi Kurds as an ally, as stated, and therefore they did not directly benefit from the Nixon Doctrine of empowering US allies to confront communism by themselves. Indeed, the US only became involved in the Iraqi Kurd situation because the Shah convinced the Nixon administration that they needed to undermine Iraq’s threat to Iran and the wider region (and that the way to do this was to back the Kurds to weaken Iraq). This analysis thus shows the pivotal role of Iran in the matter, in its development as well as conclusion.

When Ford succeeded Nixon on August 9, 1974, he continued to view Iran as the central regional actor keeping the security of the Persian Gulf. Indeed, as Patrick Kiely has noted, ‘Economic and military cooperation expanded [with Iran] significantly during Ford’s tenure’. The US regarded Iran as an observation post from which it could keep watch over the Soviet Union in the Middle East and, together with Turkey, form a block against any southwards movement it envisaged. Similarly, the US or Nixon and Kissinger wanted the June 1973 Arab-Israeli War and its aftermath to eliminate Soviet influence in the region. The US backed Israel during the war and Kissinger initiated a DEFCON 3 nuclear alert in response to the Soviet threat of intervention. Kissinger’s ‘shuttle diplomacy’ had the same aim. Therefore, US backing for the Iraqi Kurds through the Shah of Iran fits neatly into this broader US policy of containing ‘international communism’ in the region.

Regarding Iraq, once US decision-makers learnt that Iraq had compromised with Iran via the Algiers Accord and that Iran no longer needed its Kurdish card, the US no longer saw the need for the Kurds to be an ‘open wound’, as Kissinger expressed it, in Iraq. Between 1972 and 1975, the US backed the Iraqi Kurds to support its allies in the region, which, in turn, was largely aimed at containing international communism. Additionally, Israel’s backing for the

566 For more on these issues and US relations with Iran during the Ford administration see Kiely, Patrick, Kiely, ‘Through Distorted Lenses’, pp. 46-49.
Iraqi Kurds was to keep the Iraqi army busy at home; the Iraqi army being preoccupied with the Kurdish War meant that Iraq was not able to meaningfully join its Arab neighbours against Israel.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has analysed the subject from 1971 to 1975. It looked at a number of significant Kurdish, Iraqi and regional events in the overall context of the Cold War and then examined the impact of these on the Iraqi Kurds. After presenting a background for the chapter, US reluctance to back anti-Baʾath elements to overthrow the Baʾath were considered, attempts in which the KDP under Mustafa Barzani was at the forefront. It was found that US policy in relation to the Kurds was partly determined by its desire not to become involved in their situation, directly or indirectly. Further, the US did not believe that this could realistically result in the establishment of a friendly government.

Following this, the strengthening of Soviet relations with Iraq was investigated and its implications for relations between Iran and the Kurds studied. It was shown that the Kurds used the USSR’s increased influence over Iraq and alliance with the Baʾath to attempt to persuade the US to step in and back anti-Baʾath forces (the Kurds in particular). Iran also perceived this and the likelihood of a stable and strong Iraq as a serious threat. The Shah of Iran, therefore, exerted all his efforts to convince the US to support the Kurds, even if this support were symbolic.

The Kurds wanted the US as a guarantor since they did not trust Iran. Iran’s purpose in all this was to keep trouble firmly on the Iraqi side of the border, essentially by conducting a proxy war through the Kurds so that Iraqi troops would not be able to direct their attention towards Iran or the Gulf. On Iran’s behest, therefore, and also as affected by Israel and Jordan, a symbolic US support was arranged for the Iraqi Kurds. The longstanding Kurdish goal of American patronage, as evidenced by Barzani’s numerous entreaties, appeared to be materialising. Consequently, limited numbers of arms and financial aid were funnelled to Kurdistan through Iran, originating from CIA stocks, Israel and Iran itself.

