

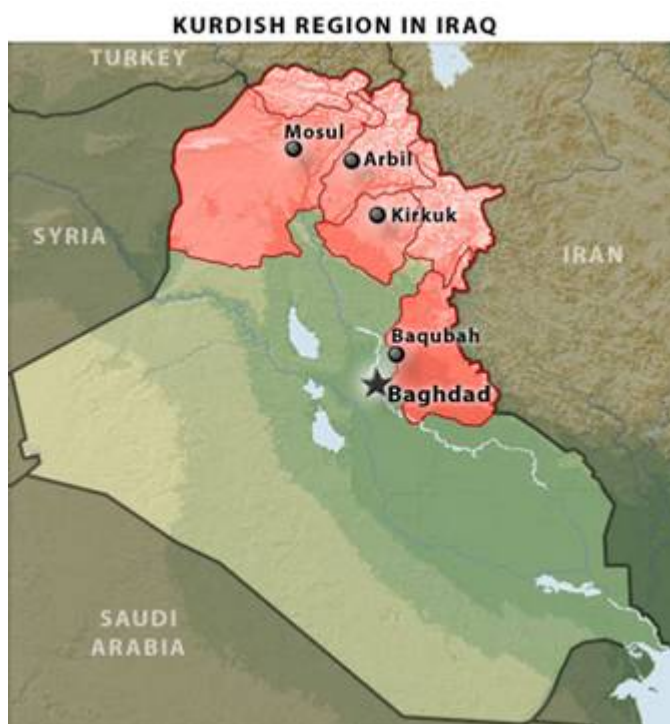
# The “Great Kurdistan” threat

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Numbering 30 millions, Kurds are distributed over four countries, Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. In Iraq, Massud Bargain and Jalal Talabani are said to be in a position to declare the independence of Kurdistan. The map of the new State as submitted last July to the “*National Assembly*” comprises territories over which the Kurds cannot have any claim...but which are oil-soaked. No doubt that such a “*Great Kurdistan*” if unilaterally founded would generate a string of conflicts which will destabilize the whole of the Middle East. Nobody *save the United States and Israel* has nothing to gain, least of all, the Kurds.

The 1920 Treaty of Sevres, art 62, *repealed by the Lausanne Treaty in July 1923*, made provision for “*local self-rule*” of territories “*where the Kurdish element was dominant*”. A map of Kurdistan, which could be to-day labelled as “*the Very Large Kurdistan*” and was handed over at Sevres by the Kurdish delegation extended from the coastline of the Mediterranean to the Arab Gulf....Something totally unacceptable for the big powers of the days –*France, Great Britain*– for Turkey, the Arabs and the Armenians who claim lands which the Kurds wished to lay their hands on.

In Mesopotamia, it incorporated the Willayet of Mossul, the Sindjar close to the Syrian border, the Sulimaniya region, Kirkuk and stopped at Qanaqin, in the north-east of Baghdad

on the border with Persia. As an answer to that claim, the British planned to set up a Kurdish kingdom in the north of the Mossul Willayet only. In doing so they intended to undermine the Turks who had their eyes locked on Mossul. The project was abandoned after the creation of Iraq (1) because the north of Iraq had revealed huge oil resources.

## Kurdish revolts in Iraq

Ever since all Kurdish revolts in Iraq have erupted in the name of home rule but the question of the administrative borders has scarcely been tackled.

For the *pro-British Prime Minister Nouri Said, born by a Kurdish mother*, home rule was not the prime goal of the insurgents. In October 1930, he reported the results of talks with them to the High Commissioner in Baghdad : " *First, it was a question of guarantees ...then the Kurds showed their discontent at the existing administration,...then they demanded a quasi autonomy and now it comes to secession*"(2).

Never during the Ottoman Empire has Iraqi Kurdistan existed as a State in the Western sense of the word. There were Kurdish principalities more or less dependent on the Sultan in Istanbul, but they covered a very small part of Kurdistan.

The Sheikh Mahmud Berzendji, self-proclaimed "*humkudar*" (*king*) of Kurdistan in 1922 ruled over the Sulumanyia region and the Kirkuk members of his council, *actually his henchmen*– were all...Turkmen. His rebellion was crashed in a heavy-handed manner by the British and he was deported to the south of Iraq.

