

THE UNITED STATES AND THE KURDS

1945 - 1992

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I, Michael Christopher Merrick, certify that this sub-thesis is my own work and that I have acknowledged all sources used .

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and flourishes, positioned above the typed name.

Michael Merrick,
Deakin, ACT,
28 March, 1996.

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INTRODUCTION

This essay is an historical analysis of the relationship between the United States and the Kurds from the Second World War to the end of the Bush administration. It will be argued that the US through its foreign policy, directly and indirectly, acted to subvert self-determination for the Kurdish minorities in Turkey, Iraq and Iran. US policy in this particular case reflects an overarching American antipathy towards Third World self-determination in general.

During the Cold War, the US justified subversion of Third World self-determination on the grounds of containing the Soviet threat. US policy, during this period, was, however, a determined and conscious effort to extend US hegemony over the world economy. After the onset of the demise of the Soviet Union, George Bush continued this policy but laboured under a lack of moral justification. To compensate, Bush argued that he was attempting to enlarge democratic principles throughout the world. While a degree of democracy has emerged in some previously totalitarian and authoritarian states, the US has either continued to circumvent self-determination in the Third World or provides support for states which deny self-determination for their minorities, that is, when such self-determination interferes with US national interest. US national interest in this respect can be defined as the maintenance and / or enlargement of markets for US business interests.

In the Middle East, US policy, whether Cold or post-Cold War, has focused on maintaining an ability to influence the supply and price of oil for the Western market. In pursuit of this policy the US overtly (Iran 1953-1989 and Turkey 1990 -) and covertly (Iraq 1980 - 1990) sponsored proxies in the

region to confront threats to the balance of power. The majority of the world's Kurdish population reside in these three states. The sole criterion for the United States in dealing with the Kurds in Turkey, Iran and Iraq has been whether the host state has been a friend or foe at the time. Because of this, self-determination for the Kurds has remained secondary to US national interest. Moreover, whether or not the state in question is a friend or foe, Kurdish self-determination threatens the balance of power in the Middle East. Should the Kurds in one state gain autonomy or independence it would have a domino effect in other states.

There has been a secondary ideological dimension involved in the US attitude towards the Kurds. Since President Truman's institutionalisation of the Cold War in 1947 (the Truman Doctrine), US foreign policy makers have purposely confused Third World nationalist self-determination with communist expansion. Several reasons have been suggested for this mindset. Revisionist scholars hold that it emanates from the nature of America's own revolution. The American Revolution was not a popular rebellion against the British; it was a middle class reaction to high taxes and brakes on mercantile expansion. ¹ 'As a consequence the American definition of what constitutes legitimate revolution is so idiosyncratic (basically confined to the attainment of "free market" economies) as to be irrelevant to Third World conditions. In terms of policy, this peculiar outlook has led the US to operate within the modern context as an anti-revolutionary power' [Davidson 1995: 76]. The revisionists assert that throughout the Cold War the US strove to establish a stable capitalist order by way of trade agreements. Whenever instability threatened US interests, covert action and military intervention were employed to restore the status quo [Merrill 1994: 167-168]. ²

The promotion of the idea of a Soviet threat in the Middle East was primarily designed to obfuscate the true nature of US foreign policy. As one scholar has argued 'the most striking feature of Soviet policy in the Middle East is not how much, but how little, it has been able to maintain a continuous impact there and how far states and independent forces in the region have been able to defy or manipulate the USSR' [Halliday 1988: 155]. Halliday concludes that '(the Soviet) support for a variety of states has not consolidated its relations with them: Arab states have been unreliable partners, and the Islamic revolution in Iran has done little to benefit Moscow. The impact of Soviet policy on the Middle East, therefore, has been marginal at best' [Halliday 1988: 167]. In relation to the Kurds, as will become apparent, at various times, US and Soviet policy coincided to such a degree, that both superpowers were attempting to achieve the same ends, albeit for different reasons.

Most studies of modern Kurdish history utilise a framework where chapters are divided into discrete national units; the Kurds of Iraq, the Kurds of Turkey, etc. While such a framework accepts politico-national realities, it fails to reflect Kurdish reality. Despite the fact that the Kurds have had artificial national borders thrust upon them, ethnic 'Kurdistan' is not limited by borders. The Kurds have accepted or denied borders as it suited them. In addition, the reaction of host states towards the Kurds is predicated on the trans-national nature of the Kurdish *ethnos* and the fear this engenders within host governments.

Studies of postwar Kurdish history usually only obliquely refer to the Kurdish issue as it pertains to US relations with Turkey, Iraq and Iran.

Conversely, studies of these relations relegate the Kurdish issue to footnotes. This study will concentrate on the effect the Kurdish issue has had on these relations since the Second World War. In doing so it will not examine the minutiae of postwar Kurdish history; the Kurds will be the focus only to the degree that their actions have impinged on the policies of the major players.

