

Land and Rebellion:

Kurdish Separatism in Comparative Perspective

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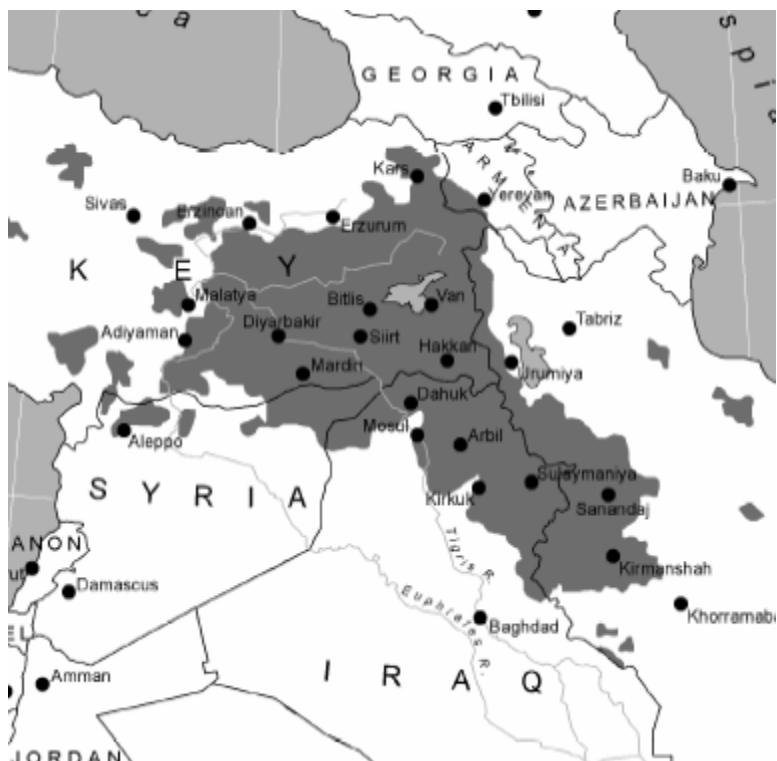


Figure 1. Greater Kurdistan.

Source: Dahlman 2002, 272.

“There’s not much talk about the [Iranian] Kurds because we have never taken any hostages, never hijacked a plane. But I am proud of this.”

-‘Abd al-Rahman Qassemou, leader of Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran, assassinated in July 1989 by the Iranian government.

The conventional understanding of Kurdistan and of Kurdish separatism--focused mostly on Iraqi and Turkish Kurds-- is that it is a uniform phenomenon. Missing from this picture, however, are both Iranian and Syrian Kurds, who have respectively been only periodic and nearly absent actors on the Kurdish political scene. What accounts for this variation across Kurdish minorities in these four countries? This essay seeks to explain why Kurdish nationalists have been historically able to sustain rebellion in Iraq and Turkey but have failed in Iran or Syria. I argue that variations in the persistence and success of ethnic mobilization by Kurdish organizations countries are substantially a function of relations between states and rural Kurdish elites. Rulers in Iraq and Turkey, who were much more successful over time in breaking up Kurdish rural social structures (and weakening traditional elites), unwittingly created the foundation for later waves of Kurdish nationalist rebellion in doing so by creating large urban Kurdish populations that could be mobilized (by Kurdish urban radicals).

I draw three central conclusions from this comparative study. First, the formative origins of contemporary Kurdish nationalism have long-term historical roots. Second, states have been central in Kurdistan to the process of ethnic mobilization by virtue of altering the class structure of Kurdish society, thereby shaping the human resources upon which both which traditional Kurdish leaders and then more radical, urban-based organizations could draw. The infrastructural power of the Iraqi and Turkish states, which was crucial to defeating earlier rebellions, paradoxically helped to make it possible for later, urban Kurdish elites to build the social base to challenge those states. Finally, the comparative study of Kurdish nationalist movements has much to tell us about the social origins of successful self-determination movements elsewhere and suggests that we should return our attention to the dynamics of social change in such minority populations.

In the conclusion I argue that if we are to understand why some self-determination movements persist against state repression for long periods of time and achieve their goals, we must situate self-determination movements firmly in the demographic and political structures of the modernization and state building projects that accompanied decolonization. In short, the imposition of direct state rule (also called internal colonialism), the commercialization of agriculture and forceful destruction of traditional rural social power structures, and urban migration have largely shaped the prospects for ethnoregional minorities to make and sustain claims for self-determination.

In the next section I make the case for viewing modern Kurdish politics as a natural experiment and break the four cases of Kurdish-state relations into paired comparisons of ethnonational/homogenizing and Arab socialist state building projects, seeking to set aside a good number of possible alternative explanations. Following that, I present paired comparisons of successful Kurdish mobilization—in Turkey and Iraq—and of failed mobilization in Iran and Syria. In the concluding section, I use the insights afforded by the four Kurdistans to make some speculative propositions about ethnic politics more broadly, looking to a much broader array of cases.

Kurds in Four National States: A Natural Experiment

Genuinely comparative studies of Kurdish rebellion are few: three, to be exact (Entessar 1992, Natali 2000; Romano 2006).¹ This is largely the case because the visibility of Kurdish nationalist movements in Turkey and Iraq has overshadowed the simple observation that four countries straddle greater Kurdistan—Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey. However, only Iraq's and Turkey's Kurds have mounted sustained, organized challenges to their central governments. Often described as the largest ethnic group in the world lacking its own national state, the Kurds merit interest simply on the basis of the size of their population. Analytically speaking,

¹ But see Matthew Kocher's (2004) excellent cross-temporal comparative study of Kurdistan under Ottoman and Turkish rule and in the 19th and late 20th centuries, respectively.

they also offer scholars a rare opportunity to hold constant myriad important factors in comparing Kurdish movements: a natural historical experiment.² From a quite similar historical, economic, political, and demographic past, Kurdish minorities became part of four national states following World War I.

Prior to World War I, Ottoman and Persian rule over Kurdistan carried little in the way of serious distinctions in the pattern of state encroachment. As Hassanpour (1994) has noted, social change in greater Kurdistan produced a flourishing urban commercial and intellectual life overseen by more or less autonomous Kurdish principalities until 1639, when the Ottoman and Persian empires negotiated a border that divided Kurds and imposed on them buffer status. During the next 250 years, the drive to maintain sovereignty provided a powerful incentive for allying with one empire or the other, and the frequency of war on Kurdish soil reversed much of the progress that had preceded the border agreement. By the eve of World War I, Kurdistan had been de-urbanized and had largely reverted to agrarian-tribal political structures that would define the early modern legacy inherited by 20th-century Kurdish elites.

Another factor that provides a compelling comparison group among these four Kurdish minorities is the variation within the regime types that they confronted. Turkey and Iran were ruled by authoritarian (and later quasi-democratic in Turkey's case) nationalists who sought to homogenize their populaces into "Turks" and "Iranians" by repressing minority expression. The goal here was national integration and was socially conservative in tone since it did not

² For discussions of natural experiments in social science, see Dunning 2005, Freedman 1999, and Posner 2004.

seek egalitarian ends.³ Iraq and Syria also sought homogenization, but did so with an eye to Arab socialism, nationalist in tone like Iran and Turkey but with an explicit socialist tone that sought to minimize ethnic issues to prioritize class transformation.

Following the first World War, newly independent Turkey embarked on an ethnically homogenizing state project under Mustafa Kemal Ataturk aimed at creating a strong, “modern” Turkey. Across Turkey’s southeast border with Iran, Reza Shah of Iran largely emulated Ataturk’s policies, seeking to build an equally powerful modern Iran. There remained sizeable functional differences in the policies that the two pursued, as I discuss below, but ideologically and in several important state policy arenas—especially language policy and local autonomy vs. central authority—the two regimes largely followed the same trajectory vis-à-vis Kurdish and other minorities. Where they differed, I detail below, is in their success at breaking down rural social structures and inducing urban migration. And, they differed substantially in the degree to which Kurdish parties could sustain rebellions against them.

Much the same could be said of the Ba’athist Republican regimes that took power in Syria and Iraq in 1958. Overthrowing externally installed conservative monarchies, Arab socialist army officers in both countries came to power seeking also to create modern states, but along different lines than in Iran and Turkey. The two Ba’athist regimes were avowedly socialist, and in principle if not in practice dedicated to recognizing the many ethnic groups that made up their respective states. Again, those ideological similarities masked serious differences in the degree to which these states, accomplished real social transformation in the Kurdish

³ This did not mean that rulers in Iran and Turkey left class structures as they were. On the contrary, both Ataturk and Reza Shah and their successors attempted to confront landed rural elites in an effort to weaken the “local strongmen” that stood to challenge their infrastructural state building projects. For a general discussion of this problem, see Migdal 1988.

countryside. Iraq succeeded where Syria failed, and again the paradox was that this episode of state penetration of Kurdish society left it less capable later of controlling Kurdish mobilization.

Beyond the within-set controls made possible by pairing the state structures that Kurdish nationalists confronted in Iran and Turkey, and in Iraq and Syria, respectively, the four cases also make it possible to set aside several common explanants of civil war. Terrain and resource wealth are two of the most important structural predictors of civil war (Kocher 2004; Fearon and Laitin 2003; de Soysa 2000; Elbadawi and Sambanis 2002). But, across the four cases, these indicators track poorly with the success of Kurdish movements. Sizeable oil reserves are located in the Kurdish regions of both Iraq and Syria, and all four Kurdish regions are mountainous. In short, would-be Kurdish rebels have similarly favorable terrain in which to launch challenges to their respective central states in all four of these countries, and in Iraq and Syria ought to have had the most compelling resource-capture rationales for doing so, yet Syrian Kurds have failed to mount any sustained challenge while their counterparts in Turkey have done so despite the region's relative lack of resource wealth.

