

## The Kurdish Issue in Iraq: Tragedy and Hope

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**Abstract:** *The peoples of the Middle East shared a common history, religion, and political status for several millenniums. During that period, several types of bonds held them together. However, in the last two centuries these bonds have weakened due to the adoption of political principles and governing systems which are far from Islamic teachings. As a result, new problems have arisen, among them being the issue of ethnic minorities. Kurds are a victim of the new situation. They have been trying unsuccessfully for a century to achieve the same rights as other peoples in the Middle East. Their attempts and counter-actions by the states of this region, are historically analysed in this paper. Various approaches to resolve this issue are discussed along with the reasons for their failure.*

Kurds are a people indigenous to the mountainous areas of the Middle East. Their history could be traced back to 2,000 BC.<sup>1</sup> It is hard to determine the exact origin of the Kurds since there have been only a few reliable studies on this issue. Contemporary Kurdish scholars claim that Kurds are the product of the intermingling of local populations of various regions with migrating tribes from the south and east of Zagros, and from around the Caspian Sea.<sup>2</sup> The tribes from around the Caspian Sea region were Aryans.<sup>3</sup> It seems that the Aryans had a more advanced culture and language, and therefore the Kurds adopted their language.<sup>4</sup> Kurds believe that they are the descendants of the Medes (727-549 BC) who established a large kingdom east of the Babylonian Empire.<sup>5</sup> Despite this uncertainty of origin, the Kurds are mentioned in Xenophon's "Ten Thousand" in 400 BC.<sup>6</sup> Since then the word "Kurd" has been appearing in literature in the context of various peoples of the Middle East.<sup>7</sup>

Between the fifth century BC and sixth century AD, Kurds from the regions north and west of Iran, and Persians of south Iran were united politically and religiously. The Iranian languages (i.e., Baluchi, Kurdish and Persian) started to be developed by different groups at a local level during the last few centuries BC.<sup>8</sup> However, Persian (Farsi) dominated the other languages as it was the state language. Thus, the words "Fars" or "Persian" were inaccurately used to refer to the western region of the Gulf and Mesopotamia. Kurds, like other Iranians, adopted Zoroastrianism around the sixth century BC.<sup>9</sup> After the Romans adopted Christianity and invaded Kurdistan, some Kurdish tribes (in and around the Turkey-Iraq-Syria border) adopted the new religion. Kurdistan and Mesopotamia became war frontiers between various Iranian empires and the Roman empire until the arrival of Islam from Arabia.

### **Kurds in Early Islamic History**

The defeat of the Sasanian Empire in 639 (16 Hijrah, AH hereafter) by the Muslims opened the road to Kurdistān. The Muslim army arrived in southern Kurdistān (in Iraq) in 18 AH, and in central Kurdistān (in Turkey) in 20 AH.<sup>10</sup> The geographical proximity of southern Kurdistān to the capitals of the Umayyad dynasty (Damascus), and that of the Abbasids (Baghdad), caused the Kurdish tribes of this region to be influenced by political events in these capitals more than the Kurds of northern Kurdistān or other Iranians. Because of this proximity, Caliph Marwān the Second (Muhammad bin Marwān al-Hakam) was born and raised in Kurdistān as his mother was a Kurd.<sup>11</sup> It is said that the military leader, Abū Muslim al-Khurāsānī who led the Abbasid troops against those of the Umayyads (the battle occurred in Shahrazore in Southern Kurdistān) was also a Kurd.<sup>12</sup> Abū Ja'far al-Mansūr and Harūn al-Rashīd were governors of Kurdistān before they became Caliphs.<sup>13</sup> In the 10th century, the Abbasid dynasty became unstable, with a weak central government. It was in this period that many semi-independent Kurdish dynasties emerged. Among these dynasties were the Hasanwayhide (959-1015) of southern and central Kurdistān, the Zangide of Mosul (1127-1150), the Kukboride of Irbil and Kirkuk (1144-1232), etc.<sup>14</sup> However, the invasion of Mongols destroyed many of these Kurdish kingdoms.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries two rival empires emerged around Kurdistān: the Safavid empire (bringing Persian culture and the

Shī'ah sect on the east of Kurdistān), and the Osmanlı empire (bringing Turkish culture and the Sunnī sect on the northwest). Kurds, the majority of them being Sunnī, had aligned with the Osmanlıs. Another important reason which encouraged the Kurds to align with the Turks was the Osmanlıs' relatively peaceable, decentralized mode of governance as opposed to the Safavids' centralized mode of governance.<sup>15</sup> Kurdish tribes wanted to keep their territories under their direct control. As a result, many Kurdish principalities emerged under the overall sovereignty of Osmanlıs. These principalities had the right of self-governance, of appointing local rulers and judges, and of developing their own economy and education. Some Kurdish rulers minted their own currency (with their names on it) and established relationships with other powers in the region as sovereigns.<sup>16</sup> However, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Osmanlı sultāns adopted the European central government system. Reacting to this, Egyptians, Arabs and Kurds revolted against them. Muhammad Ali established his dynasty in Egypt under the protection of the sultān. The Kurds, again because of their proximity to the Osmanlıs, could not keep their principalities, such as Soran (which ended in 1841), Bahadinian (1843), and Baban (1851).<sup>17</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, the following observations could be made regarding Kurdish society:

