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The Carrot or the Stick: Kurdistan, Iraq, and U.S. Intervention in Anfal

HIS 301 America and the Middle East

Sebastian Meyer, 2014—*mourning of Anfal victims*

Introduction

The Iraqi Kurdish narrative is one of frustration, betrayal, and loss but also one of pride, strength, and above all, hope. With the present unraveling security situation in Northern Iraq and the intensification of Peshmerga forces fighting against ISIL, this is clearer than ever. However, to understand the Iraqi Kurdish situation today consideration must first be given to the history of Kurdish independence movement in Iraq. Specifically, what are the origins of Iraqi-Kurdish discord? How have Kurdish independence movements affected this discord? And, how have foreign actors hampered or encouraged this conflict? At the heart of these questions lies Iraqi violence against Kurds during the Iran-Iraq War.

Over the course of this essay I discuss relations between the US, Kurds, and Iraq leading up to mass killings of Iraqi Kurds starting in 1975 and culminating in the 1987-88 Anfal Campaign. I will also analyze the US's deliberation over diplomatic intervention in the attacks. I argue that domestic and strategic incentives persuaded the US not to intervene in Iraqi mass killings, despite knowledge of Iraqi chemical attacks on Kurds and their grave humanitarian consequences.

SECTION I: Iraq-Kurdish Origins and the Struggle for Independence

The Kurds are a heterogeneous, self-identified nation of around twenty-five to thirty-five million people spread between Turkey (15 million), Syria (2 million), Iran (6 million) and Iraq (4-5 million).[1] There are no exact ethnological or linguistic criteria with

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[1] Kerim Yildiz. *The Kurds In Iraq; Past, Present, and Future*. (Ann Harbor: Kurdish Human Rights Project, 2004): p. 9.

which the Kurds can be defined. Kurds have no common language and speak a variety of dialects. The most widespread, 'Kurmanji,' is spoken by Kurds living in Southern Turkey, Northern Syria, and the former USSR, whereas Kurds in Northern Iraq and Iran are more likely to speak Sorani (Kurdi). Kurdish dialects are mutually intelligible but differ widely in terms of colloquial and sub-dialects.[2] The Kurds are also diverse religiously. Occupying an ethnographic fault line between civilizations, the Kurds have absorbed an array of religious practices. Most Kurds are Sunni Muslims belonging to the Shafi School of jurisprudence, though its practice is distinct from other Sunnis in Iraq and Syria.[3] Other communities practice Sufi Shi'a Islam—Alevism, Yarsanism, and Yazidis—but the diversity of Kurdish religious sects extends as far as Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Judaism.[4]

Geographically, the Kurds are the largest nation without a state. Kurdistan cannot be drawn or so much as uttered without contention and disagreement. In its most general sense, Kurdistan appears as an amorphous blob between Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Iran, of which the majority is in Turkey. It should also be noted that most of this area is significantly underdeveloped industrially and most Kurds are poor farmers or miners.[5] This is a disadvantage that has become stark in the equipment of Kurdish troops and funding and organizing a Kurdish government.

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[2] Ibid p. 8.

[3] Vanessa G. Acker, "Religion Among the Kurds: Internal Tolerance, External Conflict". *Kennedy School Review.* 5 (2004): p. 101.

[4] Ibid. pp 100-101.

[5] Kawa Jabary and Anil Hira, "The Kurdish Mirage: A Success Story in Doubt." *Middle East Policy,* 20 (2) (2013): pp. 105-106.

Like their unclear ethnic definition, the historical origins of the Kurdish nation are similarly complicated, subjective, and politically charged. Scholarly research on the origins of Kurds differs drastically from one account to another. This is in part because there is no written history by Kurds before the 16th Century. Most of what scholars know about Kurdish origins comes from references of Kurds in non-Kurdish texts. [6] What is clear, however, is that throughout the Ottoman Empire and into the 20th Century Kurds did not exist as a nation. Kurds were largely taken advantage of as a marginalized community on a fault line between the Persian, Ottoman, and Russian empires.[7] By the end of WWI the Kurds were a beaten and bruised minority concerned with surviving widespread famine.[8]

However, this would change throughout the early 20th Century. As nationalist movements emerged with the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, oppressed nations within the Empire looked to visions of statehood perpetrated by Wilson's fourteen points as a new beginning. For the Kurds, an intensely diverse and previously marginalized group, this would become a leading characteristic of Kurdish nationalism.

European negotiations over Turkey in the 1920 Treaty of Sevres set up only foundations for a possible Kurdish province in Turkey. [9] However, this treaty is

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[6] Ofra Bengio, *The Kurds of Iraq: Building a State Within a State*. (London: Lyn Reinner Publishers, Inc.,2012): pp. 1-2.