Poverty has also been endemic across the Kurdish regions in all four countries, and has been especially so relative to the dominant Arab, Persian, and Turkish ethnic majorities in them. Both overall national poverty and relative deprivation (regional poverty relative to overall national) are more or less constant factors across all four Kurdish regions.⁴ Another very important factor, and one that Sambanis (2004, 270-71) rightly points to as missing from econometric civil war studies, is external intervention. Given the history of great power support

⁴ It is important to note that, in the cases of Iraq and Syria, this statement is provisional rather than definitive. I have found data reported only for the Kurdish provinces in Iran and Turkey (see Koochi-Kamali 2003 and Kocher 2004, respectively) but most accounts of Iraq and Syria are in accord with this conclusion.

for Kurds at various times in Iran and Iraq, and frequent support by one or more of these four countries for Kurdish movements in others, one might argue that it is simply external support that carries the day. It is important to note, however, the near lack of support for Turkey's Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK), especially relative to the voluminous Soviet support for the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran and long-term American, Iranian, and Israeli support for the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iraq in the 1960s and early 1970s. While Iraq's Kurds have undoubtedly benefited more from international intervention since 1991 more than any of their counterparts, I would suggest that in most instances, external support arrived only after it became clear that it could make a difference, that is, that the movement was viable enough to warrant the obvious material and potential political costs of aiding separatists in one of these countries.

Theorizing Kurdish Rebellion: Social Structural Change and Urbanization

In short, the usual suspect variables in econometric studies fail to capture the variation across the Kurdish movements in these four states. To my mind, it is in significant part because the logic of these variables' together appears to assume the homogeneity of internal movement viability: that is, given ethnic (or, more accurately, ethnoregional) groups with similar mobilization capacity, which external conditions facilitate mobilization? I want to suggest that we take a step back and look at the human resources on which different generations of would-be nationalist elites can draw in building movements from small cliques to mass-based resistance. Those human resources change in importance during the process of modernization, which took place during roughly the same time periods in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey.

At each state's founding moments, institutions were relatively weak, the economies were largely agricultural, and in Kurdistan, social power lay mostly in the hands of rural elites, whether religious (Shaykhs) or tribal (Aghas). Hence the early rebellions by Shaykh Said in Turkey (1925), Simqu in Iran (1922), Shaykh Mahmud in Iraq (1918-20), and Badr Khan in Syria (1948), all of which drew on traditional power structures as mobilizing resources to construct rebellions manned by rural Kurds. Economic transformation in the Middle East challenged the continued social power of these rural elites, but to varying degrees.

During the 1950s and 1960s, all four countries to varying degrees underwent rapid economic transformation, and that transformation affected each Kurdish minority. By the 1970s, Kurds in all four countries had established Kurdish Democratic Parties to represent the interests of new urban elites as well as traditional rural ones. Moreover, rural Kurdish elites had been decisively weakened or co-opted in each of these countries, leaving the future of Kurdish nationalism in the hands of urban leaders. What differed dramatically was the degree to which these new urban elites had a Kurdish urban population base on which to draw in mobilizing a second-generation resistance movement.

In Iraq and Turkey, land reform and the mechanization of agriculture, respectively, were the key mechanisms linking agrarian commercialization to breaking the power that aghas had over Kurdish peasants. Once that power was broken, both the capacity of aghas to hold peasants on the land and the ability of states to stifle Kurdish resistance by focusing on aghas collapsed too. When it did, a new and urbanized form of resistance emerged, led by radicals such as Jalal Talabani in Iraq and Abdullah Öcalan in Turkey. These leaders succeeded, I argue, not just because they came to prominence under demographically propitious conditions, but

also because urban growth in Iraqi and Turkish Kurdistan was to Kurdish cities. Urban migrants from rural Kurdish areas quickly established Kurdish population dominance.

In Iran, government land reform policies scarcely touched Kurdistan, as I detail below.

As a result, aghas never lost their centrality and Kurdish cities such as Sanandaj and Mahabad never became the loci of mobilizing efforts that Sulaymaniya in Iraq and Diyarbakir in Turkey would. Although the first Kurdish Democratic Party was founded in Iran, and although the most ambitious Kurdish movement (the Mahabad Republic of 1946) emerged there, the stark lack of urban growth in Iranian Kurdistan stifled the chances that the movement would successfully cross generations as its Iraqi and Turkish counterparts did.

In Syria, the same problem of limited urbanization was magnified by the lack of a settled Kurdish homeland. Kurds moved into northeast Syria to settle in large numbers only in the 1940s, giving Syrian Kurds no “start-up” social structures on which a nationalist movement could be viably built. Subsequent Syrian state efforts to resettle Kurds accomplished more politically than in Iraq, Iran and Turkey because Syrian Kurdistan lacked any significant urban centers. As a result, urban migration by Syrian Kurds was to Aleppo and Damascus, two Sunni Arab cities in which Kurds became instantly atomized minorities surrounded by suspicious Arab majorities.

To summarize the argument, Kurds could only sustain nationalist movements through uncertain external support, periodically brutal state repression, and outright war when they could first mobilize using traditional rural social structures and later rely on growing urban Kurdish populations to counter state efforts to pacify the countryside and defeat rural elites. The long-term viability of Kurdish rebellion, in short, is dependent on a particular set of

demographic and social changes. In the next section, I present historical narratives of Kurdish resistance in Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey, illustrating how despite similar origins variation in rural social power and later urbanization provided a crucial social base for Iraqi and Turkish Kurdish nationalists but failed to do so in Iran and Syria.

The Kurds of Iran: Opportunistic and Failed Resistance, 1918-

When Iran entered the modern state building period after the First World War, following Reza Shah's ascent to power, Kurdish society was dominated by tribal organization as it was in Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. In pursuing state penetration of Iran's social and geographic landscape, Reza Shah failed to obliterate tribes' importance but did succeed in transforming "the context in which they operated" (McDowall 2000, 214). That Iranian Kurds succeeded in resisting the onslaught of Iran's state building project is testament to the strength of rural social organization. Reza Shah prioritized the Iranian army above all other institutions and this meant that, beginning in about 1920, Kurdish tribes in Iran found themselves battling a newly equipped, organized, and superbly trained force using technologically advanced weaponry that they simply could not match.

Nonetheless, Iranian Kurds did manage to resist Reza Shah. In particular, as took place in Iraq and Turkey as well, tribal rebellion ushered in the modern era of Kurd-state relations in Iran. Ismail Agha Simqu, head of the Abdui Shikak tribe, attempted between 1918 and 1922 to build a tribal alliance in support of independence as post-war chaos left the country with no central rule maker. In 1920 the pre-Reza Shah Iranian army defeated his first run at building a Kurdish militia, but agreed to his proposed settlement. Two months later, Simqu regrouped his forces and sealed alliances with other tribes and, with arms and funding from both Turkey and

the new Bolshevik government in Russia, his alliance captured a sizeable portion of the Iranian Kurdish countryside. His success continued through 1921, and expanded his militia from 1000 to nearly 5000, but his heavy-handed treatment of tribes that were insufficiently supportive of him began to generate opposition within the Kurdish tribal elite. Meanwhile, Reza Shah's government held back while building its armed forces and gradually defeating other political challenges from Soviet- and Turkish-supported subversion (McDowall 2000, 220). In August 1922, the Iranian army finally moved against Simqu, capturing his stronghold and after that quickly securing all the territory he had controlled. By the end of August, Simqu had fled to Turkey. Reza Shah pardoned him in 1924 and he returned to Iran in 1925.

By 1926, Simqu had regained control of his tribe and begun another outright rebellion against the state. When the army engaged him, half of his troops defected to the tribe's previous leader and Simqu fled to Iraq. He returned in 1929, after an offer of amnesty and the governorship of the township of Ushnaviya. This time, the army ambushed and killed him. Following Simqu's death, the Iranian government moved from confronting active Kurdish challenges to seeking to extinguish "latent" ones. Rather than battling tribes one by one, Reza shah sought at first to prevent alliances while periodically co-opting various tribes to serve as auxiliary troops in confrontations with others (McDowall 2000, 223). Only in the late 1920s did his army begin to attempt to disarm the tribes. That effort took place amidst serious state violence and British consular officials remarked in 1931 that official policy appeared to have become a consistent one of "deliberate, open cruelty" toward Kurdish villagers, armed and unarmed alike (cited in McDowall, 2000, 225).

By 1941, when Reza Shah was deposed by the occupying British, his government had had some success in pacifying Kurdish tribes. He had forcibly settled or resettled the most outwardly rebellious tribes and had appropriated the lands of others. Still, two factors contributed to a largely intact Kurdish social structure on the eve of the British occupation and the ascent to power of Reza's son Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. First, Reza Shah never really challenged social structures in areas where Kurdish elites did not rebel, in an effort to resist leftist mobilization of peasants. Since fairly limited numbers of tribes resorted to out-and-out rebellion, this left most of the Kurdish countryside stably in the hands of rural landowning elites, preserving the capacity of those elites both to resist the state on occasion and to maintain their hold on the peasants who lived on their lands. Second, land policies that Reza Shah enacted actually served to concentrate rural social power. His new Land Registry Department actively encouraged aghas to register what had long been communal Kurdish lands in their own names, giving legal status to such "acquisitions" (226). Finally, wishing to curry favor with local elites, the British ordered the Iranian government in the aftermath of deposing Reza Shah to reinstate Kurdish lands that had been seized during his rule. Thus, while it is unquestionably true that Kurdish tribes were weaker relative to the state by 1941, they remained quite powerful in absolute terms. What changed during the following decades was the decline of the state's power, as I outline below.

It was during the occupation of Iran during World War II that Iranian Kurds had their greatest success in mobilizing against the central government. In September 1942, a group of urban Kurdish nationalists led by Abd al Rahman Zabihi created the Komala-i Jiyani Kurdistan (Committee for the Revival of Kurdistan, hereafter Komala) in the city of Mahabad.

Through 1944, Komala remained a small organization, with only roughly 100 members, and a clandestine-style structure composed of small cells. The group was avowedly opposed to traditional Kurdish power structures and in particular aghas and shaykhs, railing against them in print beginning with the first issue of Komala's newspaper, *Nishtman* (Fatherland). Although it did moderate this radical class language in the party's official handbook, Komala retained its urban radical flavor (McDowall 2000, 237-39).

