The Kurds in Iraq

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Why Kurdish Statehood is Unlikely

Michael M. Gunter, professor of political science, Tennessee Technological University, Cookeville, Tennessee

With the possible exception of Iraqi Kurdistan, Kurdish statehood is unlikely in the near future for several reasons. In the first place, Kurdistan (the land of the Kurds) is completely contained within already existing states – Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. To create an independent Kurdistan would threaten the territorial integrity of these pre-existing states. No state on earth would support a doctrine that sanctions its own potential breakup. Thus, the international community has generally been hostile to any redrawing of the map that was not part of the decolonization process. Between Iceland's secession from Denmark in 1944 and the collapse of communism in 1991, the only successful secessionist movements were in Singapore (1965), Bangladesh (1971) and Eritrea (1991). The collapse of colonialism after World War II and the recent disintegration of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, led to two waves of state creation. However, there are no more empires to collapse and accordingly very few possibilities for further state creation today.

A Kurdish state would probably only emerge if there were a major collapse of the existing state system of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria in the Middle East. With the exception of Iraq, this is highly unlikely to happen. The Kurdish situation, therefore, is reminiscent of that of the Poles between 1795 and 1919. It took the upheaval of World War I to shake loose a Polish state from the shackles of internal colonialism imposed by Germany (Prussia), Austria and Russia. Although the Gulf War in 1991 did result in a de facto Kurdish state in northern Iraq (more on this below), only a total re-rolling of the international dice that might follow another world war would be likely to lead to the creation of an independent Kurdistan for all the Kurds.

Unless this realignment happens soon, many actually fear for the long-term survival of the Kurdish people themselves as a distinct entity, because the states that contain them may assimilate them. Crawford Young, for example, has analyzed how the artificial states created by the colonial powers in Africa in time came to help mold new senses of ethnic self-definition.[1] Both Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson have argued that states, in effect, create nations. "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist";[2] or, as Anderson puts it, nationalism "imagines" nations.[3]

Demonstrating how the state can be used to create the nation, Massimo d'Azeglio, an Italian nationalist leader during the *Risorgimento*, supposedly declared: "We have made Italy, now we have to make Italians."[4] Again, the point is that the state can mold its ethnically diverse citizens into a single nation. All this would suggest that in time the arbitrary states that include the Kurds might assimilate them, a process that is already occurring in part.[5]

Thus, the Kurds continue to suffer from a form of internal colonialism that has stunted the full development of their nationalism. Many different observers have also noted the negative effect of such primordial divisions as tribe, clan, language and locality on the creation of a Kurdish state and nation.[6] Kurdish nationalism seems stuck in a time warp from which others emerged more than a century ago. Even as a nation, the Kurds remain divided, as were the Germans before 1871 and the Italians before 1861.

The Kurds also lack a Bismarck or a Garibaldi. No contemporary Kurdish leader has been able to rise above the level of tribal warlord to true statesman. Jalal Talabani, Massoud Barzani and Abdullah Ocalan – the three main Kurdish leaders during the past quarter century – have fought against each other as much as they have fought against the states that deny Kurdish self-determination. Tongue in cheek, Jonathan Randal even "suspect[ed] a rogue chromosome in Kurdish genetics causes . . . fissiparous tendencies."[7]

The Kurdish tendency for infighting certainly allows the neighboring states to use divide-and-rule tactics against them. In the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), for example, each side used the other's Kurds as a fifth column. Since the 1990s, Turkey has repeatedly played the Iraqi Kurds off against its own rebellious Kurds and supported one Iraqi Kurdish group against another. Given such a situation, it is difficult to envision a united Kurdistan. What Kurdish desiderata, then, can we reasonably expect to occur?

Turkey

Slightly more than half of the world's 25-30 million Kurds live in Turkey, where until recently the Kurdistan Workers party – known by its Kurdish initials as the PKK – had been waging a ruthless guerrilla war against the state.[8] Gradually, however, the Turkish army was able to militarily marginalize the PKK and in February 1999 capture its leader, Abdullah (Apo) Ocalan. His death sentence was appealed to the European Court of Human Rights, however, and then rescinded as part of Turkey's application for membership in the European Union (EU). Indeed, the entire Kurdish question in Turkey has now become caught up in the question of Turkey's application for admission to the EU.[9]

Even before Ocalan's capture, however, the PKK had abandoned its demands for Kurdish independence in favor of, first, federation and, now, simply genuine democracy within the preexisting Turkish borders. Early in 2002, the PKK even changed its name to the Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress (KADEK), which indicated a new, more moderate stance. Then in November 2003, KADEK dissolved itself and supposedly created a new, even more moderate and democratic organization tentatively called the Kurdistan Peoples Congress (Kongra-Gel).[10]

The fact that as many as 60 percent of Turkey's Kurds now live west of Ankara, that is, outside of their historic homeland in the southeast of Turkey, makes Kurdish indepen-

dence from Turkey even more impractical. Why would these ethnic Kurds, many of whom are at least partially assimilated anyway, want to give up their more prosperous lives in the west to return to a problematic future in the east?

To meet EU standards of democracy and minority rights as enumerated in the Copenhagen Criteria, Turkey must, among many other steps, grant its Kurdish ethnic population its cultural, educational, social and political rights. For many years, Turkey has feared that to do so would invite Kurdish secession. Slowly but surely, however, the lure of EU membership has begun to convince many in Turkey of the need to satisfy Kurdish demands.

In August 2002, the Turkish parliament finally passed a reform package that, in theory at least, promises to accomplish these ends. It remains to be seen, of course, whether these reforms will indeed be implemented. Too often in the past, similar hopes have been dashed on the rock of Turkish ultra-nationalism. Nevertheless, the best hope for the Kurds in Turkey today would seem to be Turkey's meeting the EU criteria for true democracy, which would imply granting Kurdish rights within Turkey's preexisting borders. As some have noted, Turkey's road to the EU lies through Diyarbakir (the unofficial capital of Turkish Kurdistan).

Iraq

Iraq is a unique case, partially the exception to the argument in this essay that a Kurdish state is highly unlikely. Because of the blunders of Saddam Hussein in calling down upon himself the U.S.-led alliance in the Gulf wars of 1991 and 2003, a de facto Kurdish state has arisen in northern Iraq since 1991.[11] This de facto state was protected by the U.S. no-fly zone from Iraqi invasion and economically supported by the Kurds. It received 13 percent of the Iraqi money garnered from oil sales allowed by the United Nations until the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

Although the two main Iraqi Kurdish parties – Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic party (KDP) and Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) – fought a nasty civil war from 1994 to 1998, their still-divided rump state is currently prospering and indeed is even a model of democracy and economic success for other more benighted Middle Eastern states. The situation, however, remains precarious because nobody recognizes this de facto state. Turkey has even warned that it would be a *casus belli* if the Iraqi Kurds declared their independence. Iran and Syria also oppose Iraqi Kurdish independence because of the magnet effect it might have on their own Kurdish populations. In addition, the United States is on record as opposing independence because of the supposed instability it would create in the Middle East.[12]

Therefore, Barzani and Talabani have both realistically denied any claims for independence, opting instead for federalism in a post-Saddam democratic Iraq.[13] Despite their disclaimers, however, it must be admitted that facts on the ground are being created. If the Iraqi Kurds continue to maintain their de facto independence into the foreseeable future, a rump Kurdish state there will become increasingly possible.

Iraq, after all, is an artificial state cobbled together by the British after World War I from the three former Ottoman *vilayets* of Mosul, Baghdad and Basra. Lacking detailed

understanding of the various peoples they were trying to meld into this new state and handicapped by strong cultural stereotypes, the British managed to create little more than what may prove to be a failed state that could only be held together by the likes of a Saddam Hussein.[14] Since Iraq has no democratic heritage upon which to build a federal democracy – the only type of state the Iraqi Kurds are on record as agreeing to remain part of – it is difficult to see the Iraqi Kurds remaining part of Iraq in the long run, except by force.

In addition, for the first time since the creation of Iraq, the Iraqi Kurds have a powerful ally in the United States. This ironic situation was brought about by Turkey's refusal to allow the United States to use its territory as a base for a northern front to attack Iraq in March 2003. Courtesy of Turkey, the Iraqi Kurds suddenly were thrust into the role of U.S. ally, a novel position they eagerly and successfully assumed. This new situation was clearly illustrated in July 2003, when the United States apprehended some 11 Turkish commandos in Sulaymaniya apparently seeking to carry out acts that would destabilize the de facto Kurdish government and state in northern Iraq. Previously, as the strategic ally of the United States, Turkey had carte blanche to do practically anything it wanted to in northern Iraq. No longer is this true. The "Sulaymaniya incident" caused what a top Turkish general termed the "worst crisis of confidence"[15] in U.S.-Turkish relations since the creation of the NATO alliance.