[7] Lawrence, Quil, *Invisible Nation: How the Kurd's Quest for Statehood is Shaping Iraq and the Middle East*.(New York: Walker Publishing Company, 2008): p. 12.

[8] Wadie Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development.* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006), p. 126-129.

[9] Ali, Othman., "The Kurds and the Lausanne Peace Negotiations, 1922-23". *Middle Eastern Studies* (1997)*,* 33 (3) p. 531.

remembered in the Kurdish conscious as an internationally backed independent Kurdistan later annulled by Britain. This 'revocation' became the inception for much of 20th Century Kurdish nationalism. As Quil Lawrence writes, "The Treaty of Sevres was the first time the Kurds had seen their names in print on an international document, and to this day it remains something like a Dead Sea scroll for Turkish nationalists."[10] Once the vision of self-autonomy was planted in the Kurdish mindset, the nation would not rest until that dream was achieved.

Failed Deals and Militarization: Kurds in Iraq (1918 – 1970)

This dream would become near impossible in the subsequent partitioning of Ottoman territory into European mandates. In the early 1920s Iraqi Kurds fought for autonomy while the fate of Mosul and Northern Iraq lay at the hands of Britain. During this time various anti-British and anti-Christian outbreaks occurred throughout Iraqi Kurdistan, led in part by Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji.[11] Hesitant to intervene or show support, Britain granted the Kurds far reaching autonomy inside Iraq and even a special delegation to the League of Nations. Yet, these promises were ignored with the submission of many Kurdish nationalists after the annexation of the oil rich Mosul to the Iraqi Mandate. [12]

Scattered Kurdish revolts occurred throughout the 1930s and '40s aimed against Iraqi violations of promised Kurdish autonomy and lead by Mustafa Barzani.

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[10] Lawrence, *Invisible Nation.* p. 13.

[11] Wadie, *The Kurdish National Movement,* p. 147.

[12] Bengio, *The Kurds of Iraq,* pp. 14-16 ; Wadie, *The Kurdish National Movement.* pp. 158-159.

While these protests failed, they culminated in the forming of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) in 1946, distinctly separate from the Soviet-backed Mahabad Turkish Republic and The Kurdish Democratic Part in Iran (KDPI).[13] This new, uniquely Iraqi Kurdish movement gave KDP leaders a more viable framework to organize and would henceforth become the vehicle for shaping their demands for autonomy.[14]

The KDP faced its first challenge following the coup of 1958 and Abd al-Karim Qasim's ascent power. After a period of calm, KDP leaders issued Qasim an ultimatum to give Iraqi Kurds autonomy, which lead to a messy war in 1961 known as the September Revolution.[15] However, with the relative success of this conflict—there were few casualties in skirmish-style fighting and Kurds retained control of the Northern provinces—Kurdish leaders would continue fighting with Ba'th regime in 1963 and throughout the 1960s. While a ceasefire was reached in 1966, it was not fully adopted and ultimately resulted in more fighting. [16]

On March 11, 1970, KDP leaders signed another agreement with Baghdad, this time with Saddam Hussein and the second Ba'ath party, which was consolidating power in Baghdad. [17] The deal, remarkably similar to Qasim's previous appeasements, made more groundless promises for a Kurdish official language, Kurdish seats in

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[13] David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, (London, I.B. Tauris, 2004) pp. 240-241.

[14] Ibid. p. 295-300.

[15]Bengio, *The Kurds of Iraq.* p 16.

[16] Ibid. p. 17. ; Yaniv Voller, *The Kurdish Liberation Movement in Iraq: from Insurgency to Statehood.* (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp.49-50.

[17] Lawrence, *The Invisible Nation.* p. 21.

government, land redistribution to Kurds, and the return of Kurds displaced by war.[18] While the deal was accepted, Saddam launched an assassination attempt on Barzani less than a year after the deal, spoiling it and future KDP-Iraqi relations.[19]

These armed conflicts against the Iraqi state crucially mark the emergence of strong—albeit divided—Kurdish national movement merging, "the combative element with the ideological-political one…the Kurds [started] to take advantage of transitional periods and the central government's weakness to press their claims."[20] After a period of artificial concessions and groundless agreements, Iraqi Kurds by the late 1960s were committed to fighting against the Iraqi state and adamant about their self-autonomy. This hardened position would bear grave humanitarian consequences. My discussion of the Kurdish Genocide begins at this point.