Despite this, most aghas in the Mahabad hinterland made formal statements of support for the group, simply because it "symbolized independence from central government" (239). This provisional support for Komala from the agha class solidified in April 1945 when Qazi Muhammad, an agha with strong standing among his counterparts and a large militia, became the organization's president. His membership in Komala actually received strong support from the Soviet Union, in whose sphere of interest much of Iranian Kurdistan lay in accordance with the British-Soviet agreement on their joint occupation of Iran. The Soviet Union encouraged separatist movements in Iranian Azerbaijan and in northern Kurdistan in advance of a plan to incorporate the two regions into the USSR itself, and allying itself with such a notable as Qazi Muhammad made political sense.

It is interesting to note that during this period there did take place some substantial urban migration in Kurdish Iran. To look back at the demographic explanation I developed earlier in this essay, the essential argument was that urbanization made possible the social uprooting of Kurdish peasants in Iraq and Turkey, in addition to creating a pool of urban Kurds in the labor force, universities, and commercial classes who could be mobilized by urban Kurdish radicals. So, why did the modest but significant urbanization of Iranian Kurdistan not

generate the same effects over time? The answer is that, where urban migrants had been wholly broken free of both their rural elite patrons and in many cases of their tribal ties altogether, in Iran aghas and shaykhs moved into the cities almost preemptively. When they did, they simply expanded their rural social power into Kurdish cities in Iran and transplanted the structure of Kurdish society in a way that neither Iraqi nor Turkish Kurdish rural leaders were able to do (McDowall 2000, 237). This facet of Kurdish social change does suggest that urbanization may simply be one of a family of phenomena that break the power of rural strongmen rather than the key mechanism itself.

In any case, Qazi Muhammad met in September 1945 with the Soviet consul in Tabriz (the capital of the Iranian province of Azerbaijan), then in Baku with the president of the Soviet republic of Azerbaijan, and was advised to skirt Komala and establish a Kurdish Democracy Party of Iran. With substantial encouragement and material support from Soviet officials, Qazi returned to Mahabad and declared the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran. Notable in the party's opening declaration was a complete absence of any language about land reform. And, the movement probably only survived this first appearance because Mulla Mustafa and Shaykh Ahmad Barzani arrived to Mahabad in October fleeing Iraq following their failed rebellion at home. The Soviet Union ordered the Barzanis to place their militias under Qazi Muhammad's control, which they did, and by January 1946 sufficient progress had been made to embolden Qazi Muhammad to declare the independent Republic of Mahabad. The republic, however, faced fragmented local support from the outset. Its dependence on the Barzani militias was the most troubling problem to local chiefs, but not by any means the only one. Dependence on the Soviet Union, a lingering desire not to burn bridges permanently with the Iranian government,

tensions with the parallel Azeri Republic's leadership all prevented a coherent, unified front during the short-lived Kurdish republic.

In April, the republic's fortunes collapsed with the announcement that, after American and British pressure to withdraw entirely from Iran, the Soviet Union agreed to do so. The leadership of the Azeri republic negotiated a deal with the Iranian government that returned all lands to Iranian control, including much of Kurdish Iran. This treaty effectively made Mahabad the last remaining rebel area and, after a series of confrontations between Barzani forces (supported tepidly by fighters loyal to Amr Khan, an Iranian Kurdish agha) and Iranian army troops, the resistance broke down. Intra-Kurdish tensions emerged in force, with most of the conflict cleaving along urban-tribal lines. Soviet support of rural elites exacerbated this tension.

Qazi Muhammad tried to negotiate a favorable agreement with the Iranian government, led by sympathetic Prime Minister Ahmad Qavam, but the latter's position deteriorated as his Kurdish- and left-friendly politicking gradually undercut his support in Tehran. Mahabad's eroding position and steady defection of aghas from the KDP-I led to the republic's defeat and the occupation of the city by Iranian troops in December of 1946. It would be plausible to suggest simply that the withdrawal of external support for Iranian Kurdish nationalists explains the failure of the Mahabad republican experiment. However, it is appropriate here to point to numerous instances in which external support was withdrawn from Iraq's Kurdish movements—in 1974 and again in 1991, to take just two—and in which the movements nonetheless survived. It is also worth noting that Kurdish nationalists in Turkey never acquired anything like the level of outside backing that Iran's did in the mid-1940s. Rather, I want to suggest here that the movement in Iran failed largely because of inauspicious demographics. In

the 1940s the critical mass of social power still lay firmly in the hands of landlords. The Komala leadership's decision to take an avowedly Marxist line in 1941 (see Entessar 1992, 17) wrecked any chance of an alliance with them. Furthermore, even though nationalist rural elites did manage to gain some stature in Mahabad, they never succeeded in building political strongholds in either Sanandaj or Kermanshah, the two largest and politically most important cities in Kurdish Iran. Finally, more broadly speaking, Soviet support for Komala and then for KDP-I alienated a good number of landlords, who recognized that their class interests coincided more with conservative Persians in Tehran than with radical Kurds in their own regions. In short, radical Kurdish nationalism in Iran was well ahead of its time in terms of social change. Peasants were never broken free of their land ties in sufficient numbers to generate a rural mobilization base, and urbanization was too limited to produce an urban one.

In the aftermath of Mahabad's collapse, the KDP-I "effectively ceased to exist" (McDowall 2000, 244). The party's urban supporters essentially disappeared into obscurity and, for the next 15 years, there was virtually no Kurdish political activity. The absence of an indigenous Kurdish armed force in Iran, and the effective absence of a large urban population ready to be mobilized against the central government, left Iran's Kurds waiting for an external shock to provide an opportunity, much as the Second World War had. That shock came in 1961 with a Kurdish rebellion in Iraq following failed attempts by Iraq's new revolutionary government to settle its own Kurdish problem. When the 1958-61 rapprochement collapsed, the KDP-Iran supported Iraqi Kurds; in the process, the leadership and subsequent social orientation of both Iran's and Iraq's Kurdish Democratic Parties turned conservative.

Facing a newly consolidated Iraqi government by 1965, Mulla Mustafa turned against his former military allies and then-current KDP-Iran supporters and came to an agreement with the Shah that called for him to “restrain” KDP-Iran activities against the Iranian government. He went further, “subordinating the struggle in Iran to that in Iraq” and “warn[ing] that KDP-Iran militants would not be tolerated in Iraqi Kurdistan” (McDowall 2000, 253). The result of this was that the conservative leadership of the KDP-Iran was ousted and new, mostly former Iranian Tudeh (Communist) Party leaders took over the party’s leadership. They formed a Revolutionary Committee and declared their support for sporadic peasant uprisings against the National Police between Mahabad and Urumiya. Lacking a significant social base, however, this new leadership found little purchase in Kurdish society, and it was quickly crushed. Within months eight of 11 members of the Revolutionary Committee had been killed by Iranian troops, and the movement lasted less than 18 months. As McDowall notes, “The KDPI at this juncture lacked the skills or resources to survive” (253, emphasis added).

As in Iraq, in the 1960s land reform became a significant political issue in Iran. Under the banner of the “White Revolution,”⁵ the Shah’s government enacted a land reform program that promised to distribute much of the land held by the wealthiest rural families to the peasants they functionally owned. In practice, these land reforms rarely met their promises (see Hooglund 1982, Najmabadi 1987) and often amounted to targeted land grabs against the royal family’s most threatening or vocal rivals. Since there were few of either in Iranian Kurdistan,

⁵ The Shah named the program “White Revolution” to distinguish his reforms from either “Black”—referring to the Shi’a leadership—or “Red”—referring to the leftist movements that along with the Shi’a hierarchy had been his main ideological nemeses. This chromatic rhetoric was constant under his rule, and in his post-revolution memoirs he consistently blamed an unholy alliance of “red and black” for his downfall.

land reform amounted to little, and accomplished equally little in terms of breaking the coercive social and economic relationship between aghas and peasants.

There were no Kurdish uprisings to speak of between 1965 and the late 1970s, and the demographics of urban and rural areas help to illuminate why this was the case. Central Iran, which experienced the same sort of socioeconomic transformation that Turkey and Iraq did in general, was by 1977 80 percent urban and 20 percent rural; Iranian Kurdistan remained 75 percent rural and, even after two decades of oil-driven state-led industrialization, just 25 percent urban (McDowall 2000, 258). The revolutionary uprisings of 1977-79 provided another opportunity for Iran's Kurdish organizations to try to win something from a state under siege by most important parts of Iranian society, and did manage to take by default some measure of autonomy during the revolution's immediate aftermath.

Hoping for favorable treatment from the new Islamic Republican government, the KDP-Iran requested substantial autonomy within the unitary Iranian state. Khomeini and his supporters, however, envisioned a new Shi'a Muslim Iranian polity in which ethnic identities had no place. To a considerable extent, the Islamic Republic was even more hostile to Kurdish ambitions than either of the Pahlavi Shahs had been, and the first battle between Kurds and partisans of the new regime took place less than a month after Khomeini's return to Iran in February 1979. During the first three years after the revolution, while a more threatening domestic struggle with Iranian leftist forces and a still more threatening war with Iraq preoccupied the Iranian armed forces, KDP-I fighters managed to seize and hold most of rural Iranian Kurdistan, ceding only cities and larger towns to the government's armed forces. During this period, both traditional and radical Kurdish leaders attempted to negotiate with the

regime: Shaykh Izz al Din Husayni and Qassemlou both made offers and both were refused. As a result, fighting went on until 1982.