If Iraq indeed proves to be a failed state that cannot sustain a federal democracy, the United States, Turkey and Iran may actually come to see greater stability in allowing Iraq to be partitioned into its constituent parts rather than forcing it to retain a unity its citizens – especially the Kurds – may come to oppose. While it takes a stretch of the imagination to countenance such a development now, events may move quickly once it becomes more apparent that Humpty Dumpty cannot be put back together. This then would be the exception to the assertion at the beginning of this essay that Kurdish statehood is unlikely. What is likely, however, is that we will know sooner rather than later which road the Iraqi Kurds will travel.

Iran

Iran contains the second-largest number of Kurds in the world, but over the years has beaten the Kurdish national movement into the ground and further demoralized it by assassinating its main leaders, Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou in 1989 and then his successor, Sadeq Sharafandi, in 1992.[16] Immediately after World War II, Iran also crushed the short-lived Mahabad Republic of Kurdistan in Iran and hanged its leader, Qazi Muhammad. Earlier, in the 1920s, Iran had defeated yet another Kurdish rebel, Ismail Agha Simko, and eventually killed him.

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's Islamic Republic had no place for minorities within the Islamic *umma*, and by the early 1980s crushed a Kurdish uprising trying to take advantage of the chaos caused by the overthrow of the shah. Therefore, the most that the Kurds in Iran can hope for would be the continuing development of a more secular Iranian orientation that would lead to updated cultural and educational rights for the state's minorities including the Kurds.

Syria

The approximately one million Kurds in Syria are too divided and weak to threaten the current government. Unlike the situation in Turkey (until recently at least), Iran, and Iraq, the Kurds in Syria are separated into three non-contiguous geographical regions.[17] The best hope for the Kurds in Syria, therefore, would be the gradual liberalization of the new regime of Bashar al-Asad.

[1] Crawford Young, "Ethnicity and the Colonial and Post-Colonial State in Africa," *Ethnic Groups and the State*, ed. Paul Brass (London: Croom Helm, 1985), pp. 73-81.

[2] Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1964), p. 168.

[3] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), from the title of the book.

[4] Cited in Benyamin Neuberger, "State and Nation in African Thought," *Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1977, pp. 199-205.

[5] On the precarious position of the Kurdish language, for example, see Amir Hassanpour, *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan, 1918-1985* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), p. 466. For further background, see M. Hakan Yavuz and Michael M. Gunter, "The Kurdish Nation," *Current History*, No. 642, January 2001, p. 33.

[6] See, for example, Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (London: Zed, 1992); and David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996). These two studies stand as possibly the best contemporary analyses in English of the Kurds.

[7] Jonathan Randal, *After Such Knowledge What Forgiveness? My Encounters with Kurdistan* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), p. 11.

[8] For detailed analyses of the Kurdish problem in Turkey, see Henri J. Barkey and Graham E. Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998); Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurds and the Future of Turkey* (New York: St. Martin's, 1997); Kemal Kirisci and Gareth M. Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-state Ethnic Conflict* (London: Frank Cass, 1997); and Paul White, *Primitive Rebels or Revolutionary Modernizers? The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey* (London: Zed, 2000).

[9] Michael M. Gunter, "The Continuing Kurdish Problem in Turkey after Ocalan's Capture," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 21, October 2000, pp. 849-69.

[10] "International Initiative Briefings: KADEK Dissolves Itself," accessed at www.freedom-for-Ocalan.com, November 11, 2003.

[11] For background, see Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurdish Predicament in Iraq: A Political Analysis* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999); and Gareth R.V. Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan: Political Development and Emergent Democracy* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

[12] The argument that the Kurds supposedly make for instability in the Middle East has been made by Stephen C. Pelletiere, *The Kurds: An Unstable Element in the Gulf* (Boulder and London: Westview, 1984).

[13] Michael M. Gunter, "Kurdish Future in a Post-Saddam Iraq," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 23, April 2003, pp. 9-23.

[14] Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

[15] Cited in Nicholas Birch, "Detention Strains Already Tense U.S.-Turkish Relations," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 15, 2003.

[16] For recent background, see Farideh Koohi-Kamali, *The Political Development of the Kurds in Iran: Pastoral Nationalism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003).

[17] For a recent analysis, see Ismet Cheriff Vanly, "The Oppression of the Kurdish People in Syria," *Kurdish Exodus: From Internal Displacement to Diaspora*, ed. Mohammed M.A. Ahmed and Michael M. Gunter (Sharon, MA: Ahmed Foundation for Kurdish Studies, 2002), pp. 49-62.

Transnational Networks: New Opportunities and Constraints for Kurdish Statehood

Denise Natali, visiting research fellow, Washington Kurdish Institute (WKI); director of WKI's transnational project

At first glance, the prospects for Kurdish statehood have never seemed so promising. International penetrations into Iraqi Kurdistan after the 1991 Gulf War, including the creation of a safe haven by coalition forces, have allowed the Iraqi Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) to flourish. After 12 years of political autonomy, Iraqi Kurds have institutionalized Kurdish self-rule in northern Iraq. Shifts in international norms, active international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the presence of highly politicized and influential Diaspora networks have semilegitimized the idea of Kurdish statehood. These transnational processes, added to ongoing restrictions against Kurds at home, have also facilitated the communication and movement of different Kurdish communities across borders. Autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan has become a magnet for transborder Kurdish organizations, political parties, publications and modern telecommunications networks, all of which have advanced the Kurdish nationalist movement at home and abroad.

Yet, a deeper look into the nature of transnational networks reveals a less promising scenario for Kurdish statehood. While transnationalism has encouraged Kurds to mobilize as an ethnonational group, it has created new dichotomies in the nationalist project. The emergence of Kurdish Diaspora communities across different host-country political systems has led to greater diversification in Kurdish nationalist mobilizations. Transnational opportunities are also asymmetrical and limited in scope. Some Kurdish groups have gained access to international political and humanitarian support, while others have remained isolated in the international arena. Additionally, transnational networks interact with opportunity structures inside the state, creating a nexus between the global and the local that further hinders or encourages nationalist mobilizations at home.[1] Opportunities for Iraqi Kurds to export their transnational networks to their autonomous zone are not available to Kurdish Diasporas from Turkey and Iran, which are constrained by a more restrictive political space at home. Consequently, instead of a pan-Kurdish nationalism, different Kurdish nationalist projects have reemerged across state borders.[2]

Transnational Networks in Kurdish Politics

Transnationalism is not a new phenomenon in Kurdish nationalist politics. Since the state-formation period, transborder networks have increased the significance of Kurdish nationalist mobilizations. Qazi Mohammed's Kurdistan Democratic party in Iran (KDPI) and Said Elci's KDP in Turkey benefited, although temporarily, from Mullah Mustafa Barzani and his traditional supporters in the KDP Iraq. Iraqi Kurdish leftist nationalists led by Ibrahim Ahmed and Jalal Talabani maintained important cross-border support networks with their urbanized leftist counterparts in Turkey and Iran, allowing their modernizing nationalist movement to continue alongside and in competition with the tribalized, traditional stratum. Abdullah Ocalan, imprisoned leader of the *Partiye Karkaren Kurdistane*

(PKK) – renamed KADEK in 2001 and the Kurdistan People's Congress in 2003 – kept his illegal nationalist organization alive for nearly 20 years in Syria. Even after his arrest, the PKK found another haven in the autonomous Kurdish northern Iraq, where it continues to advance and destabilize Kurdish nationalist politics.

Transnational networks that emerged after the 1991 Gulf War, however, are more complex than cross-border alliances between Kurdish nationalist groups and central governments. They include new forms of financial, political and ideological support from NGOs, humanitarian relief organizations, and Diaspora groups that have given Kurdish communities legal spaces to advance their nationalist agenda without the fear of repression and for a relatively continuous period of time. Access to democratic host-country systems and generous assistance from European governments have allowed Kurdish educational and cultural programs to flourish, including Kurdish-language publications, school text books, academic conferences, cultural organizations, advanced telecommunications systems and musical events. L'Institut Kurde de Paris and the NAVEND center for Kurdish studies in Bonn, for instance, have brought different Kurdish communities together as a unified nationalist group. Kurdish television stations and satellite communications systems have further heightened the sense of a territorially boundless Kurdish nationalism.

The emergence of an influential Diaspora community may have helped create a unified sense of Kurdishness. However, the idea of Kurdish statehood is limited to cyberspace. Indeed, from their isolated ethnic niches in institutionally racist but open European societies, Kurds have become more nationalistic from afar. Most Kurdish Diasporas identify as Kurds first and not as European citizens in a post-national community. Still, the idea of a larger Kurdistan is not salient among Kurdish Diasporas, at least not in the public-policy arena.

Re-territorialization of Kurdish Nationalism

While transnationalism has de-territorialized some Kurdish projects, it has re-territorialized others. Kurdish nationalist projects have become part of complex transnational social networks in which cultural reproduction in the Diaspora is tied to ethnonationalist politics at home. These global cultural flows have encouraged local identities to retain or gain significance, offsetting globalization and deterritorialization processes.[3] Additionally, the exodus of Kurdish communities to Europe dispersed Kurds across various borders once again, further diversifying the political arena in which Kurdish nationalism can be mobilized. Since the 1980s, Iraqi Kurdish migrants have relocated to England, Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany. About 750,000 Kurds from Turkey migrated to Germany, first as economic migrants and then as political refugees. Iranian Kurds have had an entirely different migration experience. While about 15,000 former KDPI cadres took exile in Germany, England and some Nordic countries, the majority fled to Iraqi Kurdistan, where they remain in refugee camps or as clandestine activists. Most others remained in Iran, living as migrant populations in shantytowns and cities. These different migration experiences, alongside distinct historical trajectories that shaped Kurdish nationalisms at home, have encouraged differentiation rather than homogeneity in Kurdish nationalist projects.