Iran, it has been argued, did everything it possibly could to ensure that the Kurds and the Baʾath did not reach a lasting peace. The sources show that when the Baʾath regime launched a total war on the Kurdish movement, the regime had total Soviet support (and there are
strong indications of direct soviet involvement in the initiation of this). By late 1974, however, Saddam Hussein’s military campaign in Kurdistan had become a failure; despite using all available means by the army, including Soviet military support, the campaign did not achieve its aims. It has been proposed that Saddam Hussein must have been convinced that overcoming the Kurds by military means was not achievable and therefore, fearing a backlash in Baghdad and with his own life on the line, he turned to a “Plan B”, which was to yield to the Shah in return for the Shah abandoning the Kurds. The role of the USSR in facilitating this for its own ends in the larger, northern Middle East Cold War picture has also been suggested; by helping to resolve the Iraqi problems with Iran and the Kurds, insofar as that was the case, Russia helped to secure the Ba’athist regime and thus its own position in Iraq.

Thus, Iran and Iraq agreed in the Algiers Accord of March 1975 to resolve their territorial issues, and Iran betrayed and abandoned the Kurds by sealing its border. The US did nothing to rescue the Kurds from this. Thus, faced with the prospect of an unsustainable war, the Kurdish leadership decided to abandon the struggle. It was also established that the purpose of Iran, the US and Israel backing the Iraqi Kurds in their final clash with the Iraqi government under the Ba’ath was to debilitate Iraq and for the Kurds to absorb Iraq’s energies so that it would not pose a threat to the interests of those countries and the region in general, while the Kurds themselves, of course, were striving for self-rule. As a result, all the parties involved had different aims, and the Iraqi Kurds were simply treated as a pawn by the regional powers, and then by the US from 1972. The effect of the Cold War and regional politics on the Iraqi Kurds, therefore, was dramatic. Essentially their fate was decided elsewhere and without their having a say in it. Thus, this chapter ended with a focus on US policy as a Cold War superpower under Nixon and Ford. The way the US behaved in all the above was found to be quite compatible with its global policies under these presidents. US behaviour and its involvement in this affair can be fairly well understood when its overall global foreign policy is considered – which is, of course, a pragmatic and functional judgement rather than a moral one.
Conclusion

Review

This thesis was initially embarked upon to address the question of whether or not the US had a policy towards the Iraqi Kurds during the time period covered (from 1958, the overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy and establishment of the Republic of Iraq to 1975, the signing of the Algiers Accord and end of the Kurdish September Revolution). However, as I worked through the primary materials collected for the purpose of this research, a process was initiated through which the focus – thus, the main research question and the thesis as a whole – evolved into one that sought to determine more generally the effect of the Cold War and regional politics on the Iraqi Kurds (in a political context, that is). This final work thus constitutes an analysis of that overarching research statement.

Regarding the research materials employed, large numbers of both primary and secondary sources have been used for this study. In particular, my intensive examination of voluminous primary sources is one reason why this work may be considered to have made innovative contributions to the field, as some of the data studied has only lately been declassified while other sources have not been previously introduced into the present context. In fact, it was a major challenge for me to integrate all this data into a single finished product and the limited space of this thesis.

The primary sources referred to included state archives from the United States, archives and other materials that are only available in the Kurdish language and state archives from the United Kingdom. Further, the Mitrokhin, and the diary of the Minister of Iran’s Royal Court were also consulted as primary USSR and Iranian sources, which were highly relevant and were in addition to secondary sources. This work has attempted to cross-reference the primary sources wherever possible and, given the advantage of the researcher’s native Kurdish language, to emphasise authoritative Kurdish sources, which have been largely neglected by much of the literature on the Kurds due to linguistic barriers. These included published memoirs and recorded audio-visual eyewitness reports and accounts along with a personal interview with Dr Mahmoud Othman, a member of the inner-circle of the Kurdish leadership (the audio-records of this interview are retained, i.e. they are in my possession).
These sources were in addition to other published materials, such as newspapers and the extensive English language literature that exists on the Kurds, on the Cold War and on Middle Eastern politics and related international relations. Additionally, as US policy was emphasised, the relevant literature on this was also included in one way or another (for background information, quotations from people involved, etc.).

