

KURDISTAN: IMPACT ON UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**KURDISTAN:
IMPACT ON UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY FOR THE MIDDLE EAST**

by

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ABSTRACT

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KURDISTAN: IMPACT ON UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

This paper explores the continual issues confronted by the United States' (U.S.) involvement in the Middle East and the Kurdish nation. Kurdish nationalism presents U.S. policy makers with a long-standing dilemma. The volatile, unstructured, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environment exposes the conflict between our long-term values-based interest in promoting democracy and self-determination and our more immediate interest in peace, security, and regional stability in the Middle East. This is neither a new problem nor is it likely to be easily resolved in the near future.

The crucible of the Middle East applied the heat and pressure that forged the collective experience of the Kurdish nation over several thousand years. Most Western historians and theologians portray the Middle East as the center of most, if not all, the major events in the early portion of the world's history. The essence of the region is one of continual innovation, turmoil, developments, and a link to history that is both inclusive of multiple cultures and yet extremely personal to many people of specific religious and ethnic heritage.

The struggle for recognition by the Kurds across the Middle East continues to this very day. An ethnic Kurd today bears the historical scars and weight of the struggle to gain recognition as if all the events occurred to each person during their lifetime. In order to properly assess the deep, emotional intensity associated with the Kurdish nation's plight throughout the Middle East, a thorough understanding of that history is critical.

The United States (U.S.) remains deeply involved in current military, economic, and diplomatic activities throughout the region and has been engaged in these types of activities for decades. The U.S. is not only concerned with specific national interests, but interests that have far reaching effects for multiple nations within the international community. The U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) produced in May of 2010 identifies major enduring national interests as “Security, International Order and Values.”¹ Maintaining international order requires providing that security while executing operations that advance and are consistent with our values. President Obama identified the foundation of his strategic approach to those national interests as comprehensive engagement on a worldwide basis.² The NSS further defines the qualities of the engagements as “both strategic and beyond near-term threats.”³ Ensuring the efforts of U.S. policy continues to be effective in the Middle East requires convincing Turkey, Iran, Iraq and the Kurdish Regional Government to remain focused on long-term and mutually beneficial strategic interests.

This thesis will examine the conditions and relevant factors which shaped the development of the unique divisions of the Kurdish nation and how they impact the current environment of the Middle East. It will analyze the current relationship of the Kurds to the Middle East states of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq. The objective of this paper is to analyze potential U.S. policy options in the Middle East in relation to each of these countries in order to maintain a stable and secure regional environment.

Who are the Kurds?

The members of the Kurdish population are often described as the largest group of ethnically related peoples that own no country of their own. A self-governed

Kurdistan exists as both a desire and a place in the psyche of all independence minded Kurds.⁴ Kurdistan is described as a geographical region noted for the density of ethnic, tribal Kurds within the given area. “The Kurdistan (“Land of the Kurds”) designation refers to an area of Kurdish settlements that roughly includes the mountain systems of the Zagros and the eastern extension of the Taurus.”⁵ It contains the territorial lands of multiple countries predominantly from eastern Turkey, northern Iraq, and western Iran. The land consists of a combination of aggressive, steep mountains and valleys transitioning into the Anatolian plain in Turkey, the Mesopotamian plain in Iran, and the resource rich portion of northern Iraq. Significant agricultural regions sustained the original, nomadic lifestyle of the Kurdish tribes and the precarious mountains became home to their large villages and cities as the population grew over time. The rugged conditions of the environment along with the tribal nature of the Kurds created a combination of tough, self-reliant people with extremely close, hierarchical-based clan organizations that historically strove to perpetuate the individual clans’ power bases with a limited view of national unity.



The total population of ethnic Kurds is an estimate because of the internal practices of multiple countries throughout history to homogenize the populations within Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Iraq. The desired assimilation of the Kurds by the different countries' governments over time remains an important political issue for all the participants. It is both beneficial for established governments to minimize the numbers of disparate elements in their own populations while it is extremely beneficial for the Kurds to exaggerate their overall numbers to reinforce both internal and international support.⁶ Worldwide, the Kurdish population is estimated by one source to be between 28 and 29 million members.⁷ Densely focused in and around the tripartite boundaries of the three major states, another estimate identifies 50% (13 million) of the Kurds live in Turkey which is roughly 20% of the population, 26% (5.5 million) in Iran where they comprise 10-11% of the population, 16% (4-4.5 million) in Iraq which is 23% of the population. Smaller enclaves of ethnic Kurds originated in Syria where they comprise 9% of the population and 1.5% of the Kurds live in the former Soviet Union.⁸ There exists a significant Kurdish diaspora establishing a base in Europe, mainly in Germany, where they number approximately 700 thousand – 1 million members.