The asymmetrical nature of transnational networks has further constrained the

possibilities of Kurdish statehood. Iraqi Kurds have benefited from external penetrations and an open political space in Iraqi Kurdistan. After the 1991 Gulf War, dozens of international relief organizations and donor agencies became active inside the Kurdish north, helping to reconstruct the infrastructure and local economy.[4] The positive exchange between the local political space and the transnational arena has allowed Diaspora networks to export their ideologies, financial support and political organizations to northern Iraq, developing and democratizing Kurdish nationalist institutions.

However, these types of transnational opportunity structures have not been as generous for Kurds from Turkey. While gaining access to Europe's commitment to human rights and its associated organizations, Turkey's Kurds have not obtained the international status of their counterparts in Iraq. While the Iraqi Kurdish nationalist elite and organizations have been legitimized internationally and at home, Kurdish nationalists from Turkey have been delegitimized at home and criminalized abroad.

Iranian Kurds have had even fewer transnational opportunities. With their nationalist elite assassinated and nationalist organizations under surveillance, the Iranian nationalist movement has nearly ceased altogether in the Diaspora. Most have chosen to affiliate with Iranian cultural organizations rather than mobilize on behalf of a larger Iranian or pan-Kurdish nationalism.

Even if the Kurds had similar migration experiences and were unified in one host-country setting they would not have the necessary transnational organizational support to institutionalize Kurdish statehood. Transnational networks encourage Kurdish national identity as minorities, refugees, migrant workers and international victims; however, the very notion of Kurdish statehood is delegitimized at the international level. The Kurdistan National Congress (KNK) may have created an international parliamentary-like forum that brings together different Kurdish communities from all parts of Kurdistan; however, it does not have legal status or access to foreign government support, which could legitimize its activities at the local, regional or international level.

In the absence of a legal international government and bounded by new juridical and administrative systems, Kurdish Diasporas have reframed their nationalist programs in relation to the political opportunity structures tied to their host-country settings.[5] In ethnocultural Germany, for instance, Kurdish nationalism has become integrally tied to guaranteeing Kurdish language education in school, obtaining media privileges in the Kurdish language, and gaining recognition of the Kurds as a distinct ethnocultural community. In multicultural England, Kurdish nationalist demands are linked to the advantages and constraints of the decentralized British political system, which accords Kurdish communities local autonomy while making them responsible for administering their own social services, including housing, unemployment, education and language programs. In secular Jacobin France, Kurdish Diasporas have reconfigured their nationalist demands within the larger objective of integrating French society and obtaining residency cards, the right to work and asylum status. Each Kurdish community is further constrained by the particular relationships between host and home-country governments. The penetration of Turkish politics in Germany, alongside Turkey's restrictive political space at home, has given rise to new mobilizations among Alevi, Sunni, and Kurdish nationalist communities

that have not become salient among Iraqi or Iranian Kurdish groups.

Finally, in the transnational context the idea of a pan-Kurdish nationalism has had little opportunity to develop on an ideological, political or organizational level. Rather, transnational opportunity structures have helped create a Kurdish political-advocacy community and institutionalize a set of pro-Kurdish norms based on democracy and human rights. Instead of turning to the radical nationalist PKK or demanding a Kurdish state, Kurdish nationalists have legitimized their movement by mobilizing alongside the wide range of transnational social-movement organizations (TSMOs) that have emerged with democratization processes and public participation in international policy processes.[6] Kurds from Turkey have turned to the European Parliament and the International Court of Justice to make their nationalist claims. Iraqi Kurds seek the support of the American government and United Nations, which, as part of the campaign against weapons of mass destruction, has assured their international victim status. Even then, Iraqi Kurds have no guarantee of continued American and international support. This can weaken the credibility and significance of their own nationalist project in a future Iraqi state.

Conclusions

Transnational networks have created a diversified form of Kurdish nationalism that challenges the idea of Kurdish statehood. Kurdish nationalist projects are no longer just configured inside Iraq, Turkey and Iran, but also from the numerous host countries in which different Kurdish Diaspora communities have taken refuge. This diversification is not due to inherent antagonisms or the unruly nature of Kurdish society and politics. Rather, it is a logical consequence of variations in the transnational opportunity structures outside the state's territorial borders, alongside the different historical trajectories that have shaped Kurdish nationalism inside each state.

[1] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 198-99; and Richard Munch, *Nation and Citizenship in the Global Age: From National to Transnational Ties and Identities* (London and New York: Palgrave, 2001): pp. 13-17.
[2] See Denise Natali, "Transnationalizing Kurdish Nationalism in Iraq," *The Future of Kurdistan and Iraq*, eds. Brendan O'Leary, John McGarrry, and Khaled Salih (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming).
[3] Stanley Tambiah, "Transnational Movements, Diaspora, and Multiple Modernities," *Daedalus*, No. 129, Winter 2000, p. 163.
[4] Denise Natali, "International Aid, Regional Politics, and the Kurdish Issue in Iraq after the Persian Gulf War," (Abu Dhabi: Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1999).
[5] Ruud Koopmans and Paul Statham, "How National Citizenship Shapes Transnationalism: A Comparative Analysis of Migrant Claims-making in Germany, Great Britain, and the Netherlands," *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2001, pp. 64-71; and Gaia Danese, "Transnational Collective Action in Europe: The Case of Migrants in Italy and Spain," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 4, pp. 715-17.
[6] Louis Kriesberg, "Social Movements and Global Transformation," *Solidarity beyond the State: The Dynamics of Transnational Social Movement*, eds. Jackie Smith, Charles Chatfield and Ron Pugnacco (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), pp. 4-5; Patrick Ball, "State Terror, Constitutional Traditions and Human Rights Movements: A Cross-National Quantitative Comparison" *Globalization and Social Movements*, eds. John A. Guidry, Michael D. Kennedy, and Mayer N. Zald (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2000), pp. 55-56.

Turkey and Kurdistan-Iraq, 2003

Robert Olson, professor of Middle East and Islamic history, University of Kentucky

In the period between the Turkish parliament's rejection on March 1, 2003, of the resolution to participate (with up to 45,000 troops) in the U.S.-British attack on Iraq and the decision of the Turkish government on November 7 not to send troops to Iraq, Turkey was compelled to enter more overtly into government-to-government relations with the Kurdistan Democratic party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which control major portions of northern Iraq. Processes of state formation have been taking place in the KDP- and PUK-controlled areas of northern Iraq for some time, especially since 1992, when the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) was established. These processes accelerated from March to November 2003.

As Gareth Stansfield has shown in his recent book, the KDP and PUK act as separate entities in most aspects of governing the territories they control.[1] The change in Ankara's policy was compelled by the dramatic weakening in Turkey's geopolitical position in Iraq as a result of the U.S.-British attack on Iraq on March 20, 2003. Turkey's policy is still to support the territorial integrity of Iraq, grounded in an Iraqi federation. This is also the policy that the United States claims it is pursuing.

By June 1, 2003, Ankara, however unwillingly, was increasingly compelled to treat the KDP and PUK as representing semi-sovereign entities. The Turks recognized that the KDP and PUK had armies of more than 70,000 that were increasingly well armed. Ankara had to consider that more weapons from Saddam Hussein's arsenal would end up in the Kurds' hands and that the United States would do little to stop it – would in fact facilitate it. Also during this period, U.S. forces began to supply weapons to the KDP and PUK, although the extent of the supply is unknown. The possession of sufficient armed forces is one of the most important criteria for any group, organization or people engaged in state-formation processes.

From March 1 to November 7, 2003, Turkey's relations with the KDP and PUK began to take on the characteristics of government-to-government relations. Actions on the ground and on the part of Turkey, the KDP and PUK were such that, beginning in March 2003, the term Kurdistan-Iraq should be used to accurately indicate that the KDP and PUK had obtained some significant aspects of sovereignty. Turkey implicitly recognized this situation and treated these two groups as the parties that Ankara had to address regarding its concerns in the Kurdish regions. By November 7, the border within Iraq of what would in the future be called Northern Iraq had been moved considerably southward. The longer it took the U.S. occupying forces to defeat the Arab Iraqi resistance forces, the greater became the consolidation of the KDP and PUK in Kurdistan-Iraq, developments that Ankara (and Tehran) would have to consider seriously.