This thesis consists of four chapters, in addition to an introduction and this conclusion. Taking the complexity of the subject into consideration, all efforts have been exerted to keep it as coherent and as focused as possible. To that end, the work has been organised chronologically, into four time periods (one for each chapter), within which a thematic approach has been employed, guided by the primary materials. Despite a clear structural organisation, however, it was inevitable that the sections and topics would have to overlap to an extent – and somewhat preferable. Sometimes, for example, backtracking to previously considered issues was employed to introduce and analyse themes, while at other times there were no sharp lines between one topic and another; indeed, the complexity of the subject and the fact that several actors had a stake in the subject studied meant that the various strands of this research had to be constantly interlinked.

Overall, this study has attempted to piece together several issues and perspectives in order to produce a larger picture. This thesis, therefore, has had to keep a balance between all these aspects in the presentation. Given that consideration, the following paragraphs detail the main concerns of each chapter in order to show contribution of each and, thereby, the collective findings.

The Introductory chapter started by presenting the subject for study and went on to explain the rationale behind the dating for the period of study in terms of the history of Iraq and the region in general and the Kurds and Iraqi Kurds in particular. It also presented the research question, a literature review, the justification for the research, a statement of primary sources and an overview of the structure. While reviewing the literature and the reasons why this subject remains under-represented, it was found that this gap has also been recognised by a number of scholars and that this research will thus be well placed in its field.

The core of the thesis started from Chapter One. This covered the years 1958-1963, although, as mentioned and like the following chapters, it covered issues outside of the allotted
timeframe. Chapter One started with a background of the Kurdish Issue from WWI to late 1963, with a focus from 1958. The attention here was largely on the Iraqi Kurds, as stipulated by the focus of the research. This background was essential so that the rest of the chapter could expand upon this by integrating the primary materials. The chapter showed how, from the early years of the Cold War, Iran and Turkey (both US allies) had inflated the risk of the Soviets sponsoring a Kurdish state and thus having indicating the potential for a profound Soviet gain in the region in relation to the Cold War. Iran, in particular, sought to convince US policymakers of Russia’s grand design, which was meant to give the Soviets a Kurdish land bridge to the Middle East once a Kurdish state was established as a result of the Soviet intercession and US allies, such as Iran, were dismembered. The US, it appears, really did believe that the USSR could destabilise the region by exploiting the Kurds.

The impact of the Iraqi Revolution of 1958 was then studied. In particular, it was demonstrated that this had a striking effect on Iran’s relations with the Iraqi Kurds. However, through the time analysed in this dissertation, Iran was not interested in the Iraqi Kurds winning any sort of autonomy or self-rule but simply wanted to exploit their needs in this regard so as to affect developments in Iraq and counteract Iraqi governments that it did not approve of, for instance, by presenting them to America as communists or (pro-Nasser) Arab nationalists.

It was also determined that another long-term effect of the revolution – following from its own linkage to the onset of hostilities in Kurdistan between its Peshmerga and the Iraqi army under the Qasim government (the September Revolution [Şorşî Eylûl] of 1961) – was for outside powers, such as the USSR and Egypt, to form relations with the Kurds in order to hold a “Kurdish card” in Iraq. The nature and type of the Russian backing was also investigated. Lastly, this chapter assessed US foreign policy from Truman to Kennedy, finding that the way the US viewed the (issue of the) Iraqi Kurds, as a strictly internal Iraqi matter, was quite compatible with the Truman and the Eisenhower Doctrines as well the policies of the Kennedy administration. Essentially ‘anti-communism’ was the overall US policy consideration under these presidents, so not only were the regional politics unfavourable for the Iraqi Kurds and their cause – due to nationalist and territorial integrity concerns as well as ethnic enmity – but US global policy also was unaccommodating – because the US viewed the Kurds in terms
of their potential to destabilise its Cold War allies of Iran and Turkey (as well as the post-Ottoman framework for the Middle East generally thus).