After consolidating the power struggle in Tehran between Khomeini's Islamic Republicans and leftist supporters of exiled former President Abol Hassan Bani-Sadr and Iranian gains in the war against Iraq, the regime turned again in 1982 to Kurdish nationalists. Sending in Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guard) rather than regular army troops, and dispatching the Ayatollah Sadiq Khalkhali—the “Hanging Judge”—resulted in the deaths of nearly 10,000 Kurds in the 1979-82 period alone, many in mass executions ordered by Khalkhali. In part the brutality with which the Pasdaran fought Kurds took a religious tone as well. Iranian Kurds are predominantly Sunni, and this early in the Islamic Republic Pasdaran units reported not to Tehran but to the Imam Komiteh of their region. The Imam Komiteh were local committees established to run local governments while the regime worked to consolidate its power, and they were generally headed by “Shi'a triumphalists” (McDowall 2000, 264).

There has been almost no Kurdish political activity in Iran since the early 1980s, despite the glowing success to the west of Iraqi Kurds since the 1991 Gulf War. Much of this failure, the evidence suggests, is traceable to the mismatch between Kurdish leadership in Iran since the 1940s—predominantly urban and radical-leftist in orientation—and the basic social demography of Kurdish Iran, which has remained dominantly rural and dominated by rural elites. Those quiescent elites' control over both most Kurdish peasants and whose vast political superiority relative to urban elites has meant that radical Kurdish organizations in Iran, while ideologically and organizationally similar to those in Iraq and Turkey, have always lacked a social base.

The Iraqi State and Kurdish Resistance, 1918-2003

To foreshadow the central argument of the Iraqi Kurdish narrative presented here, it is that Kurdish resistance has survived and flourished despite infighting and harsh repression for two main reasons. First, the bifurcation of social bases made possible by a) urban growth and Kurdish urban migration and b) the emergence in the 1970s of an urban-based Kurdish party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), provided a sustainable base of recruits in addition to the rural base of the Kurdish Democratic party. This diverse recruitment base, even while provoking intra-Kurdish conflict, allowed the movement as a whole to survive numerous attempts by the Iraqi government to decimate it. Second, as I detail below, leftist Kurdish parties could succeed only where a) the founding of those parties followed land reform and b) where land reform had significantly weakened rural Kurdish elites and led to urban migration. Although urban-based, leftist Kurdish elites also founded parties in Iran, Syria, and Turkey, only in Iraq and Turkey were they successful in mobilizing large numbers of recruits. In short, Kurdish peasants had to have been freed from their quasi-feudal relationships to rural elites and large Kurdish urban populations had to develop in order for second-generation, leftist parties to have a viable base of potential recruits.

Iraq gained formal independence in 1932 from the British. King Faysal, the hand-picked monarch chosen by the British to head the state, inherited an uneasy relationship with the country's Kurdish northern regions. While tensions between Kurdish tribes had made a unified front untenable (McDowall 2000, 152-53), the British policy of reliance on local strongmen rather than direct rule left a legacy of both giving new salience to tribal authority (157) and weak state

penetration of Iraqi Kurdistan. In the immediate aftermath of the First World War, Shaykh Mahmud began a procession of rural rebellions and wrung an appointment to governor of Sulaymaniya district from the newly arrived British administration. During the 1930s and 1940s, the center of gravity in Kurdish resistance to the Iraqi state remained tribal, in large part because there was only a tiny urban elite in Kurdish cities. One tribal leader—Shaykh Ahmad Barzani—stood out as a result of having extracted taxation rights to the villages he controlled in 1928. He had won those rights during a rebellion the year before over government construction of houses in his region of Barzan (178), gaining a modicum of autonomy, but periodic conflicts with other tribes forestalled wider challenges to the state.

Faysal's death in 1933 opened the political environment to Kurds, among other groups in Iraq, and the decade of the 1930s saw the emergence of urban Kurdish nationalist groups to compliment rural, tribal ones. Shaykh Latif, the son of Shaykh Mahmud who had led the 1918 rebellion, founded the Komala Brayati (Brotherhood Society—KB) and younger urban Kurds the Darkar (Woodcutters) a more radical group with closer ties to Iraq's Communist Party (ICP). In 1938 Hiwa (Hope) was created, and established a broader base than had either KB or Darkar, building networks in most Kurdish cities and, unlike the other two urban groups, ties to rural elites as well by incorporating many aghas, shaykhs, and landlords into the organization.⁶ However, the fact that rural social structures had yet to be challenged in any real way meant that the organization had no peasant base, just a collection of rural elite members. Given that, and the lack of a substantial urban population in which to mobilize recruits, Hiwa

⁶ Van Bruinessen (1992) outlines these three primary rural elite titles. Aghas are village headmen, holding some variant of "ownership" of the village and authority over villagers. Shaikhs are Islamic religious leaders who sit outside of tribal power structures and therefore are often called on to mediate tribal conflicts. Landlords are simply those who own rural land of significant quantity. The latter are sometimes aghas as well, but were also often absentees who contracted aghas to care for their land.

remained little more than a small elite organization. Its leadership, however, had close ties to the leaders of the Mahabad Republic in Iran (see below).

The first major post-independence Kurdish rebellion took place between 1943 and 1945, led by Mulla Mustafa Barzani, largely over government treatment of him and his brother Shaikh Ahmad. The “revolt remained intrinsically tribal,” garnered little other tribal support outside of the Barzani clan and its militia and the Iraqi government defeated Barzani in August 1945 (McDowall 2000, 294). The major effect of the Barzani revolt was to catalyze the disintegration of Hiwa, the only Kurdish organization to date to have a truly cross-class membership, in late 1944.

Barzani fled into Iran and, in 1946, supported the Mahabad rebellion in Iran. While there, he proposed an alliance of tribal notables and leftists within a new organization, the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iraq. The creation of the KDP-I was contemporaneous to Rizgari Kurd (Kurdish Liberation), created in 1945 in Baghdad colleges, which spread to students in Kurdish cities and which for a few years was influential in provoking uprisings in Kurdish cities. While Rizgari was committed to a united Kurdistan and to social transformation, the KDP-I was focused on advancing Kurdish interests inside Iraq, and its tribal base generated a socially conservative cast to its politics. The British, hoping to bolster their weak ally in the Iraq central government, tried to rally Kurdish shaikhs against both Rizgari and the new KDP-I, but ironically the British effort after 1918 to weaken shaikhs by encroaching on their major base of social power—authority over arbitration—left them with little remaining clout. This was all the more so among younger Kurds, who increasingly supported leftist movements rather than conservative elites.

Between 1946 and 1953, despite Mulla Mustafa's exile in Iran and then in the Soviet Union, the KDP-I became the predominant Kurdish political organization. It also developed into a more regional than strictly ethnic party (reflecting this symbolically by renaming itself the Kurdistan Democratic party) to represent all people living within Iraqi Kurdistan. Despite efforts to rally mass support, the continued strength of landlords limited the party's ability to mobilize Kurdish peasants during this period. It was also the case that landed elites had grown stronger during the 1930s. The Land Settlement Laws of 1932 and 1938, efforts to bolster the government's social base after Faysal's death, reinforced the social power of landowners as well.

Kurdish fortunes briefly changed for the better in the wake of the 1958 revolution in Iraq. The revolutionary government's new leader _____ Qasim left the KDP out of the cabinet, but did include Baba Ali Barzani, one of Shaykh Mahmud's sons. He also invited Mulla Mustafa back to Iraq from his exile in the Soviet Union (McDowall 2000, 302). However, a split emerged at this point in the Kurdish support base: while Mulla Mustafa lacked the support of the KDP's urban elites, he had Qasim's support and that of the KDP rural militias. The September, 1958 Agrarian Reform Law exacerbated this split by pitting Kurdish progressive (largely urban) elites against Mulla Mustafa and other rural landowners. Tension between Mulla Mustafa and Qasim over both land reform and over the former's increasing power led Qasim to side with other Kurdish aghas against him and the KDP by 1960 (306). In 1961 Mulla Mustafa began a revolt against the Qasim government, supported both by anti-regime aghas who opposed agrarian reform and ultimately by the KDP, which supported it but sided with Mulla Mustafa anyway (308-11). This rebellion ended in 1963 with the overthrow of Qasim's government. It

also catalyzed a permanent split between the progressive urban and conservative rural factions of the KDP, personified by Jalal Talabani and Mulla Mustafa, respectively.

By 1965 the Iraqi government had consolidated again, and began a new war against Kurdish nationalism (FLESH THIS OUT). The military's efforts focused on seizing cities and towns in Kurdish Iraq, but generally were unable to capture much of the countryside from Kurdish militias. The stalemate led to an agreement wherein the new Bazzazz government accepted Kurdish demands (WHICH WERE?); that agreement collapsed when Bazzazz was overthrown.

The collapse of that agreement led to a Kurdish civil war. Talabani and Shaykh Ahmad joined their respective forces to challenge Mulla Mustafa in 1966. The Ba'ath government, for reasons both of ideological amity and tactical accord, sided with the Talabani-Ahmad alliance. In that year began the flow of substantial aid to Mulla Mustafa's forces from Iran and Israel (McDowall 2000, 320-25). This conflict led in March 1970 to an agreement with the government, represented by Vice President Saddam Hussein. The agreement acceded to nearly all of the Kurds' major demands on language, cultural, and education policy, participation in government, development funds, resettlement, agrarian reform (again supported only by progressive Kurds), and other demands and in addition called for a Kurdish vice president of the republic (327-28). And, in a departure from past government policy the regime actually took some steps toward enactment of the agreement, especially on land reform.

Nonetheless, by 1971 fighting had already begun again (WHY-FLESH THIS OUT). In April 1972, Iraq and the Soviet Union concluded a mutual defense agreement, and in June 1972 Iraq nationalized its oil industry. These events catalyzed accelerated American support for

Mulla Mustafa and intensified the fighting. As a result, Mulla Mustafa's forces made serious gains against the Iraqi army and continued to do so through 1974. Throughout this period, most the human resource base for Kurdish rebellion was rural.

In March 1975, Saddam Hussein met the Shah of Iran in Algiers to conclude a treaty in which Iran would cease all support for Iraqi Kurds in return for Iraq recognizing the midpoint of the Shatt al-Arab river as the border between the two countries.⁷ Within weeks, Mulla Mustafa's fighters retreated, returned to their homes, or fled into Iran. The end of his dominance of the Kurdish movement in Iraq coincided with a dramatic demographic change: the decline of rural population and subsequent urbanization of the Kurdish population in Iraq. [75-85 period?]