There also seemed to be an increasing recognition in Ankara that a Kurdistan-Iraq would be in greater control of most revenues generated within its borders (or that it would have access to such revenues via its participation in a federated Iraq). With more access to oil revenues generated within its territories, Kurdistan-Iraq would be more able to

establish priorities, allocate funds and determine economic and trade relations with neighboring countries. This in turn would inspire confidence in its people that citizens would benefit from their work. Ankara may also have realized that a negotiated normalized relationship between Turkey and Kurdistan-Iraq would reduce smuggling and the black-market economy. Regulation of the economy with the Kurdish population of Turkey would reduce the prevalent corruption and uncertainties. The regulation of the parallel economies would also provide venues for improved relations with Turkey and for reducing tensions among the governments in Turkey, Iran and Syria and their economically under-developed and heavily populated Kurdish peripheries. This would encourage more investment in the Kurdish regions, which would neutralize these regions' hostility and alienation, reducing political polarization and armed conflict.

Ankara has in part begun to realize that a Kurdistan-Iraq would also be a focus of foreign and international investment. The oil, gas, water (Tigris, Greater and Lesser Zab Rivers) and mineral resources – in addition to the region's strategic geography – provide opportunities for a variety of economic enterprises, and the U.S. occupation government, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), would favor such developments. If Arab Iraqi resistance forces ever were able to expel U.S. forces, such a development, for reasons discussed above, would not lessen the economic and political significance and potential of a Kurdistan-Iraq. The consequences of such investments would soon be felt in the Kurdish areas and regional states.

The contribution of an economically viable Kurdistan-Iraq to the development of the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran and Syria would in turn provide some economic relief to the central governments of those states and free up monies to invest in their own countries, contributing to wider regional stability and, potentially, democratization. The Turkish government's agreement for Pet Oil and General Energy Oil and Gas to operate in PUK-controlled territory and the PUK's welcoming of Turkish companies to operate and invest in its territory indicate that even before March 1, 2003, Ankara had recognized some government-to-government relations (in this case with the PUK) with Kurdistan-Iraq.[2] Turkey also had to recognize that in the future, Kurdistan-Iraq might well be a territory that a number of oil and gas pipeline networks would traverse, some going to Israel. Such developments would contribute to its recognition as an entity with a sovereign government, if not as a state.

Ankara may also have begun to think that a Kurdistan-Iraq would be able to normalize relations with U.S.-occupied Arab Iraq or, in the future, with an Arab Iraq free of direct U.S. occupation. Kurdistan-Iraq would also be able to normalize relations with neighboring countries and other states and to do so on a state-to-state basis. Other states would not have to employ parallel diplomacy in order to pursue what they considered legitimate national interests. Elimination of non-state parallel diplomacy and economies would reduce the potential for misunderstandings and conflicts, enabling negotiated settlements. Regularization of *de facto* state-to-state relations between Kurdistan-Iraq and Arab Iraq would reduce the internecine fighting, guerrilla warfare and armed conflict that have plagued the region for the past three-quarters of a century.

Ankara (and Tehran, though probably less so) may have begun to realize, with the

pressure of myriad other factors, that the economic development and political stability of Kurdistan-Iraq would provide fertile ground for improved social and cultural relations among the peoples of the region. Cultural and linguistic expression in a variety of media – printed, visual and dramatic arts – has been building self-confidence in Kurdistan-Iraq since 1992. It was contributing to a desire to participate as equals in a wider Kurdish society, though the extended family, clan and tribe were still predominant. The cultural and political achievements of Kurdistan-Iraqis inspired pride among the Kurds of Iran, Syria and Europe throughout the 1990s and into the first decade of this century. There was a growing awareness among the political elite in Turkey, Iran and Syria of their own Kurdish populations' desire for more cultural, civil and political rights.

While possibilities for war remained, there was the growing realization in Ankara (and Tehran) that a prosperous and stable Kurdistan-Iraq and its contribution to regional development would allow the peoples of the Middle East to cope better with the many external challenges and threats that they were bound to face in the coming decades. The U.S.-British war and occupation of Iraq served as a good example of what could happen to Turkey or Iran if they did not get their houses in order. Turkey at least began to rearrange its furniture regarding Kurdistan-Iraq after March 20, 2003. For Iran the situation was much more threatening. Its entire state structure was under attack, with both domestic and foreign opposition supported by the United States. Not only did the Islamic Republic have to worry about getting its house in order, it had to be concerned that it might collapse if confronted with an even more aggressive U.S. challenge.

The establishment of government-to-government relations between Turkey and the KDP and PUK does not mean that relations could not become hostile and it does not mean that Ankara favors such relationships. However, given the inability of U.S. occupation forces to establish sufficient order and stability, Ankara was compelled further to maintain as strong a presence in Iraq as it could. Turkey's decision on November 7, 2003, not to send troops to Iraq reinforced the necessity of its new relationship with the KDP and PUK.

It had become clearer as early as July 2003 that developments were headed in this direction. On July 4, 2003, U.S. Special Forces in Sulaymaniya captured 11 Turkish Special Forces soldiers, along with 19 members of the Iraq Turkomen Front (ITF). The Americans charged that the Turks were planning to assassinate the newly appointed governor of Kirkuk. A senior State Department official said, "The United States had substantial intelligence that the Turks were in activity against the local leadership."[3] Turkish chief of staff General Hilmi Özkök stated that the Sulaymaniya incident "had unfortunately led to the biggest crisis of confidence ever between the U.S. and Turkish armed forces."[4]

The detention and expulsion of the Turkish Special Forces from Sulaymaniya had several consequences: (1) it reduced Turkey's presence in Sulaymaniya and Kirkuk and other towns in northern Iraq and restricted Turkish armed forces to the area that they occupied inside Iraq along the international border between Turkey and Iraq; (2) it reduced further the strategic and tactical cooperation between Turkey and the United States in Kurdistan-Iraq and in Arab Iraq; (3) it reduced Turkey's presence to unofficial repre-

sentations, trade delegations, and its military and peacekeeping forces in Kurdistan-Iraq; by early 2004, both the KDP and PUK were demanding that the peace-keeping forces be removed; and (4) Ankara perceived that Washington was not too concerned about the effect of Iraqi Kurdish nationalism on Kurdish nationalist movements in Turkey. Cüneyt Ülsever, one of the most prominent Turkish journalists, also opined that the detention of the Turkish Special Forces soldiers would encourage Turks to realize that their future should be more tied to the EU than to the United States.[5]

Another consequence of the July 4 detention was that it compelled Ankara to further recognition of the new status of the Kurds of Kurdistan-Iraq. After July 4, 2003, with the exception of the area they occupied in northern Iraq, Turkish troops would be in Iraq only at U.S. invitation. Kurdish armed forces under the aegis of U.S. occupation-force commanders would be in control of most of northern Iraq.

The necessity for Ankara to strengthen relations with Kurdistan-Iraq was confirmed further when the Turkish government decided on November 7, 2003, not to send troops to Iraq, a decision determined by pressure from the KDP, PUK and IGC on L. Paul Bremer III, the CPA administrator. Masud Barzani, the head of the KDP, said that he would resign from the IGC if Turkish troops entered Iraq. Barzani was one of five Kurds holding important positions on the IGC. Ankara had to consider that not only did the KDP and PUK govern Kurdistan-Iraq, but they also were powerfully represented on the IGC with several members. One of them, Interim Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari, was the former foreign-affairs spokesman for the KDP.

On November 18 and 19, 2003, when Jalal Talabani visited Ankara, he did so not as the leader of the PUK, but as the president of the IGC, with the trappings of a "state-to-state" visit. This categorization would seem to strengthen the argument for calling Turkey's relations with Kurdistan-Iraq a government-to-government relationship. The Kurdish representation on the IGC in Baghdad must have reinforced the perception in Ankara of the necessity for strong revised relations with the KDP and PUK.

By November 7, 2003, Kurds held 5 of the 25 posts in the IGC (including that of the foreign minister), and Jalal Talabani, leader of the PUK, was the president (interim) of the IGC. When Talabani visited Ankara on November 18-19, 2003, Turkey had to consider that in the future the federated state of Iraq could also possibly have a prime minister and a foreign minister who were Kurds.

In changed circumstances, of course, Turkey might find it necessary to invade Kurdistan-Iraq. One such instance might be if, with or without direct U.S. support, the Kurds of Iraq declared an independent state. Another case might be if the United States, because of increased resistance from Arab Iraqis, decides to withdraw from Iraq, a situation that might result in civil war. Another scenario for Turkish intervention would be if the Kurds, Arabs and Turkomen of Kurdistan-Iraq were to engage in internecine fighting. A fourth situation could arise if the Kurds of Iran sought more autonomy in the event of the toppling of the Islamic Republic, which could lead to closer relations between the Kurds of Iran and Kurdistan-Iraq.[6] A fifth instance could arise if Turkey thought that Iran was beginning to exercise too much influence in Arab Iraq and a Shia-dominated Arab Iraq were to emerge. Finally, another instance would be if the government of Kurdistan-

Iraq decided to support the Kurdish nationalist movements or organizations in Turkey to the point that Ankara thought they jeopardized national security, threatened governing institutions, or would lead to actions that would destabilize the Turkish government.

[1] Gareth R. V. Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan: Political Development and Emergent Democracy* (London: RoutlegeCruzon, 2003).

[2] This issue is discussed in my forthcoming *Turkey-Iran Relations, 1979-2004: Revolution, Ideology, War, Coups and Geopolitics* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Press, 2004).