Foreign Betrayal: The Politics of Genocide (1970-1975)

The failure of the 1970 deal put Iraqi Kurdish nationalists in a difficult situation. On one hand they were deeply committed to achieving political autonomy, even if it meant using military force, as it had throughout the last ten years. On the other hand, Saddam's increasingly friendly relations with the Soviet Union were based in stockpiling Soviet tanks and heavy arms from the beginning.[21] By 1970 Saddam wielded one of the most powerful armies in the Middle East. With a military catastrophe looming over

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[18] Voller, *The Kurdish Liberation Movement.* p. 50.

[19] Bengio, *The Kurds of Iraq*. p. 58.

[20] Ibid. p. 13.

[21] Shemesh, Haim, *Soviet-Iraqi Relations 1968-1988,* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 1992), pp. 84-85.

their heads and Kurdish autonomy in the balance, it was clear the Iraqi Kurds desperately needed foreign allies. Geographically and strategically, it made the most sense to turn to Iran and the Cold War superpower, the United States.

Iran, Iraqi, and Kurdish nationalist leaders had long tangoed in a three-way relationship. To weaken the position of its longtime rival to the West, Iran would often support Iraqi Kurds fighting against Baghdad.[22] To facilitate support, Kurds would emphasize the positive aspects of their love-hate relationship with Iran to facilitate the transfer of arms and funds from the Shah.[23] The late 1960s were no exception. In April of 1969 Iran revoked previous border agreements in the contentious Shat al-Arab waterway south of Basra and armed Kurdish fighters attacking the Iraqi Petroleum Company.[24] Throughout the late 1960s Iran increased its aid to Iraqi Kurdish rebels to combat the growing Iraq-Soviet relationship.[25] While it should be said that there was immense suspicion on both sides of the Iranian-Kurdish relationship, continued Iranian support was essential for Iraqi Kurds to improve their standing vis-à-vis Baghdad, and itself almost lead to a deal with Iraq in 1973.[26]

The other geostrategic ally Iraqi Kurdish nationalists sought out was the United States. With strained relations with the Arab states because of the US's support of

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[22] Bengio. *The Kurds of Iraq*, p. 29.

[23] Koohi Kamali, Farideh, *Political Development of the Kurds in Iran* (New York, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003): p. 170.

[24] Stephen Pelletiere, *The Iran Iraq War: Chaos in a Vacuum*, (New York: Prager, 1992): p. 8; Yildiz, *The Kurds in Iraqi,* p. 18.

[25] Bengio, *The Kurds Of Iraq*. p. 69.

[26] Ibid p. 102.

Israel in the October war, the US saw Kurdish nationalists in Iraq as a small opportunity to secure a new ally in a valuable location between Russia, the Middle East, and Iran. [27] Moreover, US concerns grew over the heightened relationship between the USSR and Iraq in 1972.[28] By 1975 the CIA had enacted $16 million a plan including supplying financial aid and old Soviet and Chinese arms to Kurdish leaders.[29]

The Kurds could not be more ecstatic to have a new, super power ally at their backs. In an interview Barzani told the *Washington Post*, "I trust America… America is too great a power to betray a small people like the Kurds"[30] and even told a delegation of reporters that he wished Kurdistan to become the fifty-first state.[31] To the Kurds, US support meant the freedom to shift away from its overreliance on their strenuous and historically ominous relationship with Tehran.[32]

Yet, in some ways, the Kurdish-US-Iran alliance was doomed from the beginning. Kurdish-Iranian relations were fraught with distrust from previously failed deals and the marginalized Kurdish population in Iran itself. Similarly, looking back, US-Kurdish relations in the early 1970s were likely artificially optimistic.[33] As seen above,

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[27] Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power* (New York: Simon & Schulster, 1991): p. 632.

[28] Yildiz, *The Kurds In Iraq*, pp. 22-23.

[29] Bengio, *The Kurds Of Iraq*, p. 77.

[30] Jonathan Randall, *After Such Knowledge, What Forgiveness?* (New York: Farray, Straus, and Giroux, 1997): p. 156.

[31] Bengio, *The Kurds Of Iraq,* pp. 142.

[32] Yildiz, *The Kurds In Iraq*, p. 23.

[33] Bengio, *The Kurds of Iraq.* p. 146.

Barzani, who was weary of the Shah, may have become too easily seduced by the prospect of the US as a freedom fighting super power and badly misjudged its friendly gestures.