Another revolt in 1931: Sheikh Ahmed Barzani, – *a colourful man who had in mind to go over to Christianity with his tribe*– succeeded in gaining control of a territory stretching from the Turkish border to Aqra, in the north of Mossul. The RAF shelled his HQ and he fled to Turkey.

His brother, Mustapha Barzani took over and went to Iran with over a thousand fighters eager to assist the small Republic of Mahabad born on January 22, 1946. Deserted by its Soviet ally, Mahabad fell less than a year later. Its President Qazi Muhammad was sentenced to death and hanged. Mustapha Barzani took shelter in the Soviet Union.

## **Mustapha Barzani " Kassem's Soldier"**

Barzani's return to Baghdad eleven years later, after the overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy by General Abdel Karim Kassem was a triumph. Several Kurdish ministers among them Sheikh Mahmud's son joined the government. Against the commitment that the Kurds "national rights" within the "Iraqi entity" would be guaranteed alongside with the publishing of Kurdish newspapers, Barzani branded himself " Kassem's Soldier" and helped the "*Zaim*" (*the Leader*) as Kassem was named to repress in a bloodbath an Arab nationalist revolt led by Colonel Abdel Wahab Chawaf in Mossul. The colonel was given the fatal blow on his hospital bed. Four hundred of his followers – in particular Shammar Beduins – were massacred in a mosque by Kurdish militias and the "People's Resistance Forces".

But Barzani's support went farther. In May 1959, he lent a hand to the Iraqi army in quashing a revolt of Kurds chiefs in the Rawanduz area. More than 24 000 Kurds fled to Turkey and Iran!

Relationships between Barzani and General Kassem deteriorated after a long stay of Barzani in Moscow, the Soviets signalling thus that they did not appreciate the “Zaim” decision to evict the Iraqi Communist Party from power. Once Barzani back in the mountains, the war flared up again. However, the demands that he put forward to Kassem in March 1962 were strangely mild. They dealt with the opening of schools, agricultural and industrial development, and the recognition of the Kurdish language. No question of self-rule or borders.

### **Self-rule demands**

On February 8th,, 1963, the Baathists and the Nasserians toppled Kassem and Abdul Salam Aref came to power. On March 4th,1963, Barzani handed over a list of claims with an ultimatum to a delegation from Baghdad at the meeting of Kani Maran (the Snakes spring) in which he made a demand for self-rule for a region composed of the *liwas* (*provinces*) of Sulamayia, Kirkuk, Arbil and the districts of the *liwas* of Mossul and Diyala as well as the share-out of the oil income among Arabs and Kurds. If this was rejected, he threatened to resume the fighting within three days.

As foreseen, Baghdad did not meet the unrealistic demands of Barzani which was what he wanted. General Aref however did concede to the “national rights of the Kurdish people” on the basis of decentralisation. It was a tremendous progress given the then political environment in the Middle East. However, the bidding went up. In April 1963, Jalal Talabani, head of the progressive current within the Democratic Party of Kurdistan, demanded the replacement of Iraq by a bi-national State. For Baghdad, it was a provocation. The Kurds blew up oil installations in Kirkuk !

In November 1963, Aref removed the Baathists from power and Barzani’s claims suddenly became less urgent. The DPK accused him of softening and Talabani had to run away to Iran. His followers were chased by Obeidollah Barzani.

In 1964, new turnabout: Mustapha Barzani rejected the return of “liberated zones” under the control of Baghdad. He concluded a secret alliance with the Shah of Iran, the financial and military assistance of which – *as well as the United States’ and Israel’* – enabled him to control a mountainous territory from the Syrian border to Qabaqin , leaving out the big Kurdish cities. Jalal Talabani sided with Baghdad and took part with his Kurdish units of mercenaries in the battle of Hendrin Mount (2875m) against Idriss Barzani and his 1700 pershmergas.

### **Self-rule for the Kurds in the offing**

On July 1968, 17, General Abdel Rahman Aref –*who took over after the death of his brother in a helicopter crash*- is overthrown. The Baath led by General Hassan al Bakr came to power and as a start, decided to support Jalal Talabani who was hunting down the Barzanists for the Baathists. ...The fighting was fierce against the background of the latent Iraq-Iranian conflict until Saddam Hussein then Vice President of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) was put in charge of negotiating with the insurgents.