[3] *The Washington Times*, July 8, 2003.

[4] *The New York Times International*, July 7, 2003.

[5] *Hürriyet*, July 28, 2003.

[6] Ibid.

Could a Kurdish State Be Set Up in Iraq?

Nihat Ali Özcan, author of PKK (Kurdistan Ýþçi Partisi) Tarihi, Ideolojisi ve Yönetimi *(Ankara: Asam, 1999)*

We can theoretically respond to this question with an immediate "yes." Kurds, like most other ethnic groups, may set up their own state. It would be plausible to assert, particularly after the recent operation of the coalition forces in Iraq, that the Kurds are much closer to this goal than ever. However, a closer look at the Middle East would reveal that there are serious practical difficulties to the setting up of a Kurdish state, and overcoming them would be extremely difficult and costly.

The first of these difficulties arises from the fact that Kurdish leaders have strong tendencies to cast their energies in favor of the divided local governments that they represent, rather than in favor of an independent state. Indeed leadership derives its legitimacy not from personal qualities and political institutions, but from the tribe-based social fabric prevalent in the region. Thus, neither Jalal Talabani nor Massoud Barzani is the leader of the most populous Kurdish tribes in their region; they are simply the leaders of the alliances of the best-organized tribes that managed to hold control by relying on the force of money and armaments. Tribal membership provides people living in this region with economic advantages, political power, social status and individual security. The establishment of an independent state may rapidly change the existing social order and power relations. Therefore, in the discussions over the feasibility of an independent state it should always be kept in mind that the social and political divisions between the Iraqi Kurds themselves constitute the main dynamic affecting the final outcome. Consequently, attention at this stage must be directed inside rather than outside because this division and competition could make an armed conflict inevitable.

Competition in the Kurdish region may occur either in the form of one Kurdish group against the other or of counteralliances. At this junction, it does not seem possible that local Kurdish governments could establish superiority through peaceful competition without resorting to arms. If division and competition were coupled with the culture of violence prevalent in the region, tribal interactions would likely take the form of armed

conflict. It is because of the high potential for armed conflict that the current lack of trust in the region is getting deeper and each group is focusing its attention on the region it controls. Therefore, the primary issue of the Kurdish groups is to preserve the status quo rather than to set up an independent state. The main reason there is not an armed struggle now is that both Kurdish groups have turned their eyes to Mosul and Kirkuk rather than each other.

It is almost inevitable that free elections will cause military confrontations among the Kurds. The only possibility that might prevent this would be the establishment of an independent Kurdish state. However, not only does this possibility appear to be problematic, but the countries in the region are also aware of the structural weaknesses of the Kurdish cause and tend to manipulate them in their favor.

The second difficulty in regard to the establishment of a Kurdish state will likely emanate from controversy over its borders. Particularly, the Mosul and Kirkuk regions will engender serious problems, since this region is not only home to rich oil fields, but also to various ethnic communities. Arabs and Kurds would likely be concerned with the situation of Arabs and Turkomans who might reside in a Kurdish state. While the Arab population of an independent Kurdish state would try to form alliances with other Arabs to the South and West, the Turkoman community of 700,000-2.3 million will continue to look to Turkey. On the other hand, the Kurds would likely try to expel the Arabs and the Turkomans from their region in parallel with their effort to establish their state. Therefore, the possibility of armed conflict might be so high that it would eventually result in ethnic cleansing.

The third difficulty is that neighboring countries will view such a possibility with alarm. Not only Iraq, but also Turkey, Iran and Syria would perceive the same kind of threat stemming from an independent Kurdish state. Such a state might provoke the Kurds of neighboring countries and in the long run create serious security problems. It would be futile to expect cordial relations.

The fourth reason is that an independent Kurdish state would face the serious problem of its landlocked geography. Under the conditions of failed integration with the world economy and territorial entrapment, an independent Kurdish state could come into being only if an outside power such as the United States offered support and protection, or a special relationship were established with a neighboring country. In fact, Turkey played such a role between 1992 and 2003. However, the changing political conditions in the region, particularly the Kurdish attempts at state building, would prevent any regional country from performing the "big brother" role.

The fifth difficulty relates to cost. Would the Americans be willing to pay for the process of changing political boundaries in the Middle East? If the Americans support border changes, anti-American feeling in the region would abound. To what extent would such a situation serve U.S. global interests? If the Americans are committed to the goal of rooting out the sources of terrorism, favoring border changes might increase the cost by limiting the number of its allies. Neither the wider Arab community nor Turkey and Iran would be willing to cooperate with the United States if the latter had helped the Kurds establish their state against the wishes of former.

Turkey's relationship with the Kurdish groups in Iraq can be analyzed in three differ-

ent periods. From 1959 to 1983, Turkey preferred to ignore the existence of a Kurdish reality in Iraq. Constrained by Cold War geopolitical realities, Turkey mainly considered the Kurds an internal affair of Iraq and not a threat. The second period lasted from 1983 to 1986, when Turkey started to perceive threats coming form the region. The *Partiye Karkaren Kurdistane* (PKK) was taking root in northern Iraq with the support of Iran and Syria and was allied with the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). During this period, Turkey directed its military power against the KDP.

The third period covers 1986 to date, the period of interdependent alliances with the KDP against the PKK. Turkey has protected the KDP by the direct use of force against the PKK and the PUK. It has also armed, trained and organized the military arm of the KDP. In the same process, Turkey has given aid to the KDP in sizable amounts of armaments, money, trucks and technical equipment. The KDP, by its control of the Iraqi side of the Habur customs gate at the border with Turkey, has had an important source of revenue, and Turkey has in turn acquired cheap oil from Iraq. Through its alliance with Turkey, the KDP on the one hand outrivaled other tribes in the region, while on the other it established economic and military superiority over the PUK. When disputes arose between the KDP and Turkey, the customs revenues of the KDP decreased dramatically, which caused discord in the region. In return for all these gains, the KDP participated, though not voluntarily, alongside the operations of the Turkish armed forces against the PKK. The relations between the KDP and Turkey started to weaken from late 2002 to June 2003, and the parties have attempted to form new policies in light of the dismantling of Saddam's government by the United States. Turkey, rather than directly targeting the Kurdish groups, has started to develop its relations with them in parallel to its efforts to contribute to the diminution of regional tension.

Of all the Kurdish groups, the KDP has always been in the foreground relating to Turkey, as it is composed of tribes living along the Turkish border. Talabani had to remain in the background due to the geographical distance of his tribes from Turkey. Nevertheless he intended to develop closer relations with Turkey by the leverage of a tactical relationship with the PKK. Upset by the growing ties between Turkey and the PUK, the KDP tried to contribute to the formation of an image of "Talabani the untrustworthy" in Turkish public opinion. Talabani on the other hand, due to the strategic isolation of the region under his control, made efforts to develop multifaceted relations.

Turkey at this point appears to have signed on to the idea that a federation in Iraq would be inevitable. However, Turkey considers that a federation along ethnic lines would lead to grave security concerns in the region.

Developments in northern Iraq affect Turkey in a multitude of ways. Turkey's southeast has important economic relations with Iraq. Many people earn their living through transportation and small-scale trade activities. The Kirkuk-Yumurtalik oil pipeline is an important source of revenue for Turkey. The second is that developments in northern Iraq affect Turkey's security within the context of its citizens of Kurdish origin. Turkey has been particularly concerned with the fact that the PKK/KADEK use northern Iraq as a base for their operations and that the KDP and the PUK try to recruit supporters among the Kurds in Turkey. Furthermore, the existence of a significant number of deputies of

Kurdish origin in the Turkish Grand National Assembly factors in to the formulation of Turkey's policies towards the region. The third is that Turkey, which shapes its political stance out of these concerns, might be charged by the international community with pursuing aggressive policies in the region. This might spoil Turkey's international image. The fourth is that, the Kurdish question affects Turkey's relations with both the United States and the European Union. The fifth is that the Kurdish question has long curtailed Turkey's maneuvering capability in foreign policy and led it to adopt more irrational and reactive stances. In this context Turkey concedes considerable economic and political concessions to countries it thinks are relevant to the question.

In today's Turkey, the issue of "an independent Kurdish state" is perceived as a matter of survival. The Turkish stance against the declaration of an independent Kurdish state, which might come into being as a result of the U.S. withdrawal from the region as well as the failure of the new Iraqi state to deliver peace and hope, will be affected by the following concerns: (1) the conditions under which an independent Kurdish state might come into being; (2) the kind of political environment in Turkey at the time of the declaration of Kurdish independence; (3) the attitude of the United States. If the establishment process of the Kurdish state evolves in a peaceful way, Turkey should not be expected to intervene. However, if an ethnic-cleansing attempt adversely affects the Turkomans, Turkey may not stay out of the conflict. Further, Turkey's attention to developments in Iraq may wane if EU membership becomes more attainable. In such a Turkey, in which the influence of the military on political decision makers diminishes, it would be more difficult to decide in favor of using force and intervening militarily. In this process, since Turkey's policies regarding its own Kurds will likely change; its threat perception in regard to the Kurds of northern Iraq may change accordingly. However, if Turkey is excluded from the EU process, then it would likely view the developments in the region through a hard-core, security-first perspective. In such a case, northern Iraq will continue to occupy Turkey's agenda. Since it would likely perceive developments regarding Kurds as direct threats, it may also develop alliances with Syria and Iran. It may be more willing to resort to force. Finally, the U.S. stance will be decisive. If Washington stays indifferent to further developments in Iraq, Turkey may feel more obliged to intervene in the region.