Facilitating a Kurdish national movement also held little strategic interest for either country. For Iran, the primary goal of inciting Kurdish nationalists was to harass Baghdad. Iran was becoming dangerously stratified economically and ethnically and was moreover fearful of inciting a revolution in its own Kurdish community.[34] For the US, the primary reason for pledging support to the Kurds was to appease Iran. On a higher level, throughout the 1970s and '80s the US was consistently reluctant to support the KDP publically in order to avoid distancing themselves between the US and Saddam.[35]

In 1974 Saddam extended an updated deal to Barzani, which he refused.[36] By March 1975, five years after Barzani had accepted a deal promising Kurdish autonomy, Saddam and the Shah negotiated the Algiers Agreement with Kissinger participating behind the scenes.[37] The deal explicitly agreed that Iran and Iraq would share responsibility and access to Shat-al-Arab waterways. [38] Behind the scenes, this deal meant that Iran would stop supporting Iraqi Kurds for peace with Iraq, a disaster for

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[34] Ibid. pp. 68-69.

[35] Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide,* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), p. 223.

[36] Yildiz, *The Kurds In Iraq*, pp 19-20.

[37] Ibid. pp. 23-24.

[38]Agreement Concerning the Use of Frontier Water Courses, Iran-Iraq, 26 December, 1975: articles 1 and 2. http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/IQ%20IR_751226_Agreement%20concerning%20the%20use%20of%20frontier%20watercourses.pdf

Kurdish communities in Iraq—that the largest sources of Kurdish military funding would dry up overnight.[39] It is clear that little to no consideration was given to the possibly catastrophic consequences this would have on Iraqi Kurds. As Kissinger mentioned in defense of the behind-the-scenes abandoning of the Kurds, "secret activity should not be confused with missionary activity."[40]

At this point four imperative factors distinguished the Saddam administration in 1970—one willing to negotiate with Kurds—from the Saddam during the Kurdish mass killings following the US-Iran betrayal. First, Saddam had received a stockpile of chemical Soviet heavy weapons in its arms race with Iran. Second, Iraq was in a much stronger financial position following the rise of oil prices during and after the 1973 war. Third, the Kurds were now more solidly a state enemy. While the KDP had always skirmished with Iraqi forces, the new Kurdish overreliance and mistrust of Iraq made it harder for both sides to come to the negotiating table.

Above all, by 1975 Saddam had gained an immense concentration of political power and was no longer isolated from the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP). Together, these factors dovetailed to create an aura of confidence around Saddam. Within hours of the new agreement Iran and the United States closed the window for aid. The waves of ethnic mass killing against Kurds in Iraq would ebb and flow for the next fifteen years.

When Elephants Fight only the Grass Suffers: Genocide and Anfal (1970-1987)

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[39] Bengio, *The Kurds of Iraq*, pp. 139-141.

[40] Ibid. p. 144.

Immediately following the Algiers Accord, desperate Kurdish forces attempted revolt while KDP leadership crumbled and thousands of Kurds fled to Iran.[41] Iraqi units took the Kurdish areas in Northern Iraq in two weeks and initiated a nation-building regime to destroy Kurdish national identity.[42]50,000 would die and 600,000 would be displaced in the fighting.[43] Iraqi forces created a buffer zone eighteen miles in from the Iranian border-- itself displacing around 250,000 Kurds—and which quickly became a free-fire zone in which over 1000 villages were razed.[44] This was to be only the beginning.

In 1979 the delicate balance of the Algiers Accord was shattered with the overthrow of the Shah. Ayatollah Khomeni mobilized his forces in the Shatt al-Arab region. In 1980 negotiations over the waterway quickly fell apart. A grenade was thrown at Iraq's Information Minister, Tariq Aziz in April. Khomeni ceased communications with Saddam and reinitiated support to the Iraqi Kurds. Iraq responded by deporting large numbers of Shi'a Iraqis and launching a preemptive attack into Khuzestan. [45]

No longer were the Kurds simply a rebellious minority. Throughout the Iran-Iraq War Kurdish resistance fighters in Northern Iraq gave assistance in seizing towns and

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[41] Voller, *The Kurdish Liberation,* p. 57.

[42] Benigio. *The Kurds of Iraq,* pp 146-147 ; Ibid. pp. 155-156.

[43] Howard Adelman, "Humanitarian Intervention: the Case of the Kurds," *International Journal of Refugee Law* Vol. 4 no. 1 (1992): p. 7.

[44]Lawrence, *Invisible Nation,* p. 29. ; Benigio. *The Kurds of Iraq,* p. 159.

[45] Pelletiere, *The Iran-Iraq War,* p. 31-35.

allowing freedom of movement to Iranian troops.[46] Kurds also become a public enemy. Saddam brutally punished Kurds captured in assisting Iran. It was not long before Saddam unilaterally turned against all Kurdish civilians, regardless of their involvement with Iran.