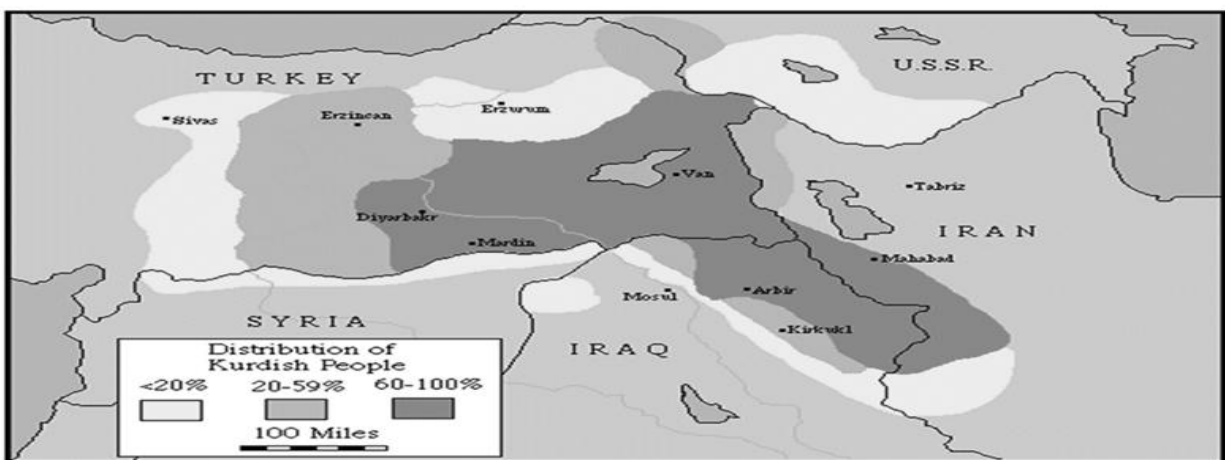


Figure 2. Density of Kurds in Middle East

Given the total estimated numbers, the Kurds are the Middle East's fourth largest ethnic group, behind the Arabs, Persians, and Turks. They comprise a significant portion of Turkey's overall population and are one of the largest segments of Iran's multi-cultural society. In Iraq, the Kurds are one of the three major groups (along with Sunni and Shiite Arabs) that divide the country roughly in thirds from North to South. If the individual factions of those countries' Kurdish populations were able to coalesce, either separately or in a unified country, they would be a significant force. A unified Kurdish nation would significantly impact international relationships and dramatically affect the politics of the region.

Just as physical separation and geography helped fragment the clans and tribes of ethnic Kurds, so too do the religious beliefs of the population. Throughout the millennia the location of the Kurds in the Middle East allowed their society contact with numerous religions. Judaism, Islam, Christianity, and indigenous Kurdish faiths have all been practiced in various forms by the tribes.⁹ As one would expect, remnants of all the religions are still practiced today. However, the Islamic caliphates and consistent influence of both the Ottoman and Persian empires provided the greatest influence. The majority of Kurds practice Islam today with the majority belonging to the Sunni and Shiite sects. The religious practices of the population are separated along the same fault lines as their language. Approximately 60% of Kurds are Sunni Muslim living in the north of Kurdistan with Shiite members concentrated in the southern and eastern portions in and near the Iranian borders. Muslim practitioners are usually members of one of the many Sufi mystic orders.¹⁰ The significance of the Sufi religious orders focuses on the allegiance and loyalty members convey to the order's leadership and the

fact that most of the tribes are lead by a Sufi master. The shared allegiance to both increases the bond between tribal members based on family and religious connections. Another key component of Kurdish religious elements is that almost all non-Muslim Kurds practice an indigenous religion identified as the “Cult of Angels”, which is a Universalist belief.¹¹ Significantly, this religion allows a high level of religious tolerance. The Cult believes that other religions legitimately exist as representations of the overall belief in the one Spirit.¹² The lack of religious discrimination by the followers increases overall societal integration.

Kurds utilize a mixture of several different languages due to the dispersion of the populace throughout the regions they inhabit. The use of Persian, Turkish, and Arabic languages by the Kurds developed out of necessity. However, the Kurds communicate with two major languages specific to their ethnic heritage, Kurmanji and Sirani.¹³ They are both similar to Farsi showing the original connection to the Iranic segment of Indo-European languages.¹⁴ Some have described these languages as different dialects but they are different in both linguistic and grammatical structure. The predominant language of northern Kurds is Kurmanji, spoken by those in Turkey and northern Syria, Iraq, and Iran while Sirani is used by the southern Kurds.¹⁵ Variations in the local names and use of these languages were passed down among the Kurds themselves. The ability to communicate a unified message for a nationalist movement by the Kurds is hindered not only by a lack of a common spoken language, but also a lack of a common alphabet. The alphabet used by the Kurds in Iraq and Iran utilizes a merged Persian and Arabic form.¹⁶ The limited ability of Turkish Kurds to use their language in a written form required them to write in a modified version of the Latin alphabet.¹⁷ Similarly, the

majority of Kurdish emigrants in Western Europe use the same Latin alphabet. Other enclaves around the world were required to utilize directed alphabets as was the case with former Soviet Union Kurds who first wrote (in sequence) using Armenian, Latin, and then Cyrillic alphabets.¹⁸ The most concerted effort of subjugation and suppression of a national language was the government effort conducted by the Turks. Since 1924 the use of the Kurdish language violated Turkish law in addition to teaching or using the language in any written form.¹⁹ The very words Kurd, Kurdish, and Kurdistan were banned from use and stricken from Turkey's official vocabulary. Simply being overheard speaking Kurdish in public would generate fines and arrest.