Kurdish Reality in an Emerging Iraq
Khaled Salih, University of Southern Denmark

The Bush administration's decision to remove Saddam Hussein's regime from power in Iraq might turn out to be a watershed in the modern history of Iraq and the Middle East. Whatever our personal opinions on this regime change, Iraq's different national, ethnic and religious groups now have a unique opportunity to redefine, negotiate and reshape the nature of the state, the division of power and what is generally called "Iraqi national identity," a collective identity that does not necessarily need to have one single group's symbolism and cultural imagination. A new Iraq would be reconstituted on new bases of legal plurality, decentralization, devolution or what is generally referred to as federation. In

this way, dividing power will allow territorial communities to manage their own affairs, control their own resources, and make their own policy choices. The nature of the federation, however, will be the main source of tension and negotiation in the coming year or so.

From a Kurdish perspective, there are several options: independence; a binational federal arrangement already proposed by the Kurds through a parliamentary bill (first issued in October 1992, and then renewed in October 2002); a binational, multiethnic, multireligious and multiregional federation; a federacy; and resistance (in form of military confrontation with the emerging government in Baghdad).

Since independence has not been presented as an organized political demand by any of the major Kurdish political forces in Iraq, there is no clear strategy and negotiation process to talk about. Kurdish leaders, intellectuals and private persons might generally feel that they would prefer to be independent like other peoples around the world. Despite the fact that even this political dream has not been on the agenda of the political parties, neighboring governments and outsiders (academics, journalists and media commentators) have repeatedly over-emphasized this option when they have expressed suspicion about the ultimate Kurdish goals. Some do this because they are not willing to allow the Kurds the same basic rights they demand for their own nations and kindred peoples. Others cannot think outside the dominant paradigm that national self-determination has only one meaning, a sovereign and independent state.

I will argue that national self-determination does not necessarily entail only one option, and that the Kurds in Iraq, like other stateless nations,[1] are committed to new forms of national affirmation beyond statehood. They have developed a perspective in which Iraq is viewed as a society with deep diversity,[2] thereby demanding not merely devolution of some state competences in a new Iraq but a meaningful recognition of the Kurds as a distinct national community and a stateless nation within a binational, multiethnic and multireligious Iraq. While the Kurds are demanding substantial self-government, they equally want to negotiate an arrangement that will safeguard their influence and political power in the center.

There is a widespread misunderstanding of the terms nation-building, state-building, nationality, sovereignty, statehood and self-determination among politicians and supporters of modernization theories, as well as academics and commentators on current political developments. The most obvious is that American politicians and academics use the terms nation-building and state-building interchangeably because in the American context nation is a synonym for state. In a new book by the Rand Corporation, the authors perpetuate this confusion by calling it *America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq.*[3] Neither the content nor the analysis in the book is about nation-building in Germany, Japan, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. The issues dealt with are solely about traditional state-building, ranging from security challenges, humanitarian situations, administrative reform and state reconstruction. In this usage, a nation is a state and a state is a nation. But the reality of the modern world rejects this equation.

Others who comment on political developments in Iraqi Kurdistan usually miss the essential point of what has happened on the ground. Typically, when they are sympathetic to the demands of the Kurds, they think within the limits of the modern nation-state,

asserting that the Kurds have the right of self-determination, which means the right to secede and nothing more. Kanan Makiya, a well-known writer on Iraq with public sympathy for the Kurdish cause and a representative of the Iraqi National Congress in the CPC (the 25-member Constitutional Preparatory Committee), is a very good example in this context. He has told the International Crisis Group that the Kurds "see the constitutional process purely through the Kurdish prism. They say that the right to self-determination means they have an inalienable right to federalism. *I told the Kurds that no*, we need to convince the Iraqi people of a federal solution; *you only have the right to secede*. We'll support you if you choose independence, but if you opt for federalism, you will have to work with us and develop a workable arrangement for Iraq. Any Iraqi solution necessarily concerns all."[4]

Others who give free advice on how to organize the new Iraq are either hostile to the expectations of the Kurds or propose arrangements that do not meet their minimum demands. Examples of the last group are Adeed and Karen Dawisha[5] and Hakan Yavuz (in this issue). Without giving due regard to Kurdish political demands and the fact that a great part of Iraqi Kurdistan has been without any direct link to the central government for more than a decade, these writers propose a federal arrangement based on Iraq's 18 existing governorates. They imagine that this is the best solution for Iraq. To start with, the Dawishas' proposal is contradictory. While they propose continuation of Iraq's "present administrative structure, under which the country is divided into 18 units," they also argue on the same page that "any attempts on the part of Iraq's Arab elites to once again grant the Kurds autonomy – without also giving them substantial control over their territory as *a unit* in the federal structure – will likewise be doomed to fail."[6] If the Kurds are "offered" only one territorial unit by the Dawishas, the rest of the units in Iraq could not add up to 17. The more problematic part of the Dawishas' argument is the fact that the model they advocate is a national federation model, presupposing one people and consequently one nation. But Iraq consists of at least two peoples and other ethnic and religious groups. Their examples of national federations, the United States and Germany, are different from Russia and the United Kingdom.[7] Hakan Yavuz, more or less dismisses Kurdish nationalist demands by portraying Kurdish nationalism as an archaic, narrow-minded, tribal, ethnic, divisive movement in the service of neoconservatives in the current Bush administration. He is willing to give the Kurds "the right to full self-determination," only "if Iraq becomes another authoritarian entity in the hands of Sunni or Shiite Arabs." Throughout his article he proposes, in a state-centered Jacobin tradition, a unified Iraq without considering the political struggle of the Kurds since the creation of Iraq at the beginning of 1920s.

Looking at the future of Iraq from the constituent components of its society, it should be self-evident that representatives of various groups must decide on the future of their state and societies. A viable federal model might be a binational, multiethnic, multireligious, pluralist state based on consocial.[8] From a Kurdish perspective, any future arrangement must be based on renegotiation of the constitution, political system, distribution of power, geographic demarcation and institutional barriers to nullify any signed agreement. One has to remember that the Kurds have consolidated their national identity in recent years, partly because of international circumstances, partly because

Saddam Hussein decided to withdraw government institutions from Kurdistan, and partly because the Kurds were forced by necessity to strengthen their emerging institutions. These new institutions have become primary political reference points for the citizens of Iraqi Kurdistan. The political parties, despite competition and internal fighting, have moved towards a post-sovereign stance.[9] In their proposed negotiations they have come up with ideas that might be radical not only for Iraq but for the whole Middle East. The Kurdish proposals for constitutional negotiations are about shared sovereignty and multiple spheres of action, not an 'exit' strategy for independence, as viewed by Hakan Yavuz. In this context, Kurdish nationalism is developing along the lines of what Michael Keating calls "a new form of nationalism,"[10] that shares an important feature with classical nationalism, a belief in the right of self-determination despite internal divisions.

For a variety of reasons, Kurdish leaders in Iraq decided to "return" to Iraq, after more than a decade of *de facto* sovereignty. But their return is rooted in their belief that any future association with the rest of Iraq must be a voluntary arrangement and the product of a pact that is now open for renegotiation instead of imposition and subjugation. The Kurds have now embraced the idea that national self-determination implies that they can decide their own future in a voluntary federation as long as other groups in Iraq are willing to negotiate. If they fail to achieve that goal, they have equally the right to propose a federacy,[11] in which Iraqi Kurdistan will have a federal relationship with the central government but will leave it to other groups in Iraq to decide their own future, whether they go for centralist, governorate-based units or other options. At the same time, Kurdish leaders are painfully aware of the fact that if they opt for independence, their geography and power bases are strongly against them. In such an unlikely situation, independence goes most probably through a military confrontation not only with Iraq, but with neighboring states and possibly with U.S. forces. It is difficult to imagine that Kurdish leaders would undermine their best chance to renegotiate their future and throw themselves into another wave of political violence.

[1] M. Keating, *Nations against the State. The New Politics of Nationalism in Quebec, Catalonia and Scotland* (New York: Palgrave, Second Edition, 2001).

[2] C. Taylor, "The Deep Challenges to Dualism," *Quebec, State and Society*, 2nd Edition, ed. A.G. Gagnon (Scarborough, Ontario: Nelson, 1993); C. Taylor, "Why Do Nations Have to Become States?" *Reconciling the Solitudes. Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*, ed. C. Taylor (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993).

[3] J. Dobbins, J.G. McGinn, et al., *America's Role in Nation-Building. From Germany to Iraq* (Santa Monica, Rand, 2003).