With regards to US policy, Chapter One argued that the US did have a policy on the Iraqi Kurdish Issue (that it was to be regarded as an internal Iraqi matter) and that this policy was well established among US officials, it was well developed and it was based on conscious decisions. One other factor that this chapter took into account was the fact that the Iraqi Kurds did not count as a state actor and thus were not accorded policy considerations equal to those of state actors. Under Barzani and the KDP, the Kurds themselves had essentially offered to pledge themselves as a US client in the Middle East were it to be assist them with money and arms. On its side, the US was well aware that the Kurds wanted democracy for Iraq and autonomy for Kurdistan.

Chapter Two then proceeded to cover the subject from 1963 to 1965. After a background for the period, the Ba’athists’ putsch of February 1963 was examined in the context of this research. Here, it was found that the US essentially sacrificed the Kurds in order to win the favour of the Ba’ath government and pull it towards the West’s side in the Cold War. Keeping “international communism” out of Iraq was the priority here for the US, and the Kurds were expendable. In fact, this chapter asserted, the US was oversensitive in its worries about offending the Ba’ath government in relation to the Kurds. For example, the Kennedy administration went so far as to provide Baghdad with ammunitions to be used against the Kurds. Of course, Cold War politics was the rationale.

This chapter also investigate the position of the Iraqi Kurds as, therefore, not only unfortunate victims of the Cold War but also caught in a bitter regional power rivalry between what can be described as Arab and Persian nationalisms. Here, it was US ally the Shah of Iran who exploited the Iraqi Kurds. The primary function of the Kurds for Iran was as a means through which to challenge the government in Baghdad, then comprising the pro-Nasser nationalists, who had overthrown the (first) Ba’ath regime in November 1963 (the starting marker for the time period covered by this chapter). Similarly, Egypt and Nasser also developed their relations with the Iraqi Kurds, basically for the same reason as Iran, to influence the course of politics in Iraq. The relationship of all external powers with the Iraqi Kurds, therefore, was functional, to instrumentalise them in order to shape the politics of Iraq.
Being a much smaller (non-state) actor, and being landlocked, it was argued, the Iraqi Kurdish movement had little choice but to cooperate with any power that wanted to assist them in their resistance to Baghdad (which meant, essentially, their fight against racial and cultural assimilation into Arab Iraq). Outside powers, therefore, exploited this for their own advantage. This however, is not to say that they – and the Iraqi state also – did not have their own, complex considerations. On the contrary, further to local rivalries, they were also regional players in the Cold War. Iran, for instance, was shown to have been partly motivated also by the need to circumvent Soviet backing for the Kurds in indirectly seeking to persuade the Kurdish leadership to go for it for help (the aim was not to leave an opening that the USSR could fill).

Lastly, this chapter also argued that the US interest in containing communism and securing its allies was in overall tension with the Iraqi Kurds’ ambitions. The US – during this time, under Kennedy and Johnson – saw the Kurds as potentially destabilising its regional allies Iran and Turkey. Therefore, the interests of its allies and keeping the Soviets out was important for the US, not the situation or ambitions of the Iraqi Kurds themselves. The attempts of Barzani emissaries to entreaty the US – as reported in this and other chapters – thus fell on deaf ears. Those ears, moreover, were relatively low level; the Kurds were not given access to the higher reaches of the successive US administrations. Essentially, they were kept at a distance, in order that Washington was not to be seen as in any way compromised in its important relations (with its regional allies).