The policies of assimilation enacted by the regions' governments effectively continued the fragmentation of the Kurdish tribes. The imposition of a single, officially mandated language and written alphabet was a key ingredient in preventing an early formation of Kurdish identity.

Historical Background of ethnic Kurds

The historical migration of peoples and tribes into modern day Kurdistan began in the second millennium B.C. and continued until the first millennium B.C. when the tribes are noted to begin to homogenize.²⁰ The multitude of disparate tribes and the issues previously discussed of geography, religion, and language, both spoken and written, continued to enforce the compartmentalization of tribal loyalties. The individual tribes continued their progression toward a Kurdish identity until the early nineteenth century. The Kurds did, however, provide insight into their pattern of dissent with numerous revolts against the central governments exercising control over Kurdistan. Most of the tribes conducted these rebellions unilaterally or at best with a loose

confederation of neighboring tribes. Additionally, during the Arab, Turkish, and Persian dynasties, Kurdish tribes were able to maintain a good deal of autonomy in their territories.²¹ Tribes and clans gained their power base by pledging support to whatever form of government overthrew the last in exchange for the tribe's freedom of control. However, the individual clan agreements continued to maintain the segregation of individual tribes instead of unifying them.

The first half of the 19th century sparked a new interest by the Ottoman rulers on their Kurdish inhabitants on the periphery of the empire. The decline of the central government's control allowed the more independence minded Kurdish tribes to advance their interests and expand their own fiefdoms. The Ottoman rulers, Sultan Salim III (1789-1807) and his successor, Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839), initiated plans designed to bring about the downfall of the tribal leaders.²² Over the next several decades, the sultans conducted multiple military operations to destroy the wayward Kurdish armies while returning the clans to the empire's support.²³ Assassinations, replacement by appointees of the Sultan, and the military operations decimated the tribal leadership and created a power vacuum. The latter half of the 19th century generated the rise of the shaykhs in Kurdish tribal society to fill the power vacuum.²⁴ As noted earlier, Sufi shaykhs have always held positions of religious prominence within the tribes and during this time they were elevated to tribal leaders. These prominent leaders created an environment of limited self rule and future thoughts to the unification of the entire Kurdish nation.²⁵ But once again, the Persian and Ottoman central governments cracked down on the tribal chiefs up until the eve of World War I. (WWI)²⁶

Spark for Independence

The first glimmer of a realized wish for autonomous control and eventual independence of the tribes by Kurdish leadership flashed shortly after WWI. The peace brought about by the end of the war and the articles of autonomy in the Treaty of Sevres (1920) represents the first official document to contain options for independence. U.S. President Woodrow Wilson strongly advocated the right of self determination and independence following WWI. His speech before Congress on January 8, 1918 highlighted fourteen points for world peace and the twelfth point spoke directly to the minorities under Turkish rule: "XII The Turkish portion of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development..."²⁷ This statement clearly identifies that involvement of the U.S. in this region and with the problem of Kurdish independence is not a new issue. The article, captured in Article 64 of the Sevres Treaty, stated if in one year from the signing "the Kurdish peoples present themselves" with a request for independence to the League of Nations and the council recommends approval then "Turkey hereby agrees to execute such a recommendation"²⁸ Unfortunately for the Kurds, the option for independence died almost immediately from the convergence of several factors. The governments involved never ratified the Treaty of Sevres; the Allies occupied Ottoman territory along with encroachment by Greece; Mustafa Kemal Atatürk began the resistance to the Istanbul government which eventually led to the supremacy of the Turkish Republic; and with the disbanding of the Sultanate, Atatürk conducted new peace negotiations with the Allies at the Lausanne

Conference.²⁹ On June 24, 1923, a new Treaty of Lausanne was signed, thereby establishing the modern day country of Turkey and relegating the Kurds to a minority within the state.

Rise of Kurdish Nationalism

Kurdish nationalism, while present to some degree in charismatic and powerful tribal leaders, failed to coalesce under a single unifying faction prior to the mid-1940s. The hopes of the Kurds for independence once again shattered due to the actions of a central, discriminating government in Turkey. The creation of the Kingdom of Iraq and the emergence of modern Turkey as part of the post-WWII break-up of the Ottoman Empire and consolidation of the Persian state (Iran), once again fragmented the Kurdish tribes.³⁰ The tribes residing within these countries experienced different pressures to submit themselves to the countries leaders. Individual developments under these disparate conditions gave rise to different levels of autonomy for segments of the Kurdish nation. Only a few of the more fervent Kurds continued to work toward the idea of a unified country.