[4] ICG, Iraq's constitutional challenge, Middle East Report No. 19, November 13, Brussels and Baghdad, Internationl Crisis Group, 2003.

[5] A. and K. Dawisha, "How to Build a Democratic Iraq," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 3, 2003, pp. 36-50.

[6] Ibid.

[7] J. McGarry and B. O'Leary "Federation, Conflict-Regulation and National and Ethnic Power-Sharing," paper prepared for delivery at the 2003 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, August 2003.

[8] B. O'Leary, "Multi-national Federalism, Power-Sharing, Federacy and the Kurds of Iraq," *The Future of Iraq and Kurdistan*, eds. B. O'Leary, K. Salih and J. McGarry (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

[9] M. Keating, *Plurinational Democracy. Stateless Nations in a Post-Sovereignty Era* (Oxford: Oxford

University Press, 2003).
[10] M. Keating, *Nations against the State. The new politics of nationalism in Quebec, Catalonia and Scotland*, op. cit.
[11] B. O'Leary, "Multi-national Federalism, Power-Sharing, Federacy and the Kurds of Iraq," op. cit.

Provincial Not *Ethnic* Federalism in Iraq

M. Hakan Yavuz, associate professor of political science, University of Utah

The dominant public discourse has assumed that the Kurds are a homogenous group of people who share the same language, ethnicity and political aspirations of independence. This totalized and imagined Kurdish nationhood is reinforced by the proclamations of some Kurdish nationalist intellectuals and American bureaucrats emphasizing the uniformity of the Kurds against Turks, Arabs and Persians.

The reality is different: Kurds are differentiated by a variety of cultural, economic, and political factors. Linguistically, the Kirmanci, Zaza and Sorani dialects (languages) are dominantly used by the diverse Kurdish groups. Religiously, the Kurds are divided into Sunni, Shia, Alevi and Yezidi faith groups. Politically, they are divided among four separate states. Economically, some Kurds are still nomadic, while most are either urbanized or rural. There are also major class differences.

The most powerful structure of Kurdish solidarity has been tribal loyalty and identity, which, however, creates local differences and alliances. This social structure, along with the policies of neighboring states, is the main obstacle for the creation of an independent Kurdish state in Iraq. Indeed, one cannot fully understand the complexity of Kurdish societies unless one considers the heightened role of the tribe. The structure of solidarity among the Iraqi Kurds has been the tribal networks. Even the Barzani and Talabani coalitions are formed around tribal structures. Trust is lacking between different tribes, and this normative order is reflected in their relations with the outside world. Thus, the distrustful relations between Barzani and Talabani are extended to Turkish-Kurdish relations as well. At the center of this tribe-based distrust and shifting political loyalties is the search for economic prosperity and security. Thus, these shifting loyalties among the Kurds make it much easier for regional states to involve themselves in the local politics of northern Iraq.

I would argue that Turkey's short-sighted policies and lack of understanding of the regional realities is an outcome of its Kemalist-ideology-dominated security culture, which frames the Kurds as "enemy," and its fear of any Islamic presence in the public sphere. This state-security culture has become a source of tension and an obstacle to Turkey's smooth entry into the European Union (EU) and has worked against Turkey's long-term interests. The transformation of this security culture and the management of the Kurdish identity claims depend on Turkey's integration into the EU. In the first part of this article, I will summarize the mistakes of Turkish policy, while in the second part, I will focus on the contradictions in U.S. policy. Finally, I hope to provide a road map for solving the Iraqi problem around the principles of constitutional patriotism and territorial federation.

New Turkey but Old Policies

Turkey's Kurdish problem is an outcome of Turkey's Kemalist project of constructing a homogenous nation-state out of diverse groups and forced secularization of the state and society.[1] Thus, the state used education, the census, the media and military service to forcibly assimilate the Kurds into an "imagined" Turkish nationhood. In order to achieve this assimilation, the state banned Kurdish dialects, folklore, names and political activism. Moreover, the Kurds were also exploited by their tribal chiefs, who were integrated into the ruling Turkish elite. These policies of state repression and internal exploitation always gave a sense of marginalization and "difference" to the majority of Kurds. As these state policies weakened common religious affiliations, which always provided a sociopolitical glue, they inadvertently set the ground for Kurdish, ethnolinguistic nationalism.

Because of urbanization, democratization and education, many Turkish cities became centers of the formation of politicized Kurdish consciousness. In the 1970s, for example, the universities became the breeding ground for Kurdish nationalism. The Kurdistan Workers party (PKK) was the first Kurdish organization to mobilize Kurdish youth and make them proud of their Kurdish identity. The PKK-led violence and the resulting state counterviolence undermined the social fabric of Kurdish society, while the arrest of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in February 1999 led to the transformation of Kurdish nationalism into a political force under the structure of KADEK (Kurdish Freedom and Democracy Congress, now renamed Kurdistan Peoples Congress). In the 1980s, the state used all means to suppress the Kurdish identity claims, even supporting the formation of radical Islamic Kurdish groups such as Hezbollah against secular and some religious Kurds. Since 2002, the Turkish state has amended a number of articles in the constitution to meet the cultural identity claims of the Kurds. These changes may not fully meet Kurdish aspirations, but they would create an institutional mechanism to deal with the Kurdish issue.

The fear of partition or Kurdish secessionism drives Turkey's foreign policy towards Iraq, in general, and the Kurds, in particular. Turkey's evolving policy (which in effect means no policy) is based on three principles: the elimination of the PKK from Iraq and Turkey; the prevention of Kurdish statehood or ethnic federation in Iraq in the name of maintaining the *territorial integrity* and *political unity* of Iraq; and the protection of the newly "discovered" Turkoman minority in Iraq. Thus, Turkey fiercely resists Kurdish control of the city of Kirkuk in northern Iraq, where a large number of the Turkoman minority lives.[2]

In short, Turkey's policy toward Iraq is hostage to its security-based perception of the Kurds as an "enemy" and a "threat" to the existence of Turkey.[3] During the last three decades, Ankara's policies not only sparked the radicalization of Kurdish identity claims, but also made the Turks the "Other." These ideological policies have resulted in major human and material costs for both Turkey's Kurdish and Turkish populations. There are currently between 8 and 10 million Kurds living in Turkey. Although they are not fully assimilated, they are well-integrated into the main stratum of life. Turkey also should support the Kurds and their aspirations in Iraq. It would be a mistake to continue the old policy of regarding the Kurds as an enemy. For the stability of Turkey, the Kurds must be seen as the friend of Turkey.

Turkey needs to have several options on the table in order to discuss the future of Iraq. The current Turkish policy has not been productive. Continuing to insist on the territorial integrity and political unity (i.e., no federation) of Iraq forecloses alternative options. Turkey needs to overcome its fear of the Kurds and support the evolution of a democratic Kurdistan in Iraq. In order to develop good relations with the Iraqi Kurds, Ankara needs to de-securitize its Kurdish policy and stop seeing Turkish and Kurdish identities as mutually exclusive. Turkey should stress democracy and human rights to address the Kurdish question within Turkey and support Kurdish political aspirations in Iraq as long as it does not become a site of anti-Turkish terrorist activities. Turkey also needs to develop a free-trade zone with the Kurdistan Regional government (KRG) to strengthen its relations with Iraqi Kurdistan.

In short, Turkey needs to respect the rights of the Kurds within and outside Turkey and fulfill the EU demands of democratization. Turkey's Kurds do not want to secede, but rather demand more rights. As far as the Iraqi Kurds are concerned, Ankara has to respect their political aspirations. If Iraq becomes another authoritarian entity in the hands of Sunni or Shiite Arabs, the Kurds will have the right to full self-determination. However, now we need to try to build a unified and civil Iraq in which no ethnic or sectarian group dominates central power and each group respects all others.

Unstructured U.S. Policy Towards the Kurds

For the past decade, the Iraqi Kurds have enjoyed their best period in modern history under U.S., British, and Turkish protection. The safe-haven and no-fly-zone policies helped the Iraqi Kurds to build their own institutions. The idea of a safe haven came from Turgut Ozal, then president of Turkey, who wanted to develop close ties with the Kurdish groups in Iraq. The Americans and Turks had different reasons to protect the Kurds. The United States regarded the Kurds as an ally against Saddam Hussein and his expansionism; the Turks viewed the Kurds as an ally in a PKK-led guerrilla war against Turkey and moderate Kurds.

After the war, the Kurds became the main building block of the U.S. policy towards Iraq. One might consider it a Kurds-first policy; it has been a source of tension in Turkish-U.S., Arab-U.S., and Shia-U.S. relations. The pro-Kurdish policy has been a liability for the United States and has been undermining U.S. credibility in Turkey and among the majority Shia Arabs. For instance, after the 2003 Iraq war, the U.S. occupation force exempted the Kurdish *peshmerga* (tribal networks of militias) from its policy of disarming militias. Moreover, the United States helped the Kurds to gain access to some heavy arms from Saddam's arsenal. The United States has also consolidated the KRG by working closely with it and treating it as a "state within a state." All these pro-Kurdish policies undermined the U.S. strategy of "preserving the territorial integrity of Iraq and creating a democratic country."[4]

Many Turks and Arabs believe that the United States has undeclared intentions of breaking Iraq into three ethnoreligious parts by supporting an independent Kurdish state. Indeed, U.S. policies have further deepened the ethnic and religious divisions in Iraq and institutionalized them at the highest level. The perceived Kurdish bias in U.S. policy

toward Iraq has been the major source of suspicion in both Turkey and the Arab world.