1. Kurds integrated Islamic Law (al-Sharī'ah) and Islamic teachings into their culture. More than six hundred Kurdish scholars contributed to Islamic literature, and some of their books became reference works in Islamic studies, such as the work of Ibn al-Athīr, Ibn al-Khalkān, and Ibn Sirīn. Kurdish 'ulamā' spread Şūfism in Iraq, Turkey, Syria and North Africa.<sup>18</sup> Kurds published their books in Arabic since it was the language of *al-Dīn*.
2. Kurdish life centered around tribal and religious order. Within tribal life, Kurdish culture and language were preserved. At the same time, the tribe kept a sizeable number of armed men loyal to the tribal chiefs. Sūfis pledged loyalty to their Shaikhs.
3. There was mutual respect, interest and understanding between 'ulamā' and tribal chiefs. This relationship served both sides when it came to establishing a good relationship with Osmanlı sultāns. Nevertheless, it was clear that the influence of

*'ulamā'* was much stronger than that of any tribal chief in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup>

4. Although Kurds were conscious of their ethnicity, it did not carry any political loyalty. It was known that Kurds were good fighters. Kurdish leaders had had an opportunity for demanding an independent Islamic state of their own, at least since the twelfth century; however they did not do so, because they believed in the concept of an Ummah with a single Caliph. It is well documented in history that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī (who was a Kurd), the liberator of Jerusalem and founder of al-Ayyūbī dynasty in Egypt and Syria, had a much stronger position than the Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad. Despite that, he did not establish a separate "state" for the Kurds.

### **Kurds in the Twentieth Century**

In the early twentieth century Kurds were, for several reasons, more loyal to the Sultān than the other ethnic groups. The first of these reasons was the loyalty of Kurd *'ulamā'* to the Sultān and their concomitant influence over the people. Second, was the looming threat from the Armenians and Russians of the take-over of Kurdish lands. It was natural, therefore, for them to align themselves with the Turks. The fact that Sultān Abdul Hamīd chose his personal guards from the Kurdish tribes reflected his trust in them. Third, being isolated in their mountains, Kurds were less influenced by the European ideas (e.g., nationalism) which had started to fascinate the Arab and Turkish intellectuals.

The victory of the Allies in World War I in 1918, the introduction of the "nation-state system," and the spread of "new thoughts" in the Middle East were strong challenges to the traditional life of Arabs, Kurds, Persians and Turks. Political conflict between these peoples in the region is one result of that "new-world-order." The case of the Arabs and Kurds in Iraq demonstrates this reality.

The Kurds of Mosul and the Arabs of Mesopotamia (Baghdad and Basra) were colonized by Britain in 1918. Britain planned to form a modern state from Baghdad and Basra since such a state would be able to protect its trade route to India. There was no plan for the political future of the Kurds.<sup>20</sup> British military and civil officers in the region tendered several proposals for Kurdistān, including:

1. Establishing an independent Kurdistān (in Turkey first), and

- adding Mosul to it later (see item number 64 of the Treaty of Sevres), or forming an independent Kurdish state in Mosul;<sup>21</sup>
2. Adding Mosul to Mesopotamia and forming the state of Iraq;<sup>22</sup> and
  3. Waiting until other internal and external factors develop which may be helpful in determining one of the above scenarios.

The British adopted the third proposal during 1918-1923. This policy was interpreted by Kurds as an indication that Britain would help in the creation of an independent state.<sup>23</sup> However, after 1923 Britain's policy shifted to the second, rather than to the first.<sup>24</sup>

Another example of the Allies' policy of sending mixed signals to nations of the Middle East was the type of discussions and agreements conducted in the three international conferences held between 1919 and 1920 in Paris, San Rimo and Sevres. The Paris conference was a preparatory one in which the Allies exchanged their views about the future of the non-Turkish nations and listened to representatives of those nations that wanted to gain their independence. The representative of Armenia wanted to establish a Greater Armenia which would include about half of the Kurdish region in Turkey (known as Northern Kurdistan). Prince Faisal of Arabia asked for one Arab state with the northern border starting from the line that connected Diyarbakir to Intakia. Sharif Pasha was the unofficial representative of the Kurdish people. He called for a united independent Kurdistan which would include the whole Ottoman Kurdish region, and the Kurdish part of Iran. It was clear that the three representatives had conflicting plans about the boundaries of their future countries. None of them achieved his goal.<sup>25</sup>

The Allies reached an agreement known as the "Treaty of Sevres" in August 1920, which was signed by the defeated Sultan. The Treaty included three Articles dealing with the Kurdish issue.