Chapter Three focused on events and developments from 1965 to 1971. After an introduction and background for the period, it examined how the Iraqi Kurds tried in vain in 1965 to secure the backing of the US. The reasons behind US reluctance to do so were confirmed (the US wanted to avoid offending regional powers and sought not to give a reason for the Soviets to meddle) as was, therefore, this as an effect of the Cold War on the Iraqi Kurds (that the latter were victims of the former). In fact, rather than garnering support, the Kurds saw the US State Department succumb to Iraqi demands later in 1965 for it to intervene to stop the flow of arms from Iran that was supplying them in their ongoing military conflict with Baghdad. Further, Kurdish appealed to the US, multiple times and through multiple channels, were also recorded here.
Next, this chapter found a significant link between Britain’s withdrawal from the Gulf and the position of the Iraqi Kurds. Basically, the British withdrawal in 1971 left a power vacuum that resulted in an Iranian sense of regional instability which in turn led to the Shah’s further support for the Iraqi Kurds; in essence, Iran endeavoured to ensure that the Iraqi government and military were kept busy in Kurdistan and thus unable to consider adventures elsewhere, such in as the Gulf. Thus also, Iran desperately tried to prevent the KDP under Barzani from signing a peace agreement with the second Ba’ath government, which had come to power in 1968 and was seeking to resolve its Kurdish Issue. The Iranian attempt failed, and the agreement was eventually to become the March 11, 1970 Accord. Israel had also offered to intensify its military backing for the Kurds if they did not sign the agreement. Israel was another regional power named in this thesis as basically using the Kurds for its own, strategic benefit, essentially by preoccupying Iraq. In this case, the aim was to ensure that the Iraqi army could not join other Arab countries against it, as indeed was the case in the 1967 war (in which Iraqi forces did not significantly contribute).

This chapter also investigated the growing influence of the USSR. While the US had feared Soviet influence in the region through the Kurds as a loose cannon, as it were, the change of government in Baghdad meant that this actually transpired at state level, through Iraq. The crucial role of the USSR in bringing the KDP together with the Ba’ath government for the agreement was thus emphasised here. The pressure the Soviets brought to bear on all parties was detailed, to the extent that the Accord could be said to have been forced through and sponsored by the USSR – for its own Cold War interests, of course.

US policy regarding the Iraqi Kurds by 1970 had essentially seen no change. There was simply no incentive for the US to intervene in the Kurdish Issue in any positive way; on the contrary, this would have offended Iraq, Iran and Turkey, in addition to the Arab world. This was also while the USSR and Nasser (before his death) preferred a peaceful solution to the Kurdish Issue in Iraq, and why the Soviets acted to ensure this; the US, however, was not willing to intervene for a peaceful solution, primarily directed by the duplicitous considerations of Iran, which wanted to foment Kurdish ambitions in Iraq but only to a certain point, to occupy Baghdad, and not to give succour to any wider Kurdish ambitions (i.e. inside Iran itself).
This chapter details Barzani’s several attempts to have President Johnson use his influence to resolve the Kurdish Issue within Iraq and to also prevent the supply of arms to Baghdad. It was clearly established that Barzani conveyed the Kurds’ ambition for the establishment and promotion of democracy and human rights, that he did not simply ask the US to aid the Kurds militarily or economically but also asked for assistance in finding a just and peaceful solution. It was found here also that the US rejection of the Iraqi Kurds’ pleas essentially came from the White House.

Moreover, the failure of the totalitarian nature of the Ba’ath regime to instigate a change in US Kurdish policy was also established in this chapter. Such a change could have been expected, but it did not materialise. Even though the Ba’ath search for a bogeyman included a hostile attitude towards America and its regional allies, the US even refused to back joint initiatives, which included the Kurds, to overthrow the Ba’ath (mainly because it did not see the likelihood of a replacement government to deal with the US and its interests any better than the Ba’ath).

At the same time, it was found, the US did not mislead the Kurds by giving them false hope. Nevertheless, it was revealed that the US did keep the Kurds on friendly terms while it was also prepared to sacrifice them for good relations with the regional state actors. Thus, Iraq’s brutal actions in Kurdistan, such as indiscriminate bombings and the use of banned weapons, had no noticeable effect on the US position; strong evidence for all these findings was produced. It was also shown how, by late 1971, the US was already fully aware that the Iraqi regime was a totalitarian one, that Iraq was backtracking on the March 1970 Accord and that this would not last long – none of which had any effect on US policy regarding the Iraqi Kurds.

In Chapter Four, which explored the subject from 1971 to 1975, the failure of the Kurds to convince the US in backing an anti-Ba’ath initiative to topple the Ba’ath – or rather, the US reluctance to entangle itself in this – was analysed. This was in addition to Kurdish demands and plans for a democratic Iraq, which also failed to induce any support from the US, now under the Nixon administration. The reasons behind all these and the policies pursued by the US were thoroughly determined – essentially as unchanged.