After the U.S. pressure on Turkey to send troops to help stabilize the postwar situation in Iraq, the Turkish government reluctantly complied. Both Barzani and Talabani then used the Turkish troop situation to demonstrate their nationalist credentials. Anti-Turkishness became the rallying point of the Kurdish leaders. To demonstrate their nationalism, they competed to deliver the harshest charges against Turkey.

Many Turks, especially the military, became even more suspicious of U.S. policy when the Kurds mobilized the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) against Turkey and attacked the Turkoman minority in Kirkuk and Mosul. The Kurdish leadership was in fact more powerful than the Turkish government in convincing the U.S. administration not to press its request for sending Turkish troops to Iraq. Indeed, the Iraqi Kurds are increasingly playing an important role in the making of U.S.-Turkish relations vis-à-vis Iraq, and this, in turn, undermines U.S. credibility in Turkey. The United States is losing the world's most pro-American Muslim public opinion as a result of its shortsighted and personalized policies. American standing and credibility in Turkey and the Arab world have dropped to their lowest point in decades. If Washington wants to foster democracy in the Middle East, it is vital to support democratic, Muslim and NATO ally Turkey as a model country. The anti-Turkish developments in Iraq could empower the Turkish military and undermine the democratic consolidation process.

The second casualty of the pro-Kurdish U.S. policy is the Shia Arabs, the majority of the Iraqi population. The Kurds – who do not want a centralized Iraqi state and fear the hegemony of the Shiite majority in any elected assembly – want an appointed committee to draft the new Iraqi constitution. This has been the major issue dividing the Shiite and Kurdish members of the IGC. The reaction of Grand Ayatollah Ali Husseini Sistani (the preeminent Shiite religious authority in Iraq) forced the United States to come up with a new policy. According to the agreement between U.S. Administrator L. Paul Bremer III and the IGC on November 15, a newly formed provisional assembly, appointed and elected from tribal and religious leaders, will form a government and begin to govern the country in June 2004. This government then will hold elections for drafting a new Iraqi constitution by March 2005.

The Kurds want the United States to prepare the constitution with a handpicked, appointed assembly rather than an elected representative body. In contrast – given their majority status as well as their exclusion and persecution under the Ottomans, the British and the Baathists – the Shia leadership wants a more democratic system. The Kurds want their own *Kurdish* federal unit with a separate parliament, president and army. In fact, most of the Kurdish leadership sees the constitution as an "exit" document from the state of Iraq. During my conversations with Iraqi Kurdish politicians, they all stressed their right to self-determination. The Kurds want the new Iraqi constitution to recognize their current status and provide an exit strategy if the system does not function as they wish.

These Kurdish demands are the major source of tension between the United States and the Shia clergy. For instance, Grand Ayatollah Sistani issued a fatwa on July 1, 2003, criticizing the U.S. policy of drafting the new constitution by a committee picked by the U.S.-appointed IGC. Sistani insists that the general elections planned for next June be by

popular ballot and not by the indirect caucus selection called for in the American plan. He also wants this popularly elected body to draft the new constitution. In addition, he wants the election of the city councils to be carried out in June 2004. Almost all Shiite clergy demand the inclusion of the following statement in the new constitution: "Islam is the religion of the majority, and it must be respected and considered a main source for the constitution." The U.S. Kurdish-first policy and the attempt to export a Turkish version of secularism are not working; they have become the major sources of tension and suspicion in Iraq and the region.

Thus, the constitution-making process is more likely to highlight the divisions in Iraq. It could turn the Shiites against the United States if Washington insists on the ethnic-federation argument of the Kurds. The United States cannot afford to alienate the Shiite majority by caving in to the Kurdish demands.

What Needs to Be Done?

First, the United States needs to change its policy of institutionalizing ethnic and sectarian divisions. Second, the new U.S. policy should be guided by three principles: territorial, not ethnic, federalism; equal distribution of oil resources among territorial entities; and protection of individual, not communal, rights and freedoms. The United States should be firm on the territorial integrity of Iraq and avoid being viewed as a colonial power carving Iraq into pieces. The appointment in July 2003 of an IGC with 13 Arab Shiites, 5 Arab Sunnis, 5 Kurdish Sunnis, a Christian, and a Sunni Turkoman reflected an ethnic and sectarian mindset. If the United States institutionalizes this policy in the forthcoming constitution, it would create a confessional politics that would undermine the prospects for a unified Iraq or an Iraqi identity.

The case of Lebanon demonstrates the danger of confessionalism in the Middle East. The Lebanese constitution guaranteed the rights of each community, with the expectation of overcoming suspicion and building trust and a sense of Lebanese identity. Post-constitutional events, however, demonstrated that the institutionalization of communal loyalties and interests in the Lebanese constitution did not build peaceful coexistence, but rather worked to undermine the formation of Lebanese identity. The present U.S. policy is leading to the Lebanization of Iraq. The most visible example is the chaotic city of Kirkuk. Its city council, created in May 2003, consists of diverse ethnic and religious groups beset by a number of identity issues that prevent it from functioning.

The United States should pursue a policy that stresses civil ties and associations rather than ethnicity or religion. If the United States agrees with the Kurds and helps create an ethnic federation of three units, it will induce ethnic and religious cleansing of diverse communities and the eventual breakup of the country. The new state structure should seek to build citizenship and constitutional patriotism rather than highlight primordial ethnic and tribal ties. A decentralized territorial federal system, rather than an ethnic or sectarian system, is the only hope for Iraq. Adeed Dawisha, a leading scholar of Iraq, argues that the Iraqi people's interest would be better served if the United States preserves the present 18 provinces and turns them into territorial units with extensive powers.[5] Territorial federation would enhance civic ties and prevent ethnic or sectarian

division of the country.

Although Leslie Gelb,[6] Peter Galbraith, and Brandon O'Leary argue for the break-up of Iraq, I strongly disagree with their position. Their arguments do not reflect the reality of the historical and sociological fabric of Iraqi society and the broader Middle East. Such a "solution" may seem politically expedient, but it will cause widespread ethnosectarian conflict. Any attempt to divide Iraq by force would in effect mean a U.S.-guided ethnic and sectarian cleansing which would destroy American credibility in the region and foster even more intense ill will toward the United States. Very few Iraqi towns or provinces approach homogeneity. Their main argument is that Iraq is an "artificial" state. This might be an interesting argument, except that most states are to a large degree "artificial" and most are far from homogeneous. Conflict is assuaged and cooperation achieved largely through democratic institutions of inclusion and basic rights for both individuals and groups. Almost all ethnic partitions have been achieved with great bloodshed, leaving a legacy of festering conflict.

Western powers must avoid the pitfalls of both a shortsighted divide-and-rule policy and the misplaced romanticism of fathering new nations in extremely diverse lands. Such policies have caused catastrophe for the people of the greater Middle East as well as the United States.

Their second argument concerns "ancient hatreds." Again, this primordialist argument fails in the light of the long, peaceful coexistence of Iraqi communities. There has been very little communal violence, and it is usually exercised by the state against its own population. Even today, one does not see one ethnosectarian Iraqi group massacring another, as was the case in India before and after independence.

The United States should try not to create another Lebanon. Humility, multilateralism and the freeing of U.S. policy from the hegemony of domestic lobbies must be realized in order to restore American credibility in the region. The Kurds must also realize that they have to live with the Arabs, Persians and Turks and should therefore not become subcontractors for U.S. neoconservatives. Less U.S. intervention and more local power is the only way to build a better Iraq.

[1] M. Hakan Yavuz, "Five Stages of the Construction of Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 3, Autumn 2001, pp. 1-24; Yavuz, "A Preamble to the Kurdish Question: The Politics of Kurdish Identity," introduction to the special issue on the Kurds, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affair*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1998, pp. 9-18.

[2] The Turkoman issue is a newly discovered minority question that Ankara wants to use against the Iraqi Kurds. The 1957 census – the last in which Turkomen were permitted to register – counted 567,000 Turkmen (9 percent of the population) among Iraqi's population of 6,300,000. The Kurds were 13 percent.

[3] Turkey never treats the governments of the PUK and the KDP as legitimate governments. When Jalal Talabani visited Turkey on November 18 and 19, 2003, he visited as the "head of the IGC, not the leader of the PUK."

[4] Saban Kardas, "Regime Change, Nation-building and Democratization: American Discourse on Iraq Reconsidered," *Foreign Policy* (Turkey), Vol. 30, No. 1-2, 2003, pp. 108-140.

[5] Adeed Dawisha and Karen Dawisha, "How to Build a Democratic Iraq," *Foreign Affairs*, May-June 2003.

[6] Leslie Gelb, "The Three-State Solution," *The New York Times*, November 25, 2003.