#### **Article 62**

A Commission, having its seat in Constantinople and made up of three members appointed by the Governments of Britain, France and Italy will, during the six months following the implementation of the present treaty, prepare for local autonomy in those regions where the Kurdish element is preponderant lying east of the Euphrates, to the south of a still-to-be established Armenian frontier and to the north of the frontier between Turkey, Syria and Mesopotamia, as established in Article 27 II (2 and 3).

Should agreement on any question not be unanimous, the members of the Commission will refer it back to their respective governments. The plan must provide complete guarantees as to the protection of the Assyro-Chaldeans and other ethnic or religious minorities of the area. To this end a commission made up of British, French, Italian, Persian and Kurdish representatives will visit the area so as to determine what adjustments, if any, should be made to the Turkish frontier wherever it coincides with the Persian frontier as laid down in this treaty.

### **Article 63**

The Ottoman Government agrees as of now to accept and execute the decisions of the two commissions envisaged in Article 62 within three months of being notified of those decisions.

### **Article 64**

If, after one year has elapsed since the implementation of this present treaty, the Kurdish population of the areas designated in Article 62 calls on the Council of the League of Nations and demonstrates that a majority of the population in these areas wishes to become independent of Turkey, and if the Council then estimates that the population in question is capable of such independence and recommends that it be granted, then Turkey agrees, as of now, to comply with this recommendation and to renounce all rights and titles to the area. The details of this renunciation will be the subject of a special convention between Turkey and the main Allied powers.

If and when the said renunciation is made, no objection shall be raised by the main Allied powers should the Kurds living in that part of Kurdistān at present included in the Vilayet of Mosul seek to become citizens of the newly independent Kurdish state.<sup>26</sup>

Because of the vacuum of power in Kurdistān and on the assumption of international support for the concept of the right of all peoples to have their own national state, Kurds wanted to form an independent Kurdish state in al-Mosul (or part of it).

### **Birth of the Arab and Kurdish National Agenda**

"Who are we?" was a question that crossed the minds of many Arabs and Kurds after WW 1. Being an Arab, a Kurd, or even a Muslim, was not the answer to that question, as culture and language reflected that reality. However, the question was asked to determine a new loyalty which was based on ethnicity and a new political agenda. Britain successfully encouraged Arabs and Kurds to develop a separate

agenda, but to the limit that any differences could be used and contained by the British.<sup>27</sup>

Military officers, rich businessmen, tribal leaders and some 'ulamā' in Baghdad and Basra cooperated with the British to establish civil authorities in both cities. However, due to a lack of similar civil cooperation in Mosul, the British appointed a military authority.<sup>28</sup> In 1919, Kurdish resistance to the British presence increased dramatically. Several civil uprisings in Kurdish cities and armed resistance led by tribes took place.<sup>29</sup> Britain agreed to treat the Kurds separately, not as part of Iraq, and to appoint Kurdish officials who would be assisted by British advisors. The Kurds of Sulaymania, the city with the largest population in Kurdistān, led by Shaikh Mahmūd al-Barzanjī, seized control of the city and established their own administration.<sup>30</sup> British military forces quashed al-Barzanjī's movement and imprisoned him (later he was exiled to India). Shaikh Mahmūd returned to Sulaymania in 1922 and established the short-lived Kingdom of Southern Kurdistān.<sup>31</sup> The significance of Shaikh Mahmūd is that it was his political movement that planted the seed for the Kurdish National Movement in the 1930's.

Resistance against British presence increased in central and southern Iraq in 1919 and more so in the south, since people believed that Britain might place Basra under the British-Indian authority. Arab tribes led by 'ulamā' revolted against Britain in the summer of 1920. They called for Britain to evacuate their troops and politicians from the country. The revolt lasted for several months. The revolutionaries suffered great losses with approximately 8,450 being killed or wounded before they agreed to surrender. As a result of British losses, the British public asked its government to withdraw from the region.<sup>32</sup> The significance of this revolution is threefold:

1. It set the foundation for the modern Iraqi state;
2. It planted the seed of Iraqi nationalism (*al-Waṭaniyyah*) which called for an independent state for Iraq and liberation from Britain; and
3. It strengthened Arab nationalists (*al-Qawmiyyah*) who called for pan-Arabism, liberation of all Arab lands from British and French forces and formation of one Arab state.