This chapter then moved on to explore the strengthening of relations between the USSR and Iraq and the impact of this. Crucially, it showed that this rapprochement failed to raise alarm
signals in the US, mainly because US diplomats still believed that Iraq’s internal instability (the Kurdish War, as it is named here) would prevent it from posing a threat in the region. Iran was considerably less convinced of this, however – and correctly so, in that although the USSR enjoyed cordial relations with the Kurdish leadership, as the Kremlin-Ba’athist relationship solidified, the Kurds were gradually side-lined by the Soviets. Barzani’s faith in the Soviets faded, and his messages to the US became more desperate. The chapter then moved on to scrutinise how, from 1972, Barzani responded to the Soviet backing of the Ba’athists in Baghdad.

Barzani, it was shown, sought to persuade Iran and Jordan of the dangers that the Soviet influence could pose. It described how the USSR had pressed the KDP to join a coalition government with the Ba’ath and the ICP and how, therefore, Barzani was stuck between joining this government or winning sufficient support outside of Iraq in the case of a resumption of hostilities. For Barzani and the KDP, the Ba’ath was untrustworthy and over time would seek to control all of Kurdistan, while rejecting the Soviet proposal would inevitably lead to renewal of the Kurdish War. This thesis concurred with Barzani’s assessment in the light of the evidence consulted.

Barzani made one final direct appeal to the US and also to Iran, Jordan and indirectly Israel to convince the US of the seriousness of the situation. Iran in particular advanced Barzani’s argument with the Nixon administration for why it was necessary for the US to receive his petition favourably. Consequently, in August 1972, the Nixon administration finally agreed that the US would receive a Kurdish representation at a high level. As a result of this, it provided ordnance and financial assistance to the Kurdish movement under Barzani. The chapter demonstrated how the Shah and Kissinger were the key figures in this decision.

The purpose of the pivot to the Kurds, it was shown, was again essentially to “absorb” Iraq’s energies and limit its capacity for offensive action abroad. This was essentially, the Iranian agenda. If anything, Iran was even more highly motivated to prevent a “national front” government comprising the KDP and ICP with the Ba’ath than it had been to prevent the 1970 Accord. In conjunction with this and in reference to the Cold War, however, Kissinger also wanted to make the cost of the Soviet move in Iraq so high that that it would come to consider this, and consequently Middle Eastern incursions generally, not to be worth the high price
paid. In his own words, Kissinger wanted the Kurds to be strong enough to ‘be an open wound in Iraq’, constantly sucking in Soviet resources (the parallel with Vietnam is manifest).

This chapter then examined how the Kurdish War was reignited from August 1974 by the Iraq army’s total assault on KDP-held areas of Iraqi Kurdistan. It covered the various actors’ interests in this, emphasising the absolutely crucial role of Iran, ultimately, in closing the border and cutting off supplies to the Kurds. The chapter went on to look at the events that led up to the Algiers Accord of March 1975 in what was, indeed, a huge betrayal of the Kurds by Iran, and also the US.

Essentially, it can be inferred that it was lack of good relations between Iran and Iraq that had originally led the Shah of Iran to support the Kurds. However, the Shah and also Jordan sold this as a Cold War and a regional security issue to the Nixon administration and thus managed to involve the US. The US was primarily involved to contain and eventually reduce the Soviet influence in Iraq and thus, opportunistically, in the Middle East, too. It thus became involved behind the scenes in empowering one of its allies (Iran) to stand up to what it saw as the communist threat. As related to the Cold War, therefore, this was in line with the Nixon Doctrine and then later, after 1974, with the US policy under Ford.

It could be contended that the Shah not only misled and sold the Kurdish national liberation movement but it also misled and used the US to advance Iran’s interests with Iraq. The Kurds also insisted on the US involvement if they were to reject Soviet demands of the Kurds to join the coalition government. It is suggested that the timing of the change in the Shah’s position – following a visit to Moscow and prior to its effective declaration in Washington – indicates the USSR as instrumental in the Iranian leader’s volte face; basically, it would appear, Russia was among those that brokered a deal between Iraq and Iran in which both parties gained – the latter in relation to a longstanding territorial dispute with its neighbour and the former through a resolution by force of its Kurdish Issue – for a while, at least. This is not to dismiss the role of the other actors that were mentioned. The US, one may conclude, was the loser in this Cold War game, and the Kurds paid the price, for all.