Following the defeat of Mulla Mustafa's and the KDP's forces in 1975, the PUK became the central organization in mobilizing Kurdish resistance to the Iraqi state. While considerably weaker initially than its predecessor had been, the PUK did manage to sustain the Kurdish challenge through the 1980s, in part through support from the Islamic Republic, which although busy repressing its own Kurds was happy to aid an enemy of its enemy in Baghdad. Between 1980 and 1987, the Iraqi government used *jash*, Kurdish fighters it paid, to combat the PUK's forces.⁸ As McDowall (2000, 354-56) notes, many of these *jash* signed up only half-heartedly because neither the KDP nor the PUK had the administrative capacity to absorb such large

⁷ The British, hoping to limit Iraq's likely military power by depriving the country of a major port on the Persian Gulf, drew the boundaries of Iraq and Kuwait after World War I so that Kuwait would encompass all of the useable coastline within the former Ottoman province that became Iraq and Kuwait. Subsequently, Iraqi governments claimed the whole of the Shatt al-Arab in order to allow Iraq's naval forces to have sufficiently deep water in which to port.

⁸ *Jash* is the Kurdish word for donkey, a pejorative moniker given these fighters by Kurdish civilians and encouraged by the Kurdish leadership.

numbers of new recruits. As a result, while indirectly on the Iraqi state payroll, many of them fed information to the Kurdish resistance.

In response both to persistent Kurdish rebellion and to Kurdish collaboration with the Islamic Republic during the first six years of the war, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein empowered Ali Hassan al-Majid, who would later be referred to as “Chemical Ali,” to take extreme measures to try to crush the Kurdish movement. Those efforts in 1987 and 1988 amounted to attempted genocide, in which as many as 150,000 people may have been killed and hundreds of thousands more forcibly resettled or driven from their homes as thousands of Kurdish villages were destroyed. Despite its brutality, al-Majid’s effort failed to “atomize” Kurdish society as he had hoped, for largely demographic reasons that the regime had failed to take into account. Destroying villages, forcibly resettling rural Kurds, and other countryside tactics might have worked in the 1960s, when nearly [WHAT PERCENT?] of Kurds still lived in rural areas, and when 60% of them still identified with tribal regional origins. By the early 1980s, that had changed dramatically; only WHAT PERCENT of Kurds remained outside of cities and large towns and only 20% of them identified tribally. In short, the regime’s success at accomplishing land reform had weakened rural elites dramatically, but had created what McDowall referred to rightly as a demographic “Trojan horse within [Kurdish] towns and townships” upon which the Kurdish Front could draw in mobilizing new recruits (2000, 370). The Iraqi government continued to fight Kurdish nationalists as though the same conditions present in the 1960s applied, and its failure to account for Kurdish urbanization, and the subsequent resource base on which the radical Kurdish leadership could draw, shaped

powerfully both the viability of the movement and the degree to which it could enlist external support.

Kurdish prospects changed radically in 1990 and 1991. By surviving the aftermath of the 1975 Iran-Iraq treaty and the attempted genocide of 1987-1988, the Iraqi Kurdish movement entered the 1990s intact and poised to capitalize on Saddam's defeat in the 1991 Gulf War. In its aftermath, Kurdish and Shi'a rebellions seriously challenged the hold of the Ba'ath regime in March. In Kurdistan, the uprisings were led not by the Kurdish parties but by the jash, who defected en masse and catalyzed a broader rebellion. In June 1991, peshmergas in Arbil and Sulaymaniya seized control of the two cities, leaving rural areas largely to government control. This tactical choice reflected the new demography of Kurdistan: by holding cities, Kurdish leaders held the bulk of their population, and especially that share of it that was ripe for mobilization into the movement.

This seizure of two of Kurdistan's three biggest cities heralded the most successful era of modern Kurdish nationalism. In May 1992, Iraqi Kurds held elections in what the no-fly zone established by the US-led coalition had made into a de facto Kurdish autonomous region. The KDP and PUK won 45% and 43.6% of the vote, respectively, crowding out all other Kurdish organizations, and eventually agreed on an uneasy joint rule. By 1996, tensions between the two organizations erupted into another Kurdish civil war in which the KDP, supported by the Iraqi government, almost destroyed the PUK, which had counted unwisely on American aid that never materialized (McDowall 2000, 388-89). The Iranian government stepped in to provide aid to the PUK in return for its collaboration against the Iranian Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP-I) in the summer of 1996. The result was that, until the American invasion of Iraq in

2003, the dependence of Iraq's two major Kurdish political organizations on external powers reinforced the split between them.

Since 2003, Iraq's Kurds have acquired a stake in their national state unprecedented in the post-independence era. Former leaders of the PUK and KDP—Jalal Talabani and Masud Barzani, respectively—now serve as presidents of Iraq and of the Kurdish regional government. It is striking that Talabani's main task today is to preserve the unity of the Iraqi state against, among other things, Kurdish aspirations represented by his rival. While it is undoubtedly true that external intervention both on behalf of Iraq's Kurds as a group and on behalf of one organization or the other was important at crucial moments in confrontations with the Iraq state, a comparative look at Kurdish resistance suggests that it is not the central explanation for success. External intervention has characterized Kurdish politics in all four countries under consideration here, and it has met varying degrees of success both across countries and within countries at different points in time. That fact suggests to me that external intervention—both the decisions made by foreign powers whether to provide assistance, and the eventual outcome of the episodes in which intervention occurs—are endogenous to broader sociopolitical factors within each Kurdish population. In short, foreign powers weighed both whether and how much to support Iraqi Kurds based on the likelihood of them succeeding. That decision, in turn, rested in significant part on the perceived ability of Kurds to mobilize sufficiently to challenge the Iraqi state successfully, which I argue rested on the demographics of various periods in post-independence Iraqi political life.

The Syrian State and the Absence of Kurdish Resistance

Syrian Kurds number 600,000 – considerably less than their counterparts in Turkey, Iraq, and Iran – but still represent roughly 7 percent of the Syrian population (Vanly 1992, 145). The Kurds constitute the largest national minority in Syria and are the only one with a territorial base.⁹ The Syrian government has treated other minorities – such as the urban-dwelling Armenians – with less hostility, oftentimes extending civil rights that have been denied to the Kurds since the republic's 1946 establishment (144). This narrative of Syrian Kurdistan analyzes the effects of land reform, Arab nationalism, and urbanization on the Syrian Kurdish population since independence.

As Syrians became progressively infatuated with Arab nationalism in the early 1900s, an enmity developed between the Kurdish minority and the Arab Syrian majority (McDowall 2000, 467). When rifts developed between several elite Ottoman families over the empire's future – some arguing for revitalizing Istanbul and others advocating decentralization – the two most predominant Kurdish families, the al-Yusufs and the Shamdins, strove to maintain control over their respective territories by aligning against Arab nationalists. These families had acquired power by dominating the grain and livestock trades while maintaining cordial relations with the Ottoman authorities. Arab nationalism threatened to erode Kurds' traditional power (based on local kinship and patronage) and, coincidentally, al-Yusuf and Shamdin power (467). Kurdish aghas in Syria also opposed the Arab Revolt of 1916 and the arrival of the Amir Faysal as the new Syrian ruler in 1918. And when Abd al Rahman al-Yusuf, undisputed leader of the

⁹ It is sometimes difficult to disaggregate Syrian minorities, as the government considers all Syrians Arabs, regardless of origin or ethnic affiliation.

Damascus Kurdish community, declared to the 1919 Syrian Congress that he opposed Syrian independence, favored the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine, and favored stronger contacts with the French, it became irrevocably clear that the Kurds' interests were diametrically opposed to those articulated by Arab nationalists (468).

The Kurds spread themselves mainly between three regions: the Jazira, Arab-Pinar, and Kurd-Dagh. 67 percent of Syria's Kurds live in the Jazira along the Turkish and Iraqi borders, and by 1918, the Kurds outnumbered the Arabs in the Jazira (Vanly 1992, 145). This ethnic disparity, coupled with the region's oilfields, made the Jazira a prime target for Syrian "arabization." At the time, sedentary Kurdish tribespeople lived alongside Arab nomads, with powerful chiefs commanding each clan. The most powerful Kurdish chief, Haju Agha, commanded a confederation of 24 tribes. He curried favor amongst French politicians for helping to secure northeastern Syria, but still espoused Kurdish nationalism and strove to foment revolutionary fervor. Haju Agha was also one of several tribal chiefs who gradually became a feudal landlord with many villages to his name.

Roughly 60,000 Kurds populate Arab-Pinar, living on subsistence farming and cereal cultivation. Finally, Kurd-Dagh, the third region, is the most productive and diversified Kurdish region in Syria. About 300,000 Kurds rely on olive, charcoal, wool, carpet, dairy product, meat, and market-garden exports.

The 1920 Treaty of Sevres decreed that Ottoman Kurdistan, which would normally have included the Kurdish areas in present-day Syria, would receive autonomy within the new Republic of Turkey and become eligible for full independence within a year of the treaty's coming into force. The only condition was that that was the will of the Kurdish people.

However, under the Treaty of Lausanne (which repudiated that of Sevres) the Kurds were totally ignored (Vanly 1992, 144).

The Jouvenal Agreement of 1926 set the border between Syria and Turkey without any regard for ethnic demarcation between Arabs and Kurds (145). It assigned to northern Syria three regions inhabited by Kurds or by a Kurdish majority – namely, Kurd-Dagh, Arab-Pinar, and the Jazira. It also left two regions with an Arab majority – namely, Harran and Gaziantep – within Turkey. In 1925, when Arab nationalists aligned with the Druze of south Syria to stage a major revolt against French rule, France used auxiliaries consisting of minorities to assist in crushing it – including many Kurds (McDowall 2000, 468). This is one of the foundations of the modern Kurdish-Arab rivalry. The French and Syrians tolerated private cultural activity among the Kurds but refused to establish a state-funded Kurdish school. The French also discouraged them from taking any political or military action against Turkey, especially on behalf of those who had emigrated from Turkish Kurdistan after the failure of Shaikh Said's revolt. These warning notwithstanding, Khoyboun, the anti-Turkish Kurdistan independence organization, came into existence in 1927 at a congress held in Lebanon. It is important to note that several of its leaders used the Jazira as a rear base and enlisted supporters from among its Kurdish inhabitants. Relations between the Kurds and the Syrian government continued to warm, culminating in Kurdish assistance with the Syrian war of independence.