As a new state began to emerge, the pro-Iraqi and pan-Arabists found common ground, joined forces, led a military coup in 1936 and overthrew the government in 1941. In both events, British forces

restored the monarchy. The Kurdish movement, however, which was originally directed against Britain, found itself in conflict with pro-Iraqis and pan-Arabists both, as power slowly shifted from the hands of the British to the hands of the Arabs. In this period, the following revolutionary movements took place in Kurdistan:

1. 1922-26, led by Shaikh Mahmūd al-Barzanjī,<sup>33</sup>
2. 1931-32, led by Shaikh Ahmad al-Barzānī,<sup>34</sup>
3. 1943-45, led by Mullah Mustafā al-Barzānī and the Hewa Party;<sup>35</sup> and
4. 1946-58, underground activities led by the Kurdistan Democratic Party.<sup>36</sup>

In the first three revolutions, British forces (especially the air force) helped Iraqi troops gain control of the Kurdish areas which were at one time captured by the rebels.

Resisting Britain and the West (in general) led Arabs and Kurds to approach the communist block under the leadership of the Soviet Union. The Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) was established in southern and central Iraq in the 1930's and by the 1940's it had spread to Kurdistan.<sup>37</sup> The significance of ICP was that (a) it was the first political party that recruited different ethnic and religious groups (Arabs, Kurds, Muslims and Christians, etc.) to its ranks, and (b) it recognized the right of the Kurds for self-determination.

The fact that ICP had an agenda against Islam, introduced new types of social relationships and political agendas (which proved to be destructive in the long-term) did not stop Iraqis from joining the party.<sup>38</sup> ICP became the largest political party in 1959-60. It aligned itself with the first President of Iraq, Abdul-Karim Qasim, who was also a dictator. Further, ICP introduced an organizational structure and a relationship with other parties which were soon adopted by them. As a result, several massacres took place in Mosul and Kirkuk.

Despite the ICP national programme (which accommodated both Arabs and Kurds), Arab and Kurdish nationalists formed their own political parties also. The new nationalist parties integrated the traditional agenda and objectives of nationalism into the ideology of socialism. The Ba'ath Party is an example of an Arab organization. Ba'ath ruled Iraq in 1963 and from 1968 onwards.<sup>39</sup> The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) is an example of a Kurdish organization. KDP led the Kurdish nationalist movement from 1946 to 1975. It



fragmented into several factions after 1975. However, KDP has remained one of the two major Kurdish parties in Kurdistan until now.<sup>40</sup>

KDP started a new revolution in 1961 under the leadership of Mullah Mustafā al-Bārzanī. He reached an agreement with the Ba'ath Party in 1970, settling the Kurdish issue peacefully by guaranteeing Kurdish autonomy within the border of Iraq.<sup>41</sup> However, peace ended in 1974 after Iran (supported by Israel and the United States) influenced Mullah Mustafā not to accept any deal from Baghdad that did not accept all the Kurdish demands.<sup>42</sup> The war resumed in 1974 and ended in 1975 after Iran entered into an agreement with Iraq.<sup>43</sup> Kurds were left alone to face Iraq's revenge.<sup>44</sup> The Kurdish revolution collapsed and its leaders took refuge in Syria, Iran and the United States.

The Iraq-Iran War (1980-88) helped Kurdish leaders organize themselves against the Iraqi regime. Another strong Kurdish party emerged in 1976, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), led by Jalāl Tālabānī. Iran helped the Kurdish parties (and other Iraqi opposition groups) against the regime of President Saddam Hussien during the war. In 1987, the Iraqi government decided to destroy the infrastructure of Kurdistan by any means, including the use of chemical weapons. As a result, more than 200,000 Kurdish civilians were killed, about 500,000 were displaced and some 3,000 villages and towns were destroyed.<sup>45</sup> Thus, when the Allies arrived in Kurdistan in 1991, they found a territory without the resources needed to survive. The United Nations Security Council issued Resolution 688 in 1991 to protect the lives of Kurds. Since then, Britain, France, Turkey and the United States have been monitoring the security of Kurdistan.<sup>46</sup>

Since 1991, Kurds have been outside Iraqi control. While the United Nations—pressured by the United State—maintains the sanctions imposed on Iraq, and the Iraqi government has imposed economic sanctions of its own on Kurdistan. Therefore, Kurds depend on international organizations for assistance and survival. To fill the administrative vacuum resulting from the withdrawal of civil and military officials from Kurdistan, Kurds have elected their own parliament and appointed a government in 1992, creating a *de facto* state.<sup>47</sup>

### Defining the Problem

Kurdish society, as a part of the Islamic Ummah in general, and of Middle Eastern societies in particular, interacts with its intellectual, political, social and economic surroundings. The Ummah has been facing various challenges for the last two centuries. These challenges find their root in the substitution of the traditional Islamic way of life, individual as well as societal, with the European (American, after World War II) way of life.<sup>48</sup> Muslims adopted ideologies like nationalism, secularism and socialism (either as such or combining one with another). Politically, nation-states replaced the Ummah. Since then, the Muslim peoples have been governed by political parties, military officers, or monarchies. These governments are either dictatorial or semi-democratic regimes. Economically, the majority of Muslim countries are either "under-developed" or "developing" states. The overall picture reflects the fact that none of the Islamic states have reached their objectives in providing their citizens with economic and political stability, dignity and security.