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Chapter Four also challenged and dismissed one-sided suggestions that the Shah had no choice but to betray the Kurds. On the contrary, Iraq’s military campaign in Kurdistan was shown to be unsuccessful, with all-out war backed by the USSR failing to dislodge the autonomy-seeking Kurds from their mountain strongholds, who were even growing in confidence at the end. Indeed, it was suggested, the continuation of the conflict may have well brought about the end of Saddam Hussein’s political career as it had done to other Iraqi leaders before, and the reason that Saddam Hussein had to yield to the Shah’s territorial demands was precisely because of Iraq’s military failure. Overall, the multi-sourced evidence presented overwhelmingly supports counter arguments to the idea that the Shah had no other choice but to betray the Kurds.

In backing the Iraqi Kurds from 1972 to 1975, albeit rather lightly in material terms and highly covertly through the CIA, the US, as a Cold War superpower, had three fundamental objectives: to contain and punish Iraq as well as making this a lesson to other Arab states; to counter and ultimately smoke the Soviets out of Iraq and the Middle East; and to support an ally in need (Iran). This chapter substantiated these as Kissinger’s views at the time. Lastly, the overarching global foreign policies of the Nixon and Ford administrations were studied, and the Iraqi Kurds’ place in these identified. What this chapter established in terms of the Nixon administration’s backing for Iran and ultimately (covertly) the Iraqi Kurds, it was explained, was in accordance with the broader US foreign policy of the time, namely, to back its allies to face communism by themselves as opposed to having US troops take up this role.

Summary

Overall, this study has addressed the main research question that it embarked upon to address and by consulting a large pool of archival material from a variety of different sources. It can claim to be among the leading works in the field to make use of a large volume of diverse sources, including essential Kurdish sources. In fact, not all the sources and materials that have been explored are mentioned in the thesis, due to the impracticality of this (whenever an argument is drawn from elsewhere, it is, of course, fully attributed).

The research statement expressed as the intention of the thesis that of showing the effects of the Cold War and regional politics on the Iraqi Kurds in a political context between the years 1958 and 1975. This thesis thus accomplished what it set out to achieve. In so doing, it
examined various issues suggested by the primary sources as connected to the research question. In that sense, it may be said to have been source-led. Among the issues indicated were internal Iraqi and regional Middle Eastern politics in complex combinations with Cold War calculations. Overall, this thesis, has substantively determined that the combined effect of these factors on the Iraqi Kurds was such that their political fate was essentially decided outside of Kurdistan – and somewhat outside of Iraq even – with little regard (if any) to the wishes of the people there.

US involvement in the history of the Iraqi Kurdish struggle during this period has been shown to be determined by Cold War considerations as they played out in the regional context, mostly through a policy of sympathetic disengagement, and at the end through a failed covert support. The US policy towards the Iraqi Kurds was also dependent on what was happening in Baghdad, although not, it is suggested, sufficiently well when the USSR started to gain influence there (i.e. during the years that the second Ba’ath government established itself).

Iran in particular was found to be a pivotal player in all the above – and this while Israeli (and possibly Jordanian) officials sought to advance the Kurdish Issue with US officials, in particular in the post-1970 period to the Algiers Accord of March 1975. This thesis has offered an intricately detailed account of these aspects of the research in depicting the regional dimension of the Iraqi Kurdish Issue in the Middle East and how various powers attempted to exploit it to advance their own interests in the area – successfully, in the end, which led to a quite tragic conclusion in 1975. Finally, the limitations of the thesis should be recognised, largely imposed by its own defined scope and considerations of space.
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Note: All translations of material quoted from interviews and in videos made by the author; Latin alphabet transliterations of Kurdish (Sorani) language titles made using the open-access software available at http://chawg.org/kurdi-nus/.

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