In 1932, Prince Celadet A. Bedir-Khan, heir to the ancient Bohtan principality of central Kurdistan, gave Kurdish nationalism a boost with the publication of *Hawar*, a literary and patriotic journal. He also standardized Kurdish grammar and disseminated pro-Kurdish literature through Syria, Turkey, and other parts of Europe. This established a foundation for a

Kurdish cultural movement in Syria, and several writers joined on. However, in 1936, Kurdish nationalism was put to the test when the French reluctantly allowed the burgeoning Syrian Arab nationalist movement to form a government over all Syria (470). In 1939, the Kurds in Jazira appealed to France for full self-government, and the French responded in 1939 by detaching the predominantly Kurdish Jazira from the Sunni Arab heartlands of Syria and brought back under direct French control (471).

After some reshaping and reorganizing, the modern bounds of Syria were accepted. In 1946, the Syrian Arab Republic gained its independence from France and became united under an elected Arab nationalist government. It is important to note the new Arab government's immediate vendetta against the Kurds; recall that the Kurds had always opposed Arab nationalist goals during the last years of the Ottoman Empire. Also, the Kurds were frequently used in armies to kill Arab nationalists. While some Kurds adamantly supported the new government, some, like Badr Khan, continued to agitate for independence. Khan even led an anti-Syria movement during the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948. Syrian internal politics remained volatile, and during one of the many coups orchestrated during the late '40s and mid '50s, Adib Shishakli seized power and, despite being part-Kurdish, was determined to create a homogeneous Arab-Muslim state (McDowall 471). So began the arabization of Kurdish communities.

Following Shishakli's overthrow in 1954, a more specifically anti-Kurdish backlash slowly began. High- and middle-ranking officers of Kurdish descent were gradually purged from the armed forces, and political officers with Kurdish backgrounds were fired. The pervasion of Arab nationalism during the mid-50s left little room for non-Arab minority groups

within the political order. Syria formed a union with Egypt as the United Arab Republic (UAR) and, despite withdrawing in 1961, encouraged more Arab nationalism and enacted greater anti-Kurdish discrimination. In 1957, a group of Kurdish intellectuals including Dr. Nureddin Zaza, Osman Sabri, and Daham Miro, with considerable support from peasants and workers, founded the Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria (KDPS) with the goals of securing Kurdish linguistic and ethnic rights, economic development, and democratization of Syrian political life (McDowall 2000, 472). The group had to stay underground and saw 20 of its leaders arrested and sentenced to prison terms of 6-12 months. In a related incident, the Amouda Massacre, more than 250 schoolboys were killed in what's believed to be an act of arson.

In 1962, the Syrian government decreed that a census be taken in the governorate of al-Hasaka (in the Jazira) with the spoken intention of monitoring Turkish migrants but the underlying goal of disenfranchising Kurds who had taken advantage of the Jazira's latent fertility. Furthermore, the government declared that all 120,000 Kurds living in the Jazira were "foreigners, illegally infiltrated into the area." Some Kurds were able to recover their Syrian citizenship through bribery or judicial recourse. The remaining Kurds were required to carry special red cards identifying them as aliens and denoting complete deprivation of all civil rights. This campaign was the first to push Kurds out of the countryside and into Damascus and Aleppo to find labor (McDowall 474).

Having witnessed Mustafa Barzani's establishment of a Kurdish autonomous uprising in Iraqi Kurdistan, the Syrian government feared organized Kurds. The Jazira also contained vast resource deposits, including oilfields. When the Ba'ath Party took power in Iraq in February 1963 (and in Syria a month later), Commander Fahd al-Sha'er led a force of 6,000 men

against the guerilla fighters of Mustafa Barzani. In response, Kurdish intellectuals began to organize around Marxist ideologies. The Ba'athists fought the Marxists by suppressing Kurds, their primary support base. Even within the Kurdish population, however, there existed a rift between Kurdish nationalists and anti-Kurdish nationalism Marxists (McDowall 2000, 473).

A few months later, Lieutenant Mohamed Talab Hilal, who served for six months as head of the secret services in Hasaka, produced the cardinal work on Syrian anti-Kurdish sentiment: *The Study of the Province of Jazira in its National, Social and Political Aspects*. Undeniably racist, Hilal's book addresses Kurds as "dregs of history" and "scum" and concludes that an outright genocide is the only way to protect the region's rich mineral wealth. It recommends a 12-point plan designed to quietly disenfranchise and suffocate the Kurds out of existence. It is important to differentiate between land reform and ethnic cleansing; at this point, the Syrian government was pursuing a campaign closer to the latter.

By 1964, as a result of the war in Iraqi Kurdistan, the unsuccessful Syrian intervention, and the measures taken against the Kurds in the Jazira, relations between the Kurdish population and the Syrian government were incomparably poor. In 1965, the government and the Ba'ath Syrian Regional Leadership enacted Hilal's plan, focusing chiefly on the creation of an "Arab cordon" in the Jazira along the Turkish border. The process of urbanization began with the mass deportation of the Kurdish rural population of around 140,000 men, women, and children living in 332 villages inside the strip. They were to be replaced by Arabs. The program began in 1973 with the resettlement of Bedouin Arabs from the Euphrates area in Kurdish territory. Relocated Kurdish villagers proved a much tougher challenge for Syrian agents than postulated. However, the government opted not to forcibly evict Kurds, but rather to arabize

the villages. The Kurdish city-dwellers living within the cordon were to be spared for the time being, and the plan was spun as an attempt to limit the ownership of land and to distribute it to peasants. The landlords in the Jazira were both Kurdish and Arab, former tribal chiefs each owning a whole village and sometimes more. In reality, the plan was meant to denationalize and arabize the Kurds.

The Syrian government's position towards the Kurds has remained relatively constant. Because of the measures taken against them, the Kurds suffer disproportionately from the economic crises Syria has endured since the early 1980s. Many young Kurds have voluntarily abandoned northern Kurdish villages in search of work in Damascus and Aleppo, and some have migrated to Europe. It is important to note, however, that President Assad has consistently enlisted Kurds to fight alongside Alawites to suppress Sunni revolts. Most notably, Kurds assisted Alawites in quelling the Sunni Islamic Revolt of Hama in February-March 1982, also known as the Hama Massacre (McDowall 2000, 477). Assad seems willing to ignore the historical Syrian-Kurdish rivalry and fund Kurdish minorities in Iraq and Turkey, which act as counterweights to rival Arab governments. He provided several hubs for the PKK after the 1980 military coup in Turkey and turned a blind eye to PKK recruitment in Syrian Kurdistan until the late '90s (479). This lasted until 1998 when, under severe pressure from Turkey, Syria ended its support of the PKK (480).

Politically, Kurds were once limited to the Syrian Communist Party (CPS), but have since the 1990s the CPS and joined one of nearly 15 Kurdish political parties in existence. Each of these parties traces its roots to the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria (KDPS) and espouses a common political philosophy: democracy for all Syria and equality between Kurdish and

Arab citizens with full cultural and social rights for Kurds. Kurdish parties continued to split – usually due to personality clashes over the distribution of power – and each time, the leading politicians took with them several families from their former villages (McDowall 477). It is important to note the fractious nature of Kurdish politics, as it has inhibited the creation of a coherent, sustainable counterweight to Syrian rule.

The Turkish State and Kurdish Resistance, 1918-

Kurdish resistance to the Turkish nation-state project has survived several military coups, an outright attempt by the government in the 1990s to decimate the rural social structure of Kurdish Turkey, and has now re-emerged even after the capture and imprisonment of Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK). I argue in the narrative below that the persistence of Kurdish rebellion in Turkey is traceable largely to the growing urban Kurdish population between the 1960s and 1980s in Turkish cities inside and outside of Kurdish regions. As in Iraq, this bifurcation of Kurdish society allowed Kurdish elites to mobilize recruits from the cities, even as the Turkish military sought to empty the Kurdish countryside by forced resettlement. In contrast with Iraq, Turkey's Kurds never obtained any consistent external support but has nevertheless managed to remain a viable threat to the Turkish state.

Kurds constitute twenty percent of Turkey's population and represent roughly half of all the entire Kurdish population. With the possible exception of Iraq, the Kurds of Turkey have been the most successful in fomenting longstanding government opposition, owing in part to the breadth of Turkish Kurdish nationalism. Kurdish was "an intellectual creation whose authors aspired to a level of civilization in which a Kurdistan state was justified equally by the

millenarian existence of the Kurdish nation and by the need to adhere to Western civilization which was then seen as universal” (Bozarslan 1992, 96). Through the twentieth century, Turkish Kurdish nationalism underwent transformations tantamount with the ever-changing nature of postwar Middle Eastern society.