On March 1970, 11 Arabs and Kurds reached a historical agreement whereby self-rule would be granted, within four years, to governorates inhabited *mainly* by Kurds. The Kurdish language was to become one of the official language along with Arabic in the autonomous

region, the Vice President of the Republic of Iraq had to be a Kurd and the mercenary units of Talabani, be decommissioned. At last, the DPK was allowed to resume its activities and publish his mouthpiece "*Al Taakki*".

During the four ensuing years, the administrative borderline and the statute of the autonomous region were heatedly discussed by Saddam Hussein and the DPK. Idriss Barzani, in the name of his father, using a XVIIIth century map demanded the integration to the future autonomous region of the Sindjar *-including the Aïn Zaleh oilfield-* Kirkuk and Kanaqin. Saddam Hussein could not agree to granting territorial rights to Kurds in the regions where they did not compose the majority of inhabitants, even it had been so in the past (3).

Finally, the selected governorates were: Dohuk, Arbil, Sulimayia. Kirkuk governorate with its numerous "*multiethnic sectors*" that is composed of "*several non-Kurdish minorities, such as the Turkmen*"- was excluded from the blueprint for an autonomous province.

### **The Autonomous Region of Kurdistan**

Despite this obvious progress, Mustapha Barzani held his ground as he feared that the autonomy would jeopardize the power of the feudal chiefs which the peasants served like in the Middle Ages. He certainly did not favour the implementation in Kurdistan of the agrarian reform carried out in the rest of the country. As usual, he bid further by reiterating his demand over Kirkuk and the share-out of oil income in relation with the number of people in those regions. Financial autonomy he said is more vital than administrative autonomy. Saddam Hussein refused again saying that a State has to treat all regions equally in terms of development regardless of the number of its inhabitants. For Saddam Hussein, Barzani spoke of a confederation no longer of a autonomy.

The signing of the Iraqi-Soviet friendship Treaty in April 1972 and the nationalisation of the *Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC)* brought about a change and gave Barzani an other opportunity to resume the fighting. As soon as May 1972, the CIA covertly financed his activities. Therefore, when on March, 11th, 1974, self-rule was granted to the Kurds, he dispelled it. He later acknowledged before Paul Balta, journalist with *Le Monde*, : "*that Israel, the Shah of Iran and the United States had strongly convinced him to refuse the agreement in the belief that the Kurds would launch a guerrilla warfare to weaken Saddam Hussein whose modernisation plan for Iraq was a serious concern for the United States and their great ally Israel*" (4). In an interview with the *Washington Post*, June 22, 1973, he pledged to serve the US policy in the region and if the US aid was "*substantial*" "*to take control of the Kirkuk oilfields and entrust their exploitation to an US company*". According to the 1975 Pike Report of the CIA, he was prepared to register Kurdistan as the 51th State of the United States!

The DPK split. Obeidallah Barzani, "sell out" for his father was tempted by the autonomy experience as negotiated and was therefore made minister of State in April 1974. Several members of the DPK politburo set up a rival party in Baghdad and until April 2003, the question of the Kurdistan borders lie dormant.

The Kurdish insurgency held its ground up to the Algiers Agreement signed by Saddam Hussein and the Shah whereby they secretly agreed to stop supporting their respective opposition groups. Within a short period, the Kurdish guerrilla collapsed. Mustapha Barzani died of a cancer in the US where he has taken up residence with his son.

## **De facto independence**

With the outbreak of the First Gulf War (1980-1988) so called Iraq-Iran War, the insurgency was afresh but the repression is horrendous. With the Anfal operation of Ali Hass Al Majidi, a security zone is secured along the borders: villages are destroyed and their population displaced and regrouped. Every encroachment of the Iranian army is met with combat gas by each warring side like at the very controversial battle of Hallabja. All through, the regional government based in Arbil kept on his normal activities.

After the cease-fire signed by Iran on July 18th, 1988, the lull was short-lived. Iraqi divisions entered Koweit in August 1990, and this led to the Second Gulf War and to the setting up in April 1991 of an illegitimate free-zone north of the 36th parallel. Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani were free to do as they pleased for the next 13 years.