The Turkish government of Atatürk established the harshest conditions and greatest suppression of the Kurds. Inspired by Atatürk's own successful rebellion, the Kurds initiated multiple uprisings against the Ankara government. The largest occurred in 1925 under the leadership of a tribal leader Shaykh Said.³¹ The Turkish Republic subdued the rebellions but did not stamp out the undercurrent of nationalism planted in the Kurds. The Republic's policies imposed on their society strict adherence to the idea of state unity. It did not matter what ethnic nor historical background an individual associated themselves with, all were Turks in the view of the government. From the

early beginnings of the revolts, the “Ankara government decided on complete assimilation of the Kurds.”³² A multitude of legal, cultural, and societal restrictions constituted the repression program. Laws directing forced resettlement to weaken the tribal ties of the Kurds divided Turkey into specially designated zones.³³ Additional laws directing the removal of Kurdish names for villages continued the program of wiping out any trace of the Kurds. Kurds, mainly in eastern Turkey, were deliberately excluded from economic assistance and revitalization efforts. Dismal economic conditions and rampant illiteracy prevented the Kurds from prospering in these areas. Nonetheless, the Kurds continued to secretly use and teach their language along with their cultural practices preventing the extinction of their ethnic heritage and thus continued the fight against further assimilation by the secular Turkish government. Kurdish nationalism continued to grow throughout the region.

Throughout the remainder of the 20th century, efforts to gain recognition for the Kurdish nation took the form of legal political parties and voting blocs designed to send ethnic Kurds, usually running as an Independent candidate, to parliament for quiet representation by their “Mountain Turk” constituents.³⁴ During the 1970s, increasingly greater percentages of Turkey’s ethnic Kurds raised the issues of increased political and social rights.³⁵ Refusal by the secular government to even acknowledge any form of diversity pushed the more aggressive dissenters to the breaking point. Out of the heightening frustration, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) formed in 1978 with Abdulah Ocalan as the leader.³⁶ Turkish military officers, who have always considered themselves the repository of Atatürk’s legacy, conducted one of three military coups in Turkish history (1980) based on the belief the civilian government failed to adequately

enforce his standards on society. The military council made changes to the articles of the Turkish constitution specifically prohibiting the use of any language other than Turkish, right of assembly, and even scientific research.³⁷ The PKK became a significantly violent opposition group beginning with the first terrorist attack on 15 August, 1984. PKK and Turkish military operations account for over 37,979 people killed from 1984 to June 2007.³⁸ The numerous ceasefires enacted over the years are associated with some form of adjustments to the restrictions imposed on the Kurds and usually ended with a declaration of dissatisfaction with the progress. The PKK remains an active, designated terrorist organization dedicated to gaining recognition, civil, and political rights for the Kurds of Turkey.

Kurds of Iran

The difference in the level of persecution and repression of the Kurds in Iraq versus the plight of their Turkish neighbors is often measured by small degrees of severity. The strength of the central government since the birth of Iran enabled Teheran to maintain tighter control over the tribes in eastern Kurdistan.³⁹ By no means are the Iranian leaders considered any less harsh on rebellious Kurds throughout their history than their neighbors. The ability of the Kurds to maintain ethnic identity resulted from the different techniques applied and the basic privileges granted the tribes. The multiculturalism of the Iranian rulers through history enabled the tribes to maintain closer connections to their ethnic heritage.

Once again the independence minded tribal leaders began a campaign of distancing themselves from the Iranian leaders residing in Teheran. Kurdish tribal rivalries prevented the formation of a united front and the elevation of Kurdish

nationalism supported by all. Reza Shah, the first leader of the newborn Iran, placated the Kurdish tribes he could, retained the leaders who accepted his authority, and crushed those who resisted.⁴⁰ The shining gem for the Kurds developed from the short lived but unifying effect from the first attempt at establishing a truly autonomous Kurdistan. A strong tribal leader, Qazi Muhammad, formed the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDPI), mobilized a majority of the tribes and established the Mahabad Republic.⁴¹ The Republic formed in 1945 and established all of the desired functions of an independent state. Kurdish schools, infrastructure and governmental entities serving their own members of society flourished. The leaders made contact and supported Kurdish separatist elements in both Turkey and Iraq. Unfortunately, the Mahabad Republic existed only with the support of the Soviet Union who used the Kurds to disrupt and annoy the Iranian government. The support was soon withdrawn under treaty arrangements following WW II and the Republic only lasted a year.⁴² Tehran resumed the suppression of future wayward tribes once again, as politics and tribal selfishness took precedence over a unified nationalist movement. The pattern continued through the reign of the Shah and into the Iranian Revolution that removed him from power. Today, while the KDPI still exists, the Kurds efforts for recognition have faded with the inevitable transition from a nomadic society to a population settled under repressive regimes. The one organization continuing the struggle for southeastern Kurdistan is the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK) which is an Iranian offshoot from the PKK. Both elements are violent terrorist organizations. However, PJAK operations against the central government are not as prolific or effective as their Turkish based partners.