Muslim intellectuals, and Muslim political organizations have been trying to address the issues raised by the Western thought, models and politics throughout the Islamic world. Muhammad ʿAbduh, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, and Saʿīd al-Nūrsī; the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, Jamāʿat al-Nūr of Turkey and Jamāʿat-i-Islami of Pakistan; the International Institute of Islamic Thought in Virginia, the various international Islamic universities and the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization in Malaysia, are only a few examples of Islamic efforts at challenging Western thought and Western models. These and other efforts have produced a large amount of scholarly literature addressing various subjects and topics from an Islamic perspective. However, the need for more literature is clear and the support of Muslim governments is needed for any further development in this task.<sup>49</sup>

Similarly one notices the growth of Islamic organizations and institutions, increase in the number of Islamic schools, the popularity of Islamic dress, and increase in the number of people, especially youth, attending mosques—all signs of a return to Islam. But these changes have occurred on the social and intellectual level; Muslim governments have, however, hardly changed, and are using the concepts of nationalism and secularism as their operating principles.

The Kurdish crisis has two aspects. One is general and long-term in nature, and is similar to the problems of other Muslim societies (as

outlined in the foregoing discussion). The solution, therefore, depends on the overall progress made in the Muslim world. The other is more specific and short-term in nature. Although it is important to focus on the general crisis, the specific one is of greater priority for the Kurds. What has set this as the priority is the fact that Kurdistan is a broken land with its peoples scattered throughout Europe and North America. The policies of relevant states and their activities have failed to resolve the crisis. Additionally, the increased regional and international interference in Kurdish politics during the 1990's led to a hijacking of the solution from the hands of the concerned parties. In the following sections, several on-going attempts to resolve the Kurdish issue and the reactions of concerned parties toward them are set forth.

### **Attempts to Resolve the Problem**

A number of solutions have been proposed to solve the Kurdish problem, varying according to the party concerned. Some believe that the Kurdish issue is a human rights issue, the result of a lack of democracy, the consequence of bad policy-making on the part of the states concerned, the result of agitation fomented by Kurdish parties or of regional/international interference. According to the nature of the problem perceived by these parties, they have also proposed some solutions.

*Human Rights Approach.* Many non-governmental human rights organizations—based in Europe and the United States—look at the Kurdish issue as the state's violation of the basic human rights provided in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which has been signed by all the members of the United Nations. The organizations documented that the regimes of Iraq<sup>50</sup> and Turkey<sup>51</sup> have denied freedom of expression and prohibited political, cultural and educational activities by the Kurds. Those who violated these prohibitory orders were jailed, tortured, have disappeared or, at the very least, were fired from their jobs.

The human rights groups have called upon these governments to end all kind of violations and honour the basic civil and political rights of the Kurds. Furthermore, they have asked the governments to allow neutral (international) observers to monitor the human rights status in each country. They are also asking European countries and the United States to use political and economic pressure (in the case of Turkey) and military threat (in the case of Iraq) to force the governments to reform their laws and policies concerning Kurds. While the

governments deny reports of human rights violation and accuse these organizations of being "tools of propaganda" serving the "enemy," Kurds are welcoming their efforts since they highlight the Kurdish situation internationally.

*International Involvement.* European countries and the United States profess that it is their policy not to interfere in the internal problems of a country but to support the sovereignty of all states and seek peaceful solutions for internal conflicts. However, the U.S. channeled help to the Kurdish movement in Iraq through the Shah of Iran in 1972-74. Again, in 1991, the U.S. sent massive humanitarian aid to Kurdish refugees through Turkey.<sup>52</sup> In both cases, the U.S. government was in conflict with the Iraqi government. However, when the U.S. was on good terms with Iraq (during the Iraq-Iran war), it supported and financed Iraq regardless of the latter's use of chemical weapons against Kurdish civilians from 1987 to 1989. In all the cases, the U.S. functioned according to its own interests and not that of the Kurds or Iraq. It is important to state that European countries and the United States did not support the political agenda of any Kurdish party.