Kurdish nationalists today view the waning days of the Ottoman Empire and the early years of the Turkish Republic as “the greatest opportunity for the creation of a Kurdish state ever to be missed” (Romano 2006, 26). The 1920 Treaty of Sevres, which came about as the Sultan was too weak to oppose Allied orders (the Allies favored the eventual establishment of Kurdistan, as per Article 62 of the Treaty) and as Ataturk’s nationalist coalition (which rejected the Treaty) had its hands full fighting Greek, Armenian, French, and pro-Sultan forces, was seen as the forerunner to Kurdish statehood (28). Some, like Alishan Beg, capitalized on this opportunity – in 1920, Beg, a Kurdish leader and chief of the Kuchgiri tribe, seized a large shipment of arms and used them to rally the Dersim tribes in rebellion. They demanded Ankara’s acceptance of Kurdish autonomy as already agreed by Istanbul, the release of all Kurdish prisoners in Elaziz, Malatya, Sivas, and Erzinjan jails, the withdrawal of Turkish officials from areas with a Kurdish majority and the withdrawal of all Turkish forces from the Kuchgiri region (29). Before these rebellions could spread into other tribes, the Kemalists reacted and put them down. The Kemalists also exploited the internal divisions between Alevi and Sunni Kurds to depict the struggle as one between “Western powers who supported the Christian Armenians and Greeks, and Muslim-Ottoman Turks and Kurds fighting to save the Sultan, Caliph, and homeland” (30). Thus, the rebels were portrayed as traitors.

Ataturk allowed the Kurds to believe that aligning with the Kemalists equated to fighting to preserve the Ottoman legacy (under which Kurds and Turks were equal as Muslims) and that the two would eventually live in a state based on Turkish-Kurdish brotherhood. Many Kurds joined and vitally contributed to the Kemalist War of Independence against the Greeks, Armenians, and Allied powers. By 1921, with the Kemalist troops remobilized to crush the Kuchgiri revolts and most Kurdish elites siding with Kemalists, the Kurdish nationalist movement essentially collapsed. On November 21, 1922, the Kemalists abolished the Sultanate, and on July 24, 1923, the Treaty of Lausanne replaced that of Sevres (Romano 31). The Kurds were coming to the realization that the new government in Ankara would differ substantially from the image propagated by Kemalists (Romano 2006, 31).

By 1923, the Turkish government was almost completely consolidated, with only religious conservatives opposing Kemalists (over the Kemalists' secularism) – these rebels never collaborated with Kurds. On March 3, 1924, the new Turkish Assembly (Turkey became a republic in 1923) abolished the caliphate and all “Kurdish schools, associations, publications, religious orders, and religious schools (madrasahs)” (32-33). Aside from Turkish nationalism, secularism and populism became cornerstones of the new modernizing regime in Ankara; everyone was declared a Turk. Though alienated and furious, Kurdish elites were still unable to organize any unified Kurdish opposition due to internal divisions. The Kemalist government's prohibition on Kurdish organizations outside the army during the War of Independence further stifled Kurdish nationalism once Turkish and Kurdish interests diverged. Another factor that contributed to Kurdish torpidity was the absence of “modern” Kurdish elites capable of fusing

disparate groups. Religious affiliations still trumped Kurdish nationalism and prevented national fusion (Romano 32-33).

In 1923, a group called Azadi emerged, with the sole aim of fomenting a revolt against Ankara. In order to overcome tribal divisions and mount a successful uprising, “Azadi installed Shaykh Said, a charismatic Kurdish religious figure, as the leader of the planned revolt” (Romano 34). Shaykh Said, like other Shaykhs, had the unique ability to mediate between tribes. Said was unable to incorporate enough Kurdish tribes to compensate for inter-tribal rivalries. Furthermore, when the Turkish government found out about Said’s plans, government officials arrested many Azadi leaders. Nevertheless, Said was successful in rallying virtually every Zaza-speaking Sunni Kurdish tribe around his case, and attracted many middle peasant adherents, important because this stratum was known for a degree of independence from control of chieftains and therefore for its potential availability to nationalist elites (35).

Said’s revolt began successfully, capturing significant towns in huge areas of eastern Anatolia, but the Turkish army reacted by sending 35,000 troops through Syria (thanks to French permission) to push back the rebels in a brutal campaign that culminated with Said’s hanging on September 4, 1925. In the aftermath of Said’s hanging, the major powers (France, the UK, the USSR, and Iran) that had formerly supported the Kurdish rebels withdrew aid. The troops were left to scrounge for arms leftover after World War I. The loss of great power support further weakened an already-fragmented Kurdish society, divesting Shaykhs of their ability to unite Kurds and leaving them at the hands of chieftains and tribal elites (36).

During this time, the most progressive and intellectual Kurdish elites lived in Istanbul and other urban centers and were thus incapable of coordinating Kurdish uprisings (Romano

2006, 37). Revolts continued but, because of the feudal makeup of Kurdish society until at least the 1950s, when the only elites available to spearhead rebellion against the state were tribal leaders, religious Shaykhs, and large landowners, none were successful. When these elites attempted to orchestrate anti-government revolts to protect their power, non-tribal Kurdish peasants rose up against their own landlords instead of supporting the rebels. Conditions only worsened for the Kurds, as Turkish repression continued and international support for the government increased (38).

Kurdish opposition to Ankara seemingly ended after the Dersim revolt of 1938, as “rebellious elites had all been exiled, killed, or deported to western Turkey, while the remaining aghas, beys, and Shaykhs were either co-opted or cowed into silence” (38). Ankara continued its campaign of minority assimilation while striving to develop the local economy of the war-ravaged southeast. As a result of government’s inability to install anything more than gendarmerie posts and tax collectors in Kurdish regions, Kurds were only partially assimilated (Romano 39).

By 1946, Ataturk’s single-party (the Republican People’s Party or RPP) legacy faced “severe challenges from within the governing elite” (Romano 2006, 39). The regime opened somewhat towards a multi-party system, which allowed for greater socio-economic development and changes in the political opportunity structure for Kurdish nationalists. Coincident with its economic modernization program, the RPP had begun pushing economic reforms that violated the unspoken alliance it had with rural and urban notables. In 1946, the RPP initiated a land reform program that appealed to small and landless peasants. Elite opposition to the land

reform program and foreign policy concerns (which called for stronger relations with the West) provided the necessary impetus for a transition to a multi-party system (39).

Under these new political circumstances, a system of political clientelism developed, in which local-level patrons were wooed to the parties and given additional resources to distribute to their clients, in exchange for delivering large blocs of votes (40). In 1950, the new center-right Democratic Party (DP) formed a new government after winning a large majority in the general election (Romano 39). In the election of 1954, of the 40 seats allotted to Turkish Kurdistan, 34 went to the Democratic Party (Romano 40). While most Kurdish representatives in the National Assembly “sought to play the political game with docility, others showed signs of nationalist tendencies; S. Azizoglu of the YTP, for example, worked through the Turkish Workers Party (TIP) to express the aspirations of new urban strata and of educated Kurdish youth (Bozarslan 1992, 98).

By the end of the 1950s, Kurdish nationalism had reemerged as a result of “Turkey’s experiment in political pluralism, a combination of collective memory and a tradition of rebelliousness, the leadership of new Kurdish intelligentsia educated during or just after the Kemalist period and who were very strongly influenced by left-wing ideas, and the Barzani revolt in Iraq” (Bozarslan 1992, 97). In terms of the leftist-nature of these movements, links developed between the students and workers (who constituted the movements’ membership) and Kurdish nationalism, as symbolized by the joint portraits of Ataturk, Lenin, and Shaykh Said (97). Additionally, the late 1950s saw aghas become part of the Turkish multi-party system, which each commanding enormous blocs of votes (Romano 2006, 41). The aghas “successfully blocked any attempts at land reform in the Kurdish regions, and the majority of the Kurdish

peasantry remained sharecroppers of the holders of very tiny plots of land” (42). Many of these peasants were forced into the cities in the Kurdish regions, in western Turkey, or abroad as a result of the disenfranchising effect of mechanized agriculture. These migratory movements were crucial in transforming east-west relations in Turkey (Bozarslan 1992, 98). Finally, Kurds were impelled to relocate by Turkish destruction of Kurdish villages (42).

Beginning in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Kurds proved to be more mobile, integrated, and politically influential than they were during the Kemalist period (Bozarslan 1992, 98). As Kurds became increasingly educated, the strength of tribal affiliations declined. This new urban Kurdish social stratum emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as the new elite leadership of many left-wing and Kurdish nationalist movements (Romano 2006, 42). Groups such as DISK (the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers Union), Dev Genc (the Federation of Revolutionary Youth), and the TWP (Turkish Workers’ Party) organized mass protests all over Turkey, demanding more rights and an end to repression, as well as more democracy and workers’ empowerment. Ironically, many of these new leaders were “scions of agha families who rejected the values they had inherited” (42-43).

As the DP became increasingly authoritarian, the military staged a coup in 1960 and implemented a new constitution focused on protecting and promoting democracy. These new liberties and rights didn’t trickle down to the Kurds, whose nationalism was still suppressed. However, the opening and growth of civil society and leftist movements gave Kurds an avenue for political expression, which they utilized in disproportionate numbers. The experience gained by these Kurds in the Turkish Left provided the foundations for the emergence of nontraditional, Kurdish intellectual and revolutionary elite. In addition to the 1960 coup,

economic modernization and its attendant rural-urban migration of the Kurdish population spurred the creation of a new, non-traditional Kurdish nationalist elite (41).

The first half of the 1960s saw the appearance of the first Kurdish publications in the Turkish Republic – *Yeni Akis* and *Dicle Fırat*, for example (Sperl 98). Most of these journals were quickly closed down by the government. In 1962, certain groups, such as the TWP, were legally allowed to exist, and they used this status to organize opposition to Ankara's policies (Romano 43).

However, as a result of its fierce support of the Kurds, the TWP was shut down in 1971 on the basis that its members were “propagating communist propaganda and advocating autonomy for the Kurds” (Romano 43). Another party, the Democratic Party of Turkish Kurdistan (a derivative of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran – KDPI), was founded in 1964 under the leadership of S. Elci and it marked the peak of confusion in the “nationalist” camp (Bozarslan 1992, 99).

As a result of the government's inaction during the Varto earthquake of 1967, populist demonstrations, often involving more than 10,000 people, occurred over the ensuing two years in virtually every major Kurdish urban area. The KDPI's demands became increasingly radical and nationalistic over these years, without becoming “separatist” per se (Bozarslan 1992, 99-100). As was the case during the 1930s, this new wave of Kurdish nationalists agitated for the destruction of “feudalism”, by which they meant “the system based on the domination of shaykhs and aghas.” These demands started to resonate with leftist overtones and were severely repressed by the regime. Nevertheless, the 1969-1970 period was “a turning point which only further radicalized the demands of Kurdish nationalists, since they had now gone beyond ‘developmentalist’ solutions.”. Because the major Turkish metropolitan areas were

saturated with Kurdish youth (who were apt to unite with workers), clashes with authorities in Istanbul became commonplace (100).