Iraqi Kurds: Development of Autonomy

The Kurdish tribes in Iraq took a decidedly different route to reach the eventual awakening of ethnic nationalism. The end of WWI placed Great Britain in the position of occupying the territory that became the Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq under King Faysal. The British initially coordinated the original agreement for an autonomous Kurdish region as outlined by the League of Nations with the French, who had occupied Syria.⁴³ With the failure of the Sevres Treaty, the British appetite for the oil discovered in the Kirkuk-Mosul region, and the unwillingness of Turkey to forego their claim on the region, the League of Nations decided the area belonged to Iraq.⁴⁴ British military forces exercised control over the fledgling Kingdom to assist with the early administration and train Iraq's bureaucracy. The British established the Kurdish administrative areas "reflecting tribal fragmentation."⁴⁵ While this did not fulfill the Kurds' desire for self-rule, the conditions allowed for greater autonomy and less persecution for the Kurds.

King Faysal decided the Kurds would not be granted independence because "the Kurds were essential to the balance of Sunnis against Shi'i preponderance."⁴⁶ Limited rebellions by prominent tribal leaders occurred early in this period of disappointment and were suppressed without the heavy-handed tactics used by Iraq's neighbors. As early as 1920, the Kurds maintained local leaders throughout their cities and villages, published Kurdish newspapers (even though censored by the Faysal central government), and in 1930 benefitted from Iraqi "legislation formally proclaiming Kurdish to be the official language in their localities."⁴⁷

However, the Kurds would not forget the promise of independence and the embers of freedom continued to glow throughout their lands. The rise of the Barzani clan grew from these embers along with Baghdad educated intellectuals. Again, unlike

their Kurdish neighbors, Iraqi Kurds attended schools and universities. The Barzani clan clashed with government and other tribal forces between 1930 and 1945, mainly to increase the clan's importance, but also to push the issue of independence. 1945 saw the first of many instances where other Kurds would join with government forces in order to gain advantages over their Kurdish rivals. The Barzani clan was forced out of Iraq and into Iran where they joined forces with the KDP-I and were original members of the Republic of Kurdistan in Mahabad. This was also the official birth of the Kurdish fighters the world would come to know as "Peshmerga".⁴⁸

The Barzani clan returned to Iraq, following the overthrow of the monarchy in 1958, from exile in Russia with their Peshmerga, formed the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (KDP), and began a series of military offensives against a series of Iraqi governments to establish the Iraqi Kurdistan from 1960 to current day. During this period, the KDP became the primary political party of the Kurds and slowly consolidated the land to under Kurdish control. The Peshmerga soon became synonymous with all soldiers for the Kurds and not just for the Barzani clan. Several splinter political groups broke from the KDP, the most famous being the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) formed by Jalal Talabani in 1975.⁴⁹ Soon the two political parties and their respective militia would not only fight against each other but alternately join forces with both the Iraqi and Iranian governments to do so.

The greatest destruction of Kurdish forces occurred during the Anfal campaigns conducted by Saddam Hussein's government forces in 1987-88 and concluding with the use of chemical weapons against the Iraqi Kurds in the town of Halabja. These actions were designed to eliminate the Kurds as a people in order to prevent the continued

fighting by the Kurds for their independence.⁵⁰ After U.S. OPERATION DESERT STORM in 1991 to defeat the Iraqi forces that invaded Kuwait, the “defacto Kurdish state” was born in northern Iraq.⁵¹ Following the removal of Saddam Hussein by the U.S. and British invasion of Iraq (OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM / OIF), the newly elected democratic government of Iraq ratified a constitution that established the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and authorized the elections that ultimately chose the government representatives.

Impact of the KRG on Iraq’s Stability

The opening paragraph from the June 2010 report to Congress on security and stability in Iraq reminds the reader that the “U.S. seeks a sovereign, stable, and self-reliant Iraq” along with the pointing out that “although stability is improving, it is not yet enduring.”⁵² The status of the relationship between the Government of Iraq (GOI) and the KRG is a significant portion of both internal and external sources of disruption on the country as a whole. For the first time in the country’s history, the GOI must concern itself with a legally recognized region of autonomous control within the provisions of the Iraqi Constitution. Never before have the Kurds been as directly involved in their own progress for the future. And yet never before has the central government been officially required to exercise restraint when working with the KRG. The Kurds have established their desired form of Federalism while maintaining their ethnic focus.⁵³ Countries whose political systems are well established with clear processes have a difficult time ensuring the political entities work smoothly together. The fledgling governmental bodies of Iraq must exercise restraint while working through the politics of governing themselves so as not to disrupt the system.