With respect to Turkey, the U.S. administration is still the strongest ally of the Turkish state in the West. Lately, due to pressure from various lobbies and reports of persistent violation of human rights, the U.S. Congress has begun to put some restrictions on U.S. economic and military aid to Turkey. Nevertheless, the European countries have applied more diplomatic pressure on Turkey to force a peaceful solution to the Kurdish issue. One of these pressures has been the delay of Turkey's entry into the European Union.<sup>53</sup>

Iraq has accused the U.S. and the European countries of violating the United Nations Charter which prevents member states from interfering in another member's internal affairs. The Turkish media has repeatedly criticized certain members of the U.S. Congress and European Parliament for their support to the "Kurdish cause." Again, these efforts have been welcomed by the Kurds.

*The Kurdish Agenda.* Within the nation-state system, the ultimate goal of the Kurds is to form an independent state, regardless of who carries it out or how it is carried out. One of the strong reasons for an independent state is that national interests cannot be achieved otherwise. Two groups, exclusively representing two different

nationalities within the same state, can only lead to a conflict, most likely a bloody one. So far, the proposal to form an independent state for the Kurds has been rejected by Iraq, Iran, and Turkey, and it has no support internationally. Kurds have failed to attain their objectives on their own, and hence are calling, for the time being, for an autonomous region or federation within the borders of a state.<sup>54</sup>

Kurdish nationalists have made several mistakes in setting their political agenda, like their use of armed struggle, and aligning themselves with a particular regional power or international superpower. Although a "state" is a form of governing, it has not been proven to be the best form to preserve national interests for all national groups within the state. Establishment of a state for Arabs in Iraq is an example of this. The armed struggle increased divisions and bitterness between two groups (Arabs and Kurds), who have shared the same history for thousands of years. The alignment of the Kurdish movement with regional and international powers has been costly and has proven to serve the interests of big powers more than those of the Kurdish movement.

It is generally accepted that a larger community of nations is more capable of defending its security and economic interests than a single state. The newly formed European Union is an example of such a community. On the other hand, a state is more capable of utilizing its resources to preserve and develop national culture of a group rather than being assimilated in a larger group. Thus, despite the Kurdish demand for their cultural rights, their strategic interests can only be achieved through a larger union with their neighbours. Kurdish politicians, therefore, should have assisted the Middle Eastern governments to unite, instead of capitalizing on their differences. Kurdistan could have become a bridge between Iran and Turkey, on the one hand, and between Iraq and Turkey, on the other; instead of being a mine-field for all. The Kurds have a lot to gain from such a union.

*Islamic Efforts.* Very little interest has been expressed in the political status of minority ethnic groups by Muslim scholars. One reason might be the feeling that the minority-majority issue is a result of nationalistic policies, which the Islamic scholars do not consider to be in line with Islam. The second reason might be that the issue is politically "hot" and sensitive, therefore it has been avoided by Muslim scholars. As a result, there is a lack of understanding of the issues among Muslims and their contribution to a solution has been

minimal.

Islamic political parties in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Kurdistan—forced by political realities—have approached the problem, each from its national/ethnic position. There has been no cooperation and consultation between these parties to have a coordinated or unified approach or to reduce the distance between themselves. The approach of the Islamic political parties in Iran, Iraq and Turkey is biased towards the state's "official views" despite their recognition of the mistreatment of Kurds by the nationalist governments. Their views on a possible solution to the Kurdish issue are all premised on the removal of the nationalist government. This approach has proved to be totally sterile.

Taking the case of Iraqi Kurds, and the position of the largest Arab-Islamic-Sunnī party in Iraq, would demonstrate the above point. When Dr. Osāmā Takrītī, head of the Iraqi Islamic Party, was asked about his party's position in regard to solving the Kurdish issue in Iraq, he said,

The Kurdish question has two dimensions. First, the Kurds have their own culture and rights, that they must regain. Second, the wrongs that befall them were real, and were part of what befell the Iraqi population in general, but on a larger and more intense scale. Third, and despite what happened, we believe Iraq can accommodate all Iraqis, including the Kurds.<sup>55</sup>

In this response Dr. Takrītī's analysis of the Kurdish issue is not different from that of President Saddam Hussien: it focuses on the cultural aspect of the Kurdish issue. With regard to the political dimension, Dr. Takrītī believes that "Iraq without the Kurds is a weak Iraq" and "the Kurds without Iraq will be a weak pseudo-state."<sup>56</sup> Therefore, "their (the Kurds) presence in Iraq is important and necessary."<sup>57</sup> The vision of the Islamic party is based on the concept of "statism," not on the concept of the Ummah, and limits the Arab-Kurd issue by expressing it solely as a concern of the state of Iraq, not that of the Middle East, or that of Kurds.