The essay will consist of two chapters. The first chapter will be introduced by a discussion of the United States' 'inheritance' of Britain's hegemony over the Middle East. Then, US-regional relations during the period from 1945 to 1968 will be discussed. This period was characterised by direct US influence in the region but indirect action in relation to the Kurds. Following this section, the period from 1968 to 1978 will be examined. For a brief interval, 1972-1975, the US provided active support for the Iraqi Kurds, albeit covert, which was disadvantageous for Kurdish self-determination.

The second chapter will begin with the regional situation after the fall of the Shah. During this period, the US sought to secure Iraq in place of Iran as its 'ally'. While neither the US nor Iraq truly trusted each other, the 'marriage of convenience' was profitable for both sides. Due to the United States' mistrust of Iraq, the importance of Turkey as a regional ally grew. This situation reflected disastrously on the Kurds. The US tended to ignore Iraqi and Turkish military campaigns against their Kurdish minorities because of strategic and financial considerations. The Iranian Kurds did not even enter into US consideration. The second half of the chapter will examine the aftermath of the Kuwait War, in particular, the Bush administration's reaction to the Iraqi civil war, the Kurdish safe haven in northern Iraq and the Kurdish election in the safe haven in 1992.

The conclusion will summarise the effect of US administrations from Nixon to Bush on Kurdish self-determination. In addition, brief mention will be made of how US policy during this period has affected the Clinton administration's relationship with the region and the Kurdish people.

CHAPTER ONE THE KURDS AND US FOREIGN POLICY

1945 - 1975

INDIRECT ACTION - 1945 - 1968

Introduction

Before the Second World War, the United States had little interest in the Kurds. President Wilson argued that self-determination for minorities residing within the pre-war, colonial empires should be addressed at the Versailles Peace Conference,¹ however, Wilson's efforts were subverted by an isolationist US congress and the demands of the British and the French to the contrary. Many minorities did, in fact, achieve a degree of independence but only where their independence coincided with British and French policy. The Kurds did not fit into this category. Despite promises of a Kurdish state the idea came to nought due to Kemal Ataturk's success in forging the new Turkish republic. The British considered that an independent Kurdish state would be inimical to the balance of power in the region. British plans were predicated on a united Iraq strong enough to resist any pressures from the Turkish republic. The discovery of oil in the Kurdish region of Iraq only served to reinforce British interest in the region.

US interest in the Kurds was revived during World War II but then only indirectly. During the war the British and the Soviets, worried about the (German leaning) 'neutrality' of Reza Shah, invaded Iran and divided it into three zones [Saikal 1980: 24-26]. The Soviets took the north, the British, the south, ostensibly leaving Reza Shah a small central zone around

Tehran. Reza Shah, humiliated, abdicated, and was replaced by his son, Mohammed Reza Shah [Saikal 1980: 26]. Iran, for the duration of the war, became a source of oil for the Allied war effort but just as importantly, a conduit for the supply of American Lendlease arms to the Soviets. According to a pre-arranged agreement, the British and Soviet occupying troops were to leave Iran within six months of the war ending. Whether the Soviets based their decision on a desire to expand their influence in the region, as claimed by the Allies, or whether they hoped to break the British monopoly on Iranian oil, which seems a more cogent argument, the Soviets reneged on the agreement [Saikal 1980: 25-35]. To further their influence, the Soviets backed the Azerbaijanis and Kurds in the establishment of two autonomous republics in northern Iran [Chaliand 1994: 74-76].

The 'independent' Azeri republic and the Kurdish republic of Mahabad were supplied with Soviet military aid and advisors [Chaliand 1994: 74-76]. As will become apparent in later discussion, support for the Kurds fitted a pattern that has been repeated by both the West and the Soviets. The Soviets were mainly interested in furthering their own desires. Self-determination for the Kurds, temporarily suited this desire and they were used as Soviet pawns. When it became apparent that the Allies would not accept Soviet influence within Iran, Winston Churchill implied the use of nuclear weapons, and the Soviets withdrew their troops and their support for the Kurds [Saikal 1980: 34] Mohammed Reza Shah, assisted by the Allies, quickly suppressed the short-lived Mahabad Republic. Leaders of the Mahabad republic were arrested and later executed [Ghassemlou 1993: 108-110].

Of great significance for later Kurdish history, one leader, Mulla Mustafa

Barzani, escaped with his forces to the Soviet Union. Barzani was not from Iran. His tribal lands were in the area of Iraq which borders Iran. While the Mahabad Republic had been a disaster for the Iranian Kurds, it had permitted Barzani to found the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iraq (KDP). After the fall of Mahabad, Barzani resided in the Soviet Union until 1958.

American interest in the Kurds had been at best fleeting and indirect. More important for American interests had been evicting the Soviets from Iran to protect Iranian oil for the West. The suppression of the Kurds was a diversion and American participation apparently quite marginal, restricted to supplying arms and training for the Shah's forces. The fact finding visit of Archie Roosevelt, then US military attache, to Mahabad [Roosevelt 1993: 122-138] and the presence of H. Norman Schwarzkopf snr. as 'police advisor' to the Shah's government [Schwarzkopf (jnr) 1993: 12, 31ff] , however, tends to belie this argument.