There are several major areas that comprise the internal conflict of Arab and Kurd sensitivities or tensions: the status of a referendum in Kirkuk under Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution; the disputed internal boundaries (DIBs) between the borders of the KRG; the hydrocarbon law; status of the Kirkuk census and property disputes; and integration of Peshmerga into the Iraqi Security Forces. While each of these items represents an internal issue for Iraq, failure to work out agreements in these areas will cause significant concern and disruption in Turkey and Iraq.

Article 140 (Kirkuk)

Article 140:

First: The executive authority shall undertake the necessary steps to complete the implementation of the requirements of all subparagraphs of Article 58 of the Transitional Administrative Law.

Second: The responsibility placed upon the executive branch of the Iraqi Transitional Government stipulated in Article 58 of the Transitional Administrative Law shall extend and continue to the executive authority elected in accordance with this Constitution, provided that it accomplishes completely (normalization and census and concludes with a referendum in Kirkuk and other disputed territories to determine the will of their citizens), by a date not to exceed the 31st of December 2007.

The Kurds of Iraq consider the city and province of Kirkuk as Kurdish ancestral lands and the rightful capital city of the KRG. Immediately following the defeat of the KDP in the 1975 military campaign, the central government of Baghdad forcibly removed Kurdish families from the surrounding area. Additionally, the government shipped in Arab families in order to lay claim to the properties owned by the Kurds.⁵⁴ This had the effect of denying the property to any Kurd attempting to return and shifted the demographic balance. There are significant oil reserves in and around Kirkuk that would provide whichever government controlled the region significant income. The main

source of irritation for the KRG is because of the slow progress in advancing the referendum. However, all parties understand how sensitive this issue remains and have agreed to allow the UN Special Envoy to develop a detailed process for adjudication. Article 140 also provides the process for conducting a national census by which voting laws and demographics can be determined.⁵⁵

Disputed Internal Boundaries

Iraqi government and the KRG are in dispute as to where the exact territorial boundaries are for each province in the regional governments' administration area. This has the effect of reducing what the Kurds believe are areas historically under their control. Increasing the tensions over the boundaries are enclaves of Arab and Kurd families who do not desire to be governed locally by members of the other ethnicity. The disputes have placed ISF and Peshmerga in potential conflict with each the other's military units. The U.S. military forces established joint security areas and the combined security mechanism whereby Iraqi and Peshmerga forces conduct joint and combined security force missions.⁵⁶ These mechanisms allow for supervised integration and training to prepare historical enemies to work together.

Integration of the Peshmerga

A complementary program is the plan for integrating Peshmerga forces into the ISF. The issues affecting the KRG are the fact that until the Peshmerga are removed from the control of each of the two lead political parties (KDP/PUK) the U.S. considers those forces to be militia. Militias are not recognized armed forces and will not receive training or equipment currently being supplied to the ISF. This produces a perceived disparity in the capacity and capability between the forces. The inability to modernize the KRG security forces creates an equipment mismatch and impedes effective

integration for military operations. The KRG have taken steps to rectify the situation. “In January 2010, the PUK and KDP command authorities were brought under the control of the new [Peshmerga] ministry.”⁵⁷ The Peshmerga Ministry is integrating the former militia units and Prime Minister Maliki has authorized the addition of the units to the ISF⁵⁸. Currently there are four recognized Peshmerga Regional Guards Brigades but the integration process is stalled due to command and control issues.⁵⁹

Hydrocarbon Laws

Article 111 and Article 112 of the Iraqi constitution) specify that the federal government, with the producing governorates and regional government, develop laws to establish processes by which each governing body exercises the authority to sanction oil development projects and retain their revenues. Additionally, the laws must be passed to ensure a fair distribution of revenues occurs for both governments.⁶⁰ Currently all oil revenues are collected by the central government and 17% is paid to the KRG. Many Iraqi Arabs believe that the KRG is receiving excess revenues not fully supported by the Kurdish population numbers. The Kurds view the current agreement as a significant loss of oil revenues from KRG “lands” and that remains a source of continued animosity. The hydrocarbon laws, when passed, may increase the revenue distribution. The GOI and KRG must reach an acceptable revenue sharing level based on requirements for long term stability.

Impact of the KRG on Iran, Turkey, and Iraq

The autonomy gained by the KRG is a major concern for both Iran and Turkey while the effect of the gains is twofold. The first is the level of autonomy already attained and what effect is generated on both neighboring countries Kurdish populations. While it is logical that both Iran and Turkey will not drastically change their methods by which

they control their Kurdish minorities, they still have to contend with the terrorist organizations of the PJAK and PKK. Both of these organizations continue to conduct operations against the military, infrastructure, and governments of Tehran and Ankara. Turkey has already adjusted some of their Kurdish policies in order to gain some relief and entice the PKK to work on a political solution. Iran's government continues to deny the minority Kurds recognition in any measurable terms, thus providing the PJAK a reason to continue their terrorist operations.