This type of solution has been rejected by Islamist Kurds as well as by the nationalists. Islamist Kurds' solution is based on the right of the Kurds to choose the government, the state, and the system which would enhance their freedom and fulfill their vision.<sup>58</sup> Iraq, which has been ruled by pro-Iraqis and/or pan-Arabists, has manifested a belligerent attitude towards the Kurds. Since they have been out of the

control of Baghdad, Islamist Kurds have been able to form their own political parties; broadcast their programmes on radio and television; and publish books, newspapers and magazines in Kurdistan.<sup>59</sup> None of these activities is allowed in Iraq. Therefore, putting Kurdistan under the control of Iraq will definitely weaken the Islamic achievements of Kurdistan.

Islamist Kurds emphasize the importance and necessity of a good Arab-Kurd relationship as members of the Islamic Ummah and as part of one geographical region. Islamist Kurds find the same to be true with regard to Turks and Iranians. Arabs and Kurds (of southern Kurdistan) have been strategically aligned since they converted to Islam.<sup>60</sup> They were once part of various Islamic states ruled by Arabs, Iranians and Turks, but are now part of the modern state of Iraq. Therefore, "state" is a relative form of governance and may change according to time and place. However, according to Islamic teachings, good and strategic relationships between various Muslim groups are a matter of principle.<sup>61</sup> Islamic scholars and politicians should therefore find a suitable tool to achieve harmony and unity among Muslim groups, whatever the political form of governing.

In conclusion, the Kurdish issue is the outcome of the adoption of the concept of nationalism and the nation-state system in the Middle East as well as the oppressive measures taken by the regime against the Kurds. The solution starts from realizing the depth of the problem and in seeking peaceful solutions which serve the strategic and cultural interests of all peoples. Islamic history and guidelines are good references with which to start.

### Notes

1. *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, new edition, (1986), s.v. "Kurds, Kurdistan," 447.
2. Mehrdad Izady, *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook* (Washington D.C.: Taylor Francis, 1992), 87.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, 32.
5. *Ibid.*, 32-34.
6. *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, "Kurds, Kurdistan," 447.
7. Izady, *The Kurds*, 34.
8. *Ibid.*, 169.

9. Ibid., 131.
10. Muhammed Amin Zaki, *Khulāsāt tārīkh Kurd wa Kurdistān* vol 1 (Baghdad: Salāh al-Dīn Publisher, 1961), 124. This book was originally written in Kurdish in 1931; it was translated into Arabic and published in Cairo in 1936.
11. Ibid., 126.
12. Ibid., 127.
13. Ibid., 128.
14. Izady, *The Kurds*, 46-47.
15. Zaki, *Khulasāt*, 164.
16. Ibid, Vol. 2. In this volume Zaki categorized two types of Kurdish rulers: first, those who established kingdoms in Kurdistān; and second, those who ruled countries outside Kurdistān (i.e., the Kingdom of Zands in Iran in 1779 AD). For the purpose of this paper, I refer to the first type.
17. Ibid. About Soran see p. 406, and for Bahdinian see pp. 392, 417.
18. For a bibliography of Maḥlānā Khālid Naqshbandī, see Abdul-Karim Muhammed al-Mudarresi, *‘Ulamā’ona fī khidmāt al-‘ulūm wa al-dīn* (Baghdad: Dar al-Huria Lil Tiba’a, 1983).
19. For more information about the emergence of ‘ulamā’ as a spiritual and political power in Kurdistān, see Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1992).
20. Walid Hamdi, *al-Kurd wa Kurdistān in Wathaiq al-Baritania*, (Baghdad: Sijil al-Arab, 1992), 100-110, 141.
21. Ibid., 110, 123.
22. Ibid., 185-189.
23. Ibid, 105.
24. In the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) the recommendation to form a Kurdish state was deleted and replaced with a recommendation to the Iraqi government (and Britain) to use the Kurdish language and appoint Kurdish officials in Kurdish cities and towns.
25. M.C. Lazareef, *The Kurdish Question: 1917-1923* (Beirut: Dār al-Rāzī, 1991), 143-198.
26. This material is reprinted from Gerard Chaliand, ed. *People Without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistān* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1993), 34.
27. To examine the social structure of Arabs and Kurds in the beginning of the twentieth century see Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, vol. 1 (New Jersey: Princeton University



Press, 1978), chapter 2. In addition, see Othman Ali, "British Policy and the Kurdish Question in Iraq: 1918-1932" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Toronto, Toronto, 1992), chapter 1.

28. Lazareef, *The Kurdish Question*, 44.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., 68.

31. Ibid., 221.

32. Hassan al-Alawi, *al-Shia'a wa al-dawla al-qawmia fe al-Iraq: 1914-1990*, (unknown publisher, 1990), 134-140.

33. This period is well documented in the works of Lazareef and Othman Ali cited above.

34. Masoud al-Barzānī, *Intifadha Barzan al-uola:1931-1932* (Kurdistān: Khabat Press, 1986), this personal recollection covers the Barzānī's revolution of 1931-32.