## **The unacceptable borders of the Iraqi “Great Kurdistan”**

To-day, Barzani’s son, is the President of the Autonomous Region and Jala Talabani , the “*President of the Republic*”. They have for a while kept their squabbling down and have annexed lands outside the Autonomous Region. They do not have to fear the Iraqi army, dismantled by Paul Bremer and they forbid any military force made up of Arabs to enter the region under their grip. Their militias, trained, armed and supported by the Americans and the Israelis are ready to seize by force Kirkuk, the Sindjar and Qanaqin.

The map as submitted to the National Assembly in July 2005 by Mullah Bakhtiyar, member of the PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) comprises the whole governorate of Nineveh, that is to say Mossul, Tell Afar (5% of Kurds, 75% of Turkmen), the Sindjar (Yezidi) and a large portion of the Djezire plateau, Kirkuk and Tuz Kurmatu –*the whole of the Turkmeneli, Turkmen country*– then it cuts across Baqubah, moves around Baghdad, fifteen kms north, then down to the south-east to Jassan and Badra on the border with Iran. The mountain range of Hamrin serves as a boundary in the north between Arabs and Kurds. This seems to be not enough for some Kurdish fundamentalists who argue that Salah Eddine (Saladin) being born in Tikrit (south of Hamrin) means that the town was Kurdish.

The drawing of Kurdistan based on “historical and geographical facts” according to Bakhtiyar was approved by the Kurdish Parliament. The Kurdish people, he said, may be willing to discuss privileges or ministerial functions, but the borders of Kurdistan are a line not be crossed. (5). The Kurdish leaders might as well consider that all Kurds living in Iraq outside Kurdistan be under the jurisdiction of the Kurdish State and regarded as privileged citizens as requested by Barzani in his counter-proposal on the autonomous region project.

Jalal Talabani has put forward to the Turkmen an autonomous plan (7)...within the would-be State of Kurdistan but the mistrust is there because lands which would be allotted to them were not mentioned. In the “*Great Kurdistan*” Project, Yezidis and Shabaks (8) who are neither Kurds nor Arabs in their opinion are being turned into “Kurds”. Assyrians are labelled Kurds because they speak the language and the Chaldeans are said to be Arabs, for the opposite reason, as if to mean that the religious schism between them bears ethnical roots.

Barzani and Talabani are asking too much. They should be satisfied with their own territory and embark on long-pending social reforms. Otherwise, they can just expect more riots and



violence as in Halabja last March where demonstrators destroyed a shrine.

Who can really believe that Arabs and Turkmen will ratify the policy of *fait accompli* ? They will not be ripped off their national rights or of their lands. There will be more wars and the American and Israeli 'friends' may not always be prepared to answer the call of the feudal Kurds.

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**Map : Strafor.com** (1) Alerte au Kurdistan, by Edouard Sablier - Le Monde, 26/9/61 - (2) Lettre du 18 octobre 1930, source : *Foreign Office* 371 14 523, Chris Kutschera, Le mouvement national kurde, Flammarion, 1979 - (3) Compte rendu des négociations - Exposé de Saddam Hussein, le 11 mars 1975 - Propos sur les problèmes actuels, Editions Ath-Thawra - Bagdad (*sans date*) - (4) Le projet politique des Etats-Unis n'est-il pas d'atomiser le Proche-Orient ? Paul Balta interview by Saïd Branine (26/3/03)

[http://www.oumma.com/article.php3?id\\_article=593&var\\_recherche=paul+balta](http://www.oumma.com/article.php3?id_article=593&var_recherche=paul+balta)

(5) Kurdish leaders redrawn map with larger Kurdistan. (6) L'Irak nouveau et le problème kurde, by Aziz El Hadj, Ed. Khayat, 1977 - (7) The New Anatolian (30/1/06) - (8) Iraq's Shabaks are being oppressed by Kurds, by Dr. Hunain Al-Qaddo.

[Http://web.krg.org/articles/article\\_print.asp?ArticleNr=4744](http://web.krg.org/articles/article_print.asp?ArticleNr=4744)

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