Iran and Turkey fear the increase in KRG autonomy moves them farther away from GOI control. The worst case scenario for all countries involved would be an attempt by the KRG to push for full independence. Turkey and Iran could not allow that to happen. The potential for each country's Kurdish population to attempt to secede from the parent state and accede to a "Greater Kurdistan" would be too great. Neither country wants to be forced to commit their resources to quell any such actions. The significant police and military actions required to suppress a popular independence movement or uprising could drain the resources of either country. The actions would most assuredly cause significant internal disruption and force the states to focus on domestic as opposed to international activities. Turkey would feel the most immediate effects because of the vast territory and total population they stand to lose. Iran would not lose a significant amount of their territory but would potentially suffer from future continued fragmentation of their multi-ethnic population. Iraq could not allow the separation of their country and the loss of hydrocarbon resources associated with the KRG. The KRG would become, in essence, a land-locked state in a hostile

environment. Lastly, the entire region would potentially destabilize as the individual states move to either defend themselves or use force in order to prevent the breakaway.

Any one of the issues that exist in relation to a Kurdish independence movement would be a significant challenge to the stability to any of the countries they inhabit. Combined, the issues create a situation where any action may create severe second and third order effects rippling through the region. Given the porous borders of the countries in the region, instability in one country adversely effects theirs neighbors. The combination of increased Iraqi Kurd-s' autonomy in conjunction with a greater movement for national identity establishes the conditions ripe for the Kurdish nation to cause the greatest disruption of the Middle East to date.

Recommendations for U.S. Policy Options

The highest priority of the U.S. is the prevention of a breakaway independence movement by the KRG. While our interest is for all nations capable of sustaining independence should be given the right and opportunity to do so, the disruption and instability in the region that would accompany such an act cannot be allowed at this time. Increased use of diplomatic pressure, economic aid, and even the threat to withdraw support to Iraq must be considered. The amount of potentially irreparable harm is unacceptable.

The U.S. must remain actively engaged with both the GOI and the KRG along with the Middle East region as a whole. All efforts currently being used to ensure Iraq succeeds as a stable and unified democratic nation will in turn assist with the security of the entire region. The U.S. should engage directly with the KRG leadership to stress continued patience for the already identified reforms. Both the GOI and the KRG have

operated on good faith and positive steps to enact programs and processes for their mutual benefit. By jointly acknowledging both the GOI and the KRG in a relationship with the U.S., the Department of State (DOS) can address the concerns of all. Increased engagements must reassure the KRG that we are recognizing their issues and keep them operating within the regional autonomy under the central GOI. A combined effort by the U.S., in conjunction with the United Nations Mission to Iraq (UNAMI), must remain actively engaged to move forward negotiated solutions to the Arab-Kurd tensions. Although the constitutional and legal aspects of the tensions are internal to the GOI-KRG relationship, the U.S./UNAMI experience will help to guide the process.

The U.S. must maintain a close relationship with the GOI and potentially increase our assistance in their developing democracy. This will also signal to Turkey and Iran the continued development by the central government of the policies and measures to deter the breakaway by the KRG. Our engagements should also include mechanisms for trilateral engagements within Iraq by all countries in the region.

The U.S.-Iraq Security Agreement (SA) remains in effect until December 31, 2011.⁶¹ There are currently no indications that the expiration date will be extended. However, the U.S. should consider opening dialogue with the GOI recommending a reduced number of U.S. military personnel to continue to provide assistance in order to allow for the internal political and security stability to increase. The U.S. should establish a robust security and assistance organization manned by military and “whole of government” agencies in order to continue the training and modernization of the GOI’s security forces. The U.S. already provides similar entities in numerous countries. The

relative size of, and authorities associated with, the organization must be commensurate to the efforts required to complete the integration of the ISF and continue the combined security area operations.

The relationship between Turkey and the U.S. remains one of historical allies. This relationship has not always been one of mutual, unilateral support for all of either country's policies but remains one of shared strategic partnership. The U.S. must actively look to influence Turkey's policies to mutual benefit in the region. One specific area is the counter-terrorism fight. By providing military and intelligence support to the Turkish efforts in combating the PKK, the U.S. will help to remove a significant threat to Turkey's security while simultaneously reducing their nervousness over the KRG autonomy. Maintaining supportive relations with Turkey also diminishes the possibility of strengthening a future Turkey-Iran relationship. Furthermore, the U.S. has much to gain by encouraging and developing a strong partnership between Turkey's and Iraq's democratically elected governments to offset Iran's influence in the region.

The current relationship between Iran and the U.S. is strained and adversarial. However, neither the U.S. nor Iran would gain from the establishment of an independent Kurdistan. This is one issue where both countries' national interests converge. The U.S. should take the opportunity to engage Iran through their partners in the region to establish a less adversarial relationship. Simultaneously, the U.S. must ensure that its policies relating to Iran do not alienate Turkey thereby strengthening the current relationship they have with neighboring Iran.