35. Masoud al-Barzani, *Thowrah Barzan:1943-1945* (Kurdistān: Khabat Press, 1986), this is also a personal recollection covering the Barzani's revolution of 1943-45.

36. Ali Abdullah, *Ta'rikh al-hizib al-dimokrati al-Kurdistānī al-Iraq* (unknown publisher, 1991).

37. Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, vol. 2, 134-135.

38. Ibid., 59.

39. To learn more about the beginning of the Ba'ath Party see, Batatu, *The Old Social Class*, vol. 3, particularly pp. 30, 35-36, 37-38, 40, 45, 46, 49 and 57.

40. To learn more about the establishment of KDP see Jalāl al-Ṭalabānī, *Kurdistān wa al-ḥarakā al-qaumiyah al-Kurdiyah*, (Beriut, Dār al-Tali'ah: 1970), 269; and for the events after 1975 see Edmund Ghareeb, *The Kurdish Question in Iraq* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1981), 181-185.

41. Several regimes governed Iraq between 1958 to 1968. Nevertheless, KDP continued its political demands for autonomy and therefore the fighting continues. A good reference on the Kurdish issue in Iraq until 1970 is Sa'ad Jawād, *Iraq and the Kurdish Question 1958-1970* (London: Ithaca Press, 1981). About the Iraqi government's position on the political events in Kurdistān see, "The Implementation of March 11 Manifesto," issued by the Iraqi Ministry of Information, Baghdad, 1972.

42. Ghareeb, *The Kurdish Question*, 131.

43. Ibid., 171.

44. Ibid., 176.

45. "Genocide in Iraq: The Anfāl Campaign Against the Kurds," *Middle East Watch*, U.S.A. 1993.
46. Michael Gunter, *The Kurds of Iraq: Tragedy and Hope* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 78.
47. *Ibid.*, 87.
48. Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberate Age: 1798-1939* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
49. There have been many books, papers, articles and documents written about Islam and the new challenges facing the Ummah. See for example, *Toward Islamization of Disciplines* (Herndon VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1989); and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: The International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1993). The references included in both books are good updated views on the mentioned topic.
50. "Human Rights in Iraq," *Human Rights Watch*, USA, 1990.
51. "Torture in Turkey and its Unwilling Accomplices," *Physicians for Human Rights*, USA, 1996.
52. Stephen C. Pelletiere, *The Kurds and Their Agas: An Assessment of the Situation in Northern Iraq* (Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute & U.S. Army War College, 1991), 26.
53. Graham E. Fuller & Ian O. Lesser, eds. *Turkey's New Geopolitics: From the Balkans to Western China* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1993). On the relationship between Turkey and Europe see p. 104, and for that between Turkey and the United States see p. 121.
54. Gunter, *The Kurds of Iraq*, 93.
55. "The Islamic Party and the Political Future of Iraq: An Interview with Dr. Osāmā Tahrīī," *Middle East Affairs Journal* 3 (1997) 1-2:161.
56. *Ibid.*
57. *Ibid.*
58. Salah Aziz, "Kurdistān (Iraq): Let the Clock Tick," paper presented in the Badlisy Centre for Kurdish Studies, Second International Conference, The Regional Dimension of Kurdish Identity: Prospects for the 21st Century," Princeton University, March 20-21, 1998.
59. Salah Aziz, "The Path to Democracy in Kurdistān-Iraq," *Namah* 2 (1994): 1.
60. Salah Aziz, "Kurdistān (Iraq): Let the Clock Tick."
61. In the Holy Qur'ān, Allah (swt) orders Muslims to bring to bear the following principles in forging relationships with other Muslims:
  - (a) "O mankind: We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female,

and made ye into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other. Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted" (49:13).

- (b) "And hold fast, all together, by the rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah's favour on you: for ye were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His grace ye became brethren: and ye were on the brink of the pit of fire, and He saved you from it. Thus doth Allah make His signs clear to you: that ye may be guided" (3:103).
- (c) "O ye who believe: Violate not the sanctity of the rites of Allah, nor of the sacred month, nor of the animals brought for sacrifice, nor the garlands that mark out such animals, nor the people resorting to the sacred house, seeking of the bounty and good pleasure of their Lord. But when ye are clear of the sacred precincts and of the state of pilgrimage, ye may hunt. And let not the hatred of some people in (once) shutting you out of the sacred mosque lead you to transgression. Help ye one another in righteousness and piety, but help ye not one another in sin and rancour. Fear Allah, for Allah is strict in punishment" (5:2).