Saddam's permanent solution for the Kurdish problem towards the end of the war would come to be known as the Anfal Campaign, a derivative of the eighth chapter of the Qur'an, Surat al-Anfal, which alludes to the spoils and plunders of war.[47] Anfal was conducted in several key stages. Ali Hassan al-Majid—or 'Ali Chemical,' Saddam's cold blooded cousin—was put in charge of administering Anfal, in part to shield Saddam from the attacks. The Campaign started by demilitarizing all Kurdish area in Northern Iraq. No people or villages were allowed to remain in Iraqi Kurdistan.[48] Kurds fleeing the destruction suffered widespread human rights abuses. Men were held in legal limbo in Iraq's prisons and often executed.[49] The second stage in Majid's campaign consisted of disproportionate, brutal responses to PUK and KDP opposition and inhumane killings. In particular, it was clear a major goal of the Anfal Campaigns was to target and kill all male Kurds of age for military service. In some cases, soldiers

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[46] Voller, *The Kurdish Liberation Movement*, p. 59.

[47] Yildiz, *the Kurds in Iraq*, p. 25.

[48]Farouk-Slugett, Marion, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001): pp. 269-270.

[49] Yildiz, *The Kurds of Iraq,* p. 26.

under the order of Majid publically massacred hundreds of Kurdish men accused of being part of the Kurdish resistance or violating mundane activities.[50]

The third stage, for which the attacks against Iraqi Kurds will forever be immortalized in Kurdish history, were the eight final attacks from February 1987 to September 1988. As the war drew to a close Iraq drew on its deep stockpile of chemical weapons to finish its Kurdish 'problem' once and for all. In the particularly gruesome example of Halabja Massacre recorded by reporters, Iraqis demolished a town of 60,000 after it was taken by Kurdish and Iranian forces, killing between 3,200 and 5,000 civilians.[51] In the final Anfal attacks after the Iran-Iraq ceasefire in August of 1988, Iraq rushed fifteen battalions (over 30,000 troops) into Kurdistan to terrorize the population and discourage future rebellion.[52]

It is hard to estimate the number of Kurdish casualties and displaced persons. Before the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war somewhere between 200,000 and half a million Kurds were resettled.[53] Estimates suggest around 50,000 - 182,000 Kurdish civilians perished in Anfal attacks from 1988-89.[54] Reports after the war vary more substantially. Conservative reports suggest that the total number of displaced Kurds from 1975 to 1988 is around 1 to 1.2 million, whereas others place number as high as 600,000

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[50] Human Rights Watch, *Geonocide in Iraq: The Anfal Campain Against the Kurds* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1993): See "Orders for Mass Killing."

[51] Yildiz, *The Kurds of Iraq,* p. 27. ; Leo Casey, "Questioning Halabja: Genocide and the Expedient Political Lie." *Dissent* 50(3) (2003), p. 74.

[52] Bengio, *The Kurds in Iraq,* p. 184.

[53] Vanley, Ismet Sheriff. "Kurdistan in Iraq" *People Without a Country.* (London, Zed Press, 1980): p. 185-188.

[54] Casey, "Questioning Halabja." p 61.

families, or 1.5 to 1.8 million people.[55] What is clear is that for a population of around 4-5 million, even the most cautious of these statistics represent a holocaust for Kurdish communities in Iraq. [56]

SECTION II: US Diplomatic Intervention

Given the brutal Iraqi violations of human rights and staggering statistics of Iraqi-Kurdish victims, the tepid reaction Kurdish mass killings in the international community is surprising. While the US and Britain attempted initial condemnations of Baghdad's attacks of the Kurds in the late 1980s—Britain through the House of Lords and the US through the Senate-- these disapprovals lacked conviction and were quickly brushed aside by the executive.[57] In this section I shift my discussion from a detailing of the holocaust of Kurds during the 1987-88 Anfal Campaign to an analysis of the US's deliberation of intervening diplomatically in these mass killings.

Reasons for Diplomatic Intervention

Of the countries able to act during the Anfal Campaign the US was in the best position. For one, there was substantial and clear evidence in US government circles of the genocide taking place. Whereas in Cambodia and the Holocaust officials could hide behind the shield of little information, this was not the case with Iraqi gas attacks. The proliferation of Human Rights groups during the 1970s in the US and abroad

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[55] Human Rights Watch, *Geonocide in Iraq,* 1993. See "Orders for Mass Killing." ; McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*. p. 360.

[56] Yildiz, *The Kurds in Iraq*. p. 9.