This paper highlights some of the significant aspects of the truly "wicked" problem of developing U.S. policy that supports all of the national interests identified in

U.S. strategic guidance statements and publications. The VUCA environment of the Middle East provides numerous opportunities for our policies to be perceived as discriminatory to individual actors or contrary to U.S. stated goals. The U.S. continues to balance foreign policy issues against setting conditions for long-term success while simultaneously prioritizing multiple international relationships, as exemplified by the Kurdish-factor in the Middle East. The broader implication for the region: the people of the Middle East, not just the Kurds, frequently express the belief that the U.S. is hypocritical when it speaks of promoting democracy and freedom. In their view, rather than backing its words with actions, the U.S. Government does the opposite by backing authoritarian regimes and denying self-determination for groups such as the Palestinians and the Kurds. The proof, they believe, is shown by such actions as supporting Israel, Turkey, and the Iraqi government. In their minds, this confirms the hypocrisy of the U.S. and undermines the achievement of all our national interests in the region.

Endnotes

¹ The NSS defines international order as order advanced by U.S. leadership that promotes peace, security, and opportunity through stronger cooperation to meet global challenges. Values are defined as respect for universal values at home and around the world. *National Security Strategy, May 2010* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, May 2010), 17.

² Ibid., 11.

³ Ibid.

⁴ David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 4th ed. (New York, NY: I.B.Tauris, 2004), 3.

⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/325241/Kurdistan> (accessed January, 2011)

⁶ Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurds Ascending: The Evolving Solution to the Kurdish Problem in Iraq and Turkey*, (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2008), 2.

⁷ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 4th ed, 3.

⁸ David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 4th ed. (New York, NY: I.B.Tauris, 2004); Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurds Ascending: The Evolving Solution to the Kurdish Problem in Iraq and Turkey*, 2; Aliza Marcus, *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence*, (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2007), 2-3.

⁹ Mehred R. Izady, *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook*, (Washington, D.C.: Taylor and Francis, 1992), 131.

¹⁰ Ibid., 159.

¹¹ Ibid., 137.

¹² Ibid., 138.

¹³ Ibid, 167-175.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 178.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 180.

²⁰ Ibid., 88.

²¹ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 4th ed, 22.

²² Ibid., 41.

²³ Ibid., 38-47.

²⁴ Ibid., 50.

²⁵ Henri J Barkey and Graham E. Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, (Lanham, Maryland: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 10-11.

²⁶ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 4th ed., 48-49.

²⁷ Public Broadcasting Corporation, *American Experience: Woodrow Wilson*, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/filmmore/fm_14points.html, (accessed February, 2011)

²⁸ Izady, *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook*, 59.

²⁹ Kemal Kirisci and Gareth M. Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-state Ethnic Conflict*, (London: Frank Cass and Company, 1997), 67-85; McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 4th ed., 137-143

³⁰ Khair el-Din Haseeb, ed., *Arab-Iranian Relations* (Beirut, Lebanon: Centre for Arab Studios, 1998), 263.

³¹ Kirisci and Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-state Ethnic Conflict*, 103.

³² Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 10.

³³ In 1934, Turkish law number 2510 divided Turkey into three major zones: (i) Localities reserved for the habitation by persons of Turkish culture; (ii) regions to which populations of non-Turkish culture would be moved for assimilation into the Turkish language and culture; (iii) regions to be completely evacuated. McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 4th ed., 207.

³⁴ "Mountain Turks" is a designation used to represent those of Kurdish decent without using the proper ethnic name. It was meant to continue the policy of wiping out all references to anything other than Turkish origin. Gunter, *The Kurds Ascending: The Evolving Solution to the Kurdish Problem in Iraq and Turkey*, 5.

³⁵ Gunter, *The Kurds Ascending: The Evolving Solution to the Kurdish Problem in Iraq and Turkey*, 6.

³⁶ Aliza Marcus, *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence*, 46.

³⁷ Ibid., 83.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 4th ed., 214

⁴⁰ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 4th ed., 214-226.

⁴¹ Ibid., 236-246.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 136.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 145.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 53.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 168.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 174-175.

⁴⁸ Qazi Muhammad (KDP-I leader) helped to literally define the Kurdish word for Soldier-Peshmerga. The definition means "one who faces death" or "self-sacrificer"; one willing to die for

a cause. Izady, *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook*, 209; McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 4th ed., 311.

⁴⁹ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 4th ed., 343.

⁵⁰ Gunter, *The Kurds Ascending: The Evolving Solution to the Kurdish Problem in Iraq and Turkey*, 14.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² *Measuring Stability and Security In Iraq: Report to Congress*, June, 2010 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, June 2010), iii.

⁵³ Gunter, *The Kurds Ascending: The Evolving Solution to the Kurdish Problem in Iraq and Turkey*, 21.

⁵⁴ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 4th ed., 339.

⁵⁵ *Measuring Stability and Security In Iraq: Report to Congress*, June, 2010 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, June 2010), 5.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 51.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ *Measuring Stability and Security In Iraq: Report to Congress*, June, 2010 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, June 2010), 5.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 6

⁶¹ Ibid., iv.