Another important development that came out of the instability of the late 1960s and early 1970s was the creation of the DDKO (the Eastern Revolutionary Cultural Centres), which “created a network within all the Kurdish towns and in the major Turkish conurbations [and] gave the Kurdish movement autonomy from the Kurdish movement in Iraq and autonomy from the Turkish student and working-class movement” (101). In 1971, due to left- and right-wing induced chaos in Ankara, the military staged another coup, which proved that the Turkish military was “the ready and able guardian of the Kemalist system and that it had the capacity to repress those groups whose opposition went too far” (Romano 44-45).

Up to this point, the Kurds had taken advantage of the liberal 1960 constitution to attach their programs to leftist movements, but when they called upon the Soviet Union for help after the 1971 coup and crackdown, the Soviets proved uninterested. In the meantime, the new military government, which had declared martial law, was gradually reversing the freedoms introduced in the 1961 constitution. Kurdish groups (including Dev Genc) were outlawed, and Kurds found it difficult to articulate a coherent message through the fractious web of intertribal politics (Romano 2006, 45-46).

In 1974, following the “intermediary” military regime, the second Kurdish revival took place, even though the DDKOs had fallen under militarist pressure. Within 2 years, dozens of Kurdish groups and organizations with left-wing and even Stalinist tendencies emerged under the leadership of Kurdish nationalists who had gained experience in Turkish leftist movements.

These groups – which competed with one another and other Turkish groups – were particularly active within Kurdish towns with homogenous religious affiliations (Alevi or Sunni) (Bozarslan 1992, 101). One of the main differences between groups in the 1960s and those in the 1970s was that the latter understood the impossibility of affecting change from within the institutionalized system. Additionally, these new groups prioritized freedom and socialism for Kurdistan above all else (Romano 2006, 48).

When these new Kurdish political forces broke onto the political scene between 1977 and 1979, openly nationalist candidates were elected and became ministers without having to abandon their opinions. More significantly, this period saw the emergence of the KUK (the National Liberators of Kurdistan), which was an offshoot of the Turkish KDP, and the PKK (the Kurdish Workers Party), which was founded in 1977 by Abdullah Öcalan. These parties rejected all compromise with the regime and the political system, or with the Turkish left or even with other Kurdish groups. These groups also utilized terrorism and recruited from the same pool of urban radicals (Bozarslan 1992, 102).

Between 1977 and 1979, terrorist attacks left Turkey overwhelmed with fear and economic crisis, creating the conditions that led to the military intervention of September 12, 1980 (102). Continuing with their program of ethnic homogenization, the Turks appointed several rapacious administrators to run Kurdish towns. Spats of state terror persisted from the mid-1960s through the late 1970s, focusing on the Turks goal of suppressing Kurdish nationalism. In 1980, these acts of state-sponsored terror, which were designed to suppress Kurdish culture in all its forms, attracted the ire of international humanitarian organizations.

However, the military plan failed and Kemalism took a turn towards extinction. In retrospect, the 1980 coup did more to increase Kurdish nationalism than it did to suppress it (Bozarslan 1992, 104-05).

Following the 1980 coup, the PKK emerged as the strongest Kurdish group (Romano 2006, 48). Its initial supporters came from rural areas, and thanks to Öcalan's foresight in predicting the 1980 coup, he was able to flee to Syria and Lebanon before having to face the military takeover (Bozarslan 1992, 105; Romano 2006, 50). Syria began to fund the PKK and allow them to organize on Syrian territory as a bulwark against the Turkish GAP project, which sought to dam the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, providers of most of Syria's water (Romano 2006, 50). By 1983, the PKK had also established bases on Iraqi and Iranian territory, having agreed to cooperate with Masoud Barzani's KDP in northern Iraq, and by 1984, the PKK was utilizing Viet-Cong style guerilla attacks on Turkish security forces, governmental personnel and facilities, and Kurdish feudal elites that supported Ankara (50).

It was not until the late 1980s that the Turkish government gave serious attention to the PKK, but by then, over one thousand lives – mainly civilians – had been lost. Support for the PKK continued to increase and to become predominantly urban. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the PKK had acquired the characteristics of a mass uprising, complete with support from foreign countries and Kurdish intellectuals, students and professionals, as well as some Kurdish traditional elites who viewed the PKK as a counterweight to the Turkish state (51).

With the Iran-Iraq war over, a new wave of Iraqi Kurdish refugees flooded into Turkey, causing massive discontent, particularly among Kurdish Turks (Bozarslan 1992, 107). Premier

Turgut Ozal realized the complexity of the Kurdish situation and tried to advance more conciliatory policies towards the Kurds (Bozarslan 1992, 108; Romano 2006, 52). His party, the Motherland Party, suffered in the 1989 municipal elections, but “Ozal transformed the Kurdish problem into a partisan political factor, a clear proof of the emergence of political pragmatism in Turkey” (Bozarslan 1992, 108). Ozal sought to undermine the PKK, win the confidence of the civilian population, and improve Turkey’s standing abroad.

Before his death in 1993, Premier Ozal “opened the possibility for dialogue between Ankara and Kurdish nationalists,” going so far as to advocate amnesty for Kurdish guerillas and negotiating formally with the PKK. Predictably, hardliners took issue with this. In 1993, after sustaining heavy losses, the PKK declared a unilateral ceasefire, coupled with a more moderate offer to negotiate with Ankara. In a second ceasefire, Öcalan articulated an even more reasonable set of demands, centered on broadcasting, linguistic and political rights, and moving away from autonomy, self-determination and separation. Unfortunately, Ozal died of a heart attack the day after Öcalan’s second cease-fire, leaving a host of successors lacking in imagination, independence, influence, and willingness to pursue anything but the military’s solution to the PKK insurgency, which meant more counter-insurgency operations (Romano 2006, 55-57).

During the mid- to late-1990s, the PKK lost ground but still managed to wage a smaller scale guerilla war. The biggest setback for the PKK occurred in February 1999, when Turkey threatened Syria militarily until it agreed not to shelter Öcalan, forcing him on an African odyssey which ended with his capture in Kenya. He was sentenced to death by a Turkish court, but was instead given life imprisonment in October 2002 to avoid criticism from international

humanitarian organizations. The PKK lost what international support it had, the PKK changed its name to KADEK (the Kurdish Freedom and Democracy Congress) in 2002, and then Congra-Gel (the People's Congress) in the fall of that same year (Romano 2006, 57-58). These groups received some support from outside sources, but nothing comparable to what they previously had from Syria and Iraq.

In the wake of Ozal's capture, the Turkish government did not immediately stray from its strategy of dealing with the Kurds as a dangerous military entity, and even began to prosecute crimes of thought (Romano 2006, 59). During the 1990s, Turkey received substantial military aid from the United States, which it used in part to destroy thousands of Kurdish towns and villages. Nonetheless, despite that and Öcalan's continued imprisonment, Kurdish nationalism has persisted. Since 1999, Turkish state policy has moderated somewhat and the result has been twofold. First, Kurds, who have been active in public office for decades (Watts 2006), have begun to capture local office elections in ever greater numbers with candidates openly supportive of the PKK. Second, the PKK has again begun to mobilize in Kurdish cities, and there has been some return to using political violence.

Conclusion

The tendency to explain individual Kurdish movements in isolation from other national settings has obscured a compelling explanation for why some of those movements have sustained themselves over long periods of time, through episodes of incredible state violence, while others have remained moribund or only mounted sporadic efforts at challenging central governments. When we probe the experience of modern Kurdish nationalist movements across

the entirety of greater Kurdistan, a coherent understanding of the central role of demographic and social change in hindering or facilitating the mobilization of human resources emerges.

Kurdish nationalists in Iraq and Turkey have succeeded where their counterparts in Iran and Syria have failed, the evidence suggests, largely because of propitious demographic circumstances. In the former two countries, early nationalist leaders came from the rural elite class and remained autonomous of central state authorities into the 1950s. After that, urbanization—in particular the growth of Kurdish-majority cities in Iraqi and Turkish Kurdistan—created the societal “Trojan Horse” that made possible a generational shift in Kurdish leadership from rural to urban, conservative to radical, elites. In short, the ability of Kurdish nationalism to shift gears demographically and spatially was central to its success.

Kurdish nationalist movements in both Iraq and Turkey began in the interwar period as essentially rural, conservative, and aimed at preserving Kurdish social structures against the intrusion of modern state builders. As those states achieved some success at penetrating the Kurdish countryside and (in the case of Turkey) of introducing mechanized agriculture, they broke the social monopoly of power enjoyed by Kurdish elites and induced substantial urban migration. When they did, paradoxically, they catalyzed large Kurdish urban population in cities such as Sulaymaniya and Diyarbakir; those cities began to provide in the 1970s the new locus of Kurdish nationalist mobilization. Reflecting this demographic change, the new Kurdish leaders were urban-based and more political radical than their predecessors: witness Sheikh Said vs. Abdullah Ocalan and Mustafa Barzani vs. Talal Jalabani.

There existed urban radicals in both the Iranian and Syrian Kurdish populations, but they still lacked by the 1970s a sizeable urban population base upon which to draw. The result

was that, as states managed to exert control over rural elites, the Kurdish nationalist movements in Iran and Syria had nowhere to hide and no new social base to mobilize, effectively paralyzing them. This suggests that, as we continue to push forward scholarship on ethnoregional movements, we ought to bring social structure and change at the macro-level back to a central position in theory building and, in particular, to focus on variations in urbanization and other “core elements of modernity” (Waldner 2004) as important catalysts of contemporary ethnoregional nationalism and wars of self-determination.

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