[57] Smith, Karen Elizabeth. *Genocide and the Europeans*. (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010): p. 102-105. ; Farouk-Slugett, Marion, *Iraq Since 1958.* 2001. p. 271.

during the Vietnam War and also the proximity of the fighting to the Turkish border itself made reliable information of Kurdish mass killings inescapable.[58] Official reports on the Iraqi use of chemical weapons were widely circulated in high levels of government. UN investigations into chemical uses during the Iran-Iraq war "regrettably" found substantial evidence of Iraq using deadly chemical weapons as early as 1986.[59] DOS reports in 1987 explicitly warned against widespread Iraqi humanitarian violations against Kurds. Specifically that, "Iraq embarked on a tougher campaign to control Kurdistan [involving] widespread destruction and bulldozing of Kurdish…villages, mass forced movement of Kurds, and exile of Kurdish families….[and use of] chemical weapons against Kurdish villages in Kurdistan."[60] Declassified CIA files show that President Reagan knew of Iraqi Mustard Gas attacks against Kurds as early as 1983.[61] US diplomat Peter Galbraith himself visited Kurdistan during the attacks and witnessed derelict Kurdish villages.[62]

Also different from Cambodia and WWII was the US's diplomatic relations with the perpetrator. Whereas the governments of Hitler and Pol Pot were seen as rabid and murderous, Iraqi government actors throughout the 1970s and '80s were viewed as

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[58] Power, *A Problem from* Hell. pp. 193-195.

[59] U.N.S.C. *Investigation of Allegation of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Conflict between Iran and Iraq.* 12 March 1986. By Perez de Cuellar, Javier, et al, UNSCC S/17911 (New York, UNSC) paragraph 14.

[60]US DOS. *Country Reports on Human Rights 1987.* 1987. See: "d. Arbitrary Arrests, Detention, Exile, or Forced Labor" under "Iraq." p. 1172.

[61] CIA, Directorate of Intelligence. *The Iraq Chemical Weapons Program in Perspective: an Intelligence Assessment*. January 1983. pp. 2.

[62] Power, *A Problem from Hell*. pp. 201-202.

rational and consistent.[63] As one of Iraq's top allies and contributors in foreign aid, the US was in a perfect position to negotiate with Baghdad as it had tremendous leverage with Iraq. Not only did the US supply Iraq with a hefty sum of agricultural credits, but the US was also Iraq's primary oil importer. Towards the end of the war Saddam had accumulated a $70 billion debt and was desperate for more US agricultural credits.[64] Despite popular perceptions of Saddam as a stone-cold leader unhindered by public perception, documents found in the Saddam's overthrow suggest Baghdad was actually tremendously sensitive to American perceptions and watched Washington carefully. Saddam even propagated an anti-US image and rigged protests in Iraq to keep Reagan on his toes, which worked remarkably well in drawing the US closer.[65]

Diplomatic intervention during the Anfal Campaign also dovetailed with US interests to stop the Iraqi proliferation of chemical weapons. By 1984 US officials were all too aware that Baghdad had amassed chemical agents and had the capabilities to produce more seeing as many US companies sold Iraq materials needed to make the weapons.[66] While their use against Iran potentially occupied a strategic and economic interest for the US, their widespread US in Iraq against civilians created concerns over a destabilized Iraq and Geneva Convention violations. Reports to the Secretary of State and US diplomats urged further consideration of the Reagan administration's neutral

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[63]Ibid. p. 186.

[64] Ibid. p. 219-224.

[65] Ibid. p. 211.

[66] George P. Shultz to Mission to the European Office of the United Nations. "Iranian Resolution on Use of Chemical Weapons by Iraq." National Security Archives Document 47. pp. 2, article 4, section 1. ; CIA, Directorate of Intelligence. *Impact and Implications of Chemical Weapons Use in the Iran-Iraq War. 22* November, 1986. p. 3-4.

stance on the Iraqi use of chemical weapons against Kurds.[67] The US prevented companies from exporting harmful chemicals to Iraq due to "concern over the possible intentions to use the chemical in the manufacture…and proliferation of deadly chemical agents" but this was only temporary.[68] Concerns naturally spread among US officials over the large amounts of chemical stockpiles in Iraq. Many opined that if the US were to take a stand on the Iraqi massacres against Kurds, it could also give the US an upper hand in stopping Iraq's wild proliferation of chemical weapons.[69]

In the same vein, intervention in the Anfal Campaign not only meant saving the Kurds but also the region. While the US officials were publically adamant about Iraqi support, decision makers were also concerned with mass destabilization in the region. The DOS reports expressed concerns over the international consequences of the huge amount of Kurdish refugees from Iraq to surrounding countries, and the human rights terrors associated with them.[70] Specifically, many US officials pointed out that the large number of refugees in Turkey, a vital member of NATO and large recipient of US aid, changed Anfal from a domestic initiative to an international problem. These officials opined that if the US were to intervene it would not only lessen the burden of

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[67] DOS Bureau of Political-Military Affairs from Jonathan Howe to George P. Shultz. "Iraqi Use of Chemical Weapons" National Security Archives Document 24. p. 1, paragraph 2-3. ; Richard Murphy to Lawrence Eagleburger. "Iraqi Use of Chemical Weapons" National Security Archives Document 25. 21 November, 1983. p. 7, paragraphs 8-10.

[68] DOS cable from George P. Shultz to the United States Interests Section in Iraq. "US Chemical Shipping to Iraq" March 4, 1984. National Security Archives document 42. pp. 1-2, paragraphs 3-4.

[69] Power, *A Problem From Hell*, pp. 205-206.

[70]Senate. *Prevention of Genocide Act of 1988*. See paragraph 7. ; US DOS 1987.*Country Reports on Human Rights 1987.* 1987.See: "Iraq: Respect for the Integrity of the Person" p. 1038.

surrounding countries of taking in refugees but also protect Iraqi Kurdistan from becoming weak and potentially further succumbing to Iranian and Russian pressure.[71]

US Silence: Domestic Incentives over Humanitarian Concerns

Despite clear knowledge of the attacks, being in a position to intervene, and intervention running parallel to US interests, the US stayed silent on the issue of the Kurds. Washington's relationship with Baghdad during the 1980s focused on mutual admiration and respect, economic growth, and regional stability. Saddam's widespread human rights violations were just starting to leak out of Iraq and many US officials still saw Saddam as a reasonable, reliable ally.[72] Moreover, the US had aimed to advance Iraqi relations for years and were reluctant to abandon their longtime investment.[73] Neither Reagan nor his successor, George H.W. Bush, ever spoke out publically against Iraqi humanitarian violations of Kurds. This policy of non-intervention can be attributed to strategic interests in Middle Eastern power dynamics, a blurry concept of genocide, and, above all, economic incentives.

While US foreign officials were concerned with the possible humanitarian and destabilizing effects of Anfal in the region, they were willing to risk these consequences to keep an Islamic Iran from gaining control of a valuable geostrategic location. Secret meetings with US and Iraqi officials—and public ones starting in 1984 when the US and Iraq officially resumed diplomatic relations—focused mainly on general

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[71] Joost Hiltermann. *A Poisonous Affair: America, Iraq, and the Gassing of Halabja*.(New York, Cambridge University Press, 2007): p. 210.

[72]Power, *A Problem from Hell.* p. 224-226.

[73] Ibid. p. 220.

strengthening alliances and working together to combat Iran. In a meeting between Donald Rumsfeld and Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz in 1984, Rumsfeld noted that US efforts to assist were inhibited by the use of chemical weapons and the violation of human rights, but only in passing conversation between a Jordan-Iraqi oil pipeline and Syrian security.[74] Senate reports detail over 70 US shipments of lethal chemicals to Iraq between 1984 and 1987 of "exported biological materials…not attenuated or weakened [and] capable of reproduction" including Anthrax and a large variety of other harmful chemical agents.[75]

On a higher level, US policy toward Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War was much more sophisticated than a simple all-out attack against Iran. While the US feared an all-powerful Iran it also expressed concerns of extended Iraqi control in the region. The best outcome, US officials opined, was to let the Iran-Iraq conflict become a war of attrition and export more oil as Iran and Iraq both become weak.[76] The Iran-Contra Affair revealed that the Reagan administration had no inhibitions about dirtying the war if it dovetailed with US interests. This approach would give the US a new command over the region and leverage with Iran and Iraq. As a result, US nonchalance over the intensification of the Iran-Iraq War would contribute to the apathy of Iranian and Iraqi leaders towards attrition-based strategies and senseless attacks, and as an extension,

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[74] Cable from Charles H. Prince to DOS, "Rumsfeld One-on-One Meeting with Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister" 21 December, 1983. National Security Archives Document 32. p. 9.

[75] U.S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs. *Second Staff Report on Chemical and Biological Weapons Exports to Iraq*. 1991. (see "US exports of Biological Materials to Iraq")

[76] Sick, Gary, "The United States in the Persian Gulf: From Twin Pillars to Dual Containment," in Lesch, *The United States and the Middle East*, (2006): p. 281.

the Anfal Campaign itself. Over one trillion dollars would be spent in military spending and more than one million soldiers would die over the eight-year period. [77]

Even closer to the heart of US decision making for diplomatic intervention was domestic concern over oil imports and agricultural subsidies. The US favored Iraqi militarization and the intensification of the Iran-Iraq War in as much as it made a profit and the conflict did not affect US business. Rising security concerns by 1985-86, particularly when Iran began mining and patrolling neutral shipping routes to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, [78] convinced the US that it would need an active relationship with Iraq to secure its oil and rice assets in the region. Washington even developed a military intervention plan with other Arab countries should Iraq fall to Iran.[79] Time and time again, further investment into the Iran-Iraq War would persuade the US to remain silent on the Kurds.

In 1988 the Senate attempted a type of diplomatic intervention on behalf of the Kurds through an economic sanction bill condemning Iraq's use of chemical weapons by voice vote, where no record of voter names are kept. Specifically, the legislation would prohibit the sale or transfer to Iraq of any item subject to export control by any agency of the United States.[80] The bill received strong pressure from oil and agricultural public interest groups in the House, however, which contributed to the bill's

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[77] Alexander Mikaberidze, *Conflict and Conquest in the Islamic World: A Historical Encyclopedia.* (Santa Barbra, ABC-CLIO, 2011): p. 418.

[78] Sick, "The United States in the Persian Gulf," p. 281.

[79] White House National Security Directive "U.S. Policy Towards the Iran-Iraq War" Ronald Reagan, 26 November, 1983. National Security Archives Document 26. pp. 1, paragraphs 1-2.

[80] Senate, *Prevention of Genocide Act*.

impossibility of passage.[81] In 1988 over 23% of all US rice was exported directly to Iraq. Louisiana alone exported more than 1 million tons of wheat to Iraq yearly.[82] The US had already supplied Iraq with $2.5 billion in agricultural credits between 1983 and 1988.[83] Representatives from wheat and rice producing states simply could not afford to be recorded advocating to cut rice and wheat credits to Iraq when these products were their constituents' main source of income.

The US also cozied up to Iraq to protect oil interests. By any means, the concept that Iran or Iraq would gain a monopoly on the access of oil into Persian Gulf was a terrifying prospect. In a declassified national security directive Reagan noted,

> It is present United States policy to undertake whatever measures may be necessary to keep the Strait of Hormuz open to international shipping. Accordingly U.S. military forces will attempt to…defeat any hostile efforts to close the Strait to international shipping. Because of the real and psychological impact of a curtailment in the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf on the international economic system we must assure our readiness to deal promptly with actions aimed at disrupting traffic.[84]

Fresh in the minds of US foreign officials was the oil embargo during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, which reemphasized the potentially catastrophic international economic effects of a disruption in the flow of oil. By the late 1980s the US had already developed an intervention plan should it need to secure its oil interests in the Gulf, which it would draw on not five years later in the First Gulf War.

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[81] Power, *A Problem from Hell,* pp. 226-228.

[82] Ibid, p. 221.

[83] Ibid. p. 173.

[84] White House National Security Decision Directive. *U.S. Policy Toward the Iran-Iraq War.* p. 1, paragraph 3.

Inevitably, US strategic interests in power dynamics in the region and its strong agricultural and oil interests in Iraq pushed the US to further invest in its relationship with Saddam rather than show dissent on the Kurdish issue during the Iran-Iraq War.

Conclusion: More of the Same

With the close of the Iran-Iraq War and onset of the first Gulf War, Iraqi Kurds would make significant strides in realizing justice and independence. The USAF and RAF would work to protect Iraqi Kurds from state aggression. New Kurdish agreements with Iraq would promise civil rights for Kurds and local autonomy for Kurdistan. With the second Gulf War in 2003 the US would work with an Iraqi coalition government to create a new constitution guaranteeing minority rights. Saddam would be hung in 2006 and 'Ali Chemical' would be sentenced to death by an international tribunal in 2007 for his participation in the Anfal Campaign.

Yet, looking back it should be asked if the US contributed positively towards preventing similar future mass killings since Anfal? Any study of American-Kurdish relations throughout the 1980s-2000s reveals a constant cycle of promises and betrayal. Strategic incentives have habitually preempted concerns for Kurdish human and civil rights. If anything, both Gulf Wars show that the US is only willing to intervene in Iraqi domestic affairs when the flow of oil is threatened. Indeed, with the success of ISIL and the US's refusal to fund or support Kurdish fighters, deep concern over Kurdish mass executions still remain.

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