After the fall of the Soviet-backed Kurdish Mahabad republic, the United States and the Kurds would have little direct contact for nearly three decades. Albeit, as early as 1948 a CIA estimate ominously noted '...the Kurds are now and will continue to be a factor of some importance in any strategic estimate of Near East affairs' [quoted in Prados 1986: 313]. In the meantime, American policy would continue to impact indirectly on the Kurds.

Because of war debts, indigenous nationalist movements and the policies of the post-war Labour government, British military influence in the Middle East declined in the years immediately following the war. The United States stepped into the vacuum. US policy in the Middle East was ostensibly

designed to replace the British balance of power with an American one; an extension of the traditional British desire to contain Russian, later Soviet, expansion into the Persian Gulf. It could be argued, however, that the United States played on the decline of the British Empire and the weakness of the Soviet Union and that its primary intent was extending American business influence in the region at the expense of the British. The United States had gained entry to the Saudi oil business before the war but the British controlled the Iranian and the Iraqi oil industries much to the chagrin of US oil interests [Yergin 1991: 409-78]

Partial evidence for this argument is provided by US actions in relation to the Mossadeq affair in Iran in the early 1950s. Mossadeq, a staunch Iranian nationalist, backed by leftist (although not controlled by them, as the United States and Britain would subsequently claim) and Kurdish elements in Iran, was intent on nationalising the Iranian oil industry, thus wresting it from British control. Initially, the United States stood on the sidelines as Mossadeq and the British struggled to gain the initiative [Eden 1960: 198-203].

Eventually in mid-1953, the United States, through the CIA, engineered the overthrow of Prime Minister Mossadeq and restored the recently exiled Shah [Blum 1994]. As a consequence, United States oil interests gained an entry into the Iranian market. Iranian and Kurdish nationalism as well as British influence in Iran were the losers [Yergin 1991: 475-8].

The Iraqi Republic 1958 - 1968

Within two years of Mossadeq's overthrow, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and Britain formed the Baghdad Pact. While the United States acted as midwife, it

declined to join for fear of offending Nasser who saw the Pact as a threat to Arab nationalism in the Middle East. The primary objective of the Baghdad Pact was to provide collective security against Soviet expansion into the region. For Turkey, Iraq and Iran it possessed a secondary benefit. The pact enabled the three countries to co-ordinate their security against threats posed by Kurdish nationalists [Shekhmous 1992: 140]. The first action taken by the new alliance was a joint Iraqi-Iranian offensive against a Kurdish revolt in Iran [Kendal 1993: 64].

The tripartite security blanket was to last only three years. In 1958, Colonel Qasim together with fellow officers of the Iraqi army overthrew the monarchy and established the republic of Iraq. Qasim, a nationalist, withdrew Iraq from the Western-sponsored Baghdad Pact. In addition to precluding Western protection, the departure from the Baghdad Pact denied Iraq protection against Kurdish insurgency. The remaining members of the Pact renamed the alliance as the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO). CENTO was explicitly designed to provide 'mutual military assistance in the event of Soviet aggression or *internal revolts liable to threaten common security*' (emphasis added) [quoted in Kendal 1993: 64].

Qasim realised that Turkey and Iran would be tempted to sponsor the Iraqi Kurds to destabilise Iraq, so he invited Barzani to return from the Soviet Union. Barzani returned believing that Qasim would reward the Kurds with partial autonomy [Sheikhmous 1992: 140]. Qasim, however, was playing the traditional Baghdad game of placating the Kurds until he could establish his authority. Barzani used his troops to control Qasim's enemies - the monarchists, the Ba'athists and rival nationalists within the government. As time went on, Qasim realised that Barzani himself had become a threat. By

1960, Barzani and the KDP were in open revolt against Baghdad. The Turkish junta reacted to Barzani's revolt with a warning to its own Kurdish minority. Should they revolt 'there will be such a bloodbath that they and their country will be washed away' [Statement of General Gursel, Turkish junta leader, 16/11/60, quoted in Kendal 1993: 65].

Meanwhile, Qasim was being undermined by his rival, Aref, and also faced external problems. Eisenhower reacted to the establishment of the Iraqi republic with an 'invasion' of Lebanon to bolster the Western leaning government. Eisenhower's 'gunboat diplomacy' was designed as a warning to Qasim and other nationalist governments in the Middle East. Again, an American president had confused nationalism with communism [Merrill 1994: 175].

In January 1963, in order to placate Barzani and give himself breathing space to confront his rivals, Qasim signed a ceasefire agreement with the Kurds. It was too late. Within a month Qasim was overthrown by the Ba'athists. Again, Qasim's desperate need for support had led to a risky coalition. Qasim had invited the Iraqi Communist Party into the government setting off alarms bells in Washington. In Washington's eyes, Qasim was a threat to Western control of the Middle East. The CIA supplied the new Ba'athist regime with lists of known communist supporters. [Cockburn & Cockburn 1991: 130]; a service they would repeat in Indonesia two years later. As would occur in Indonesia, the Iraqi Communist Party was neutralised [Miller & Mylroie 1990: 142]. By the end of 1963, the Ba'ath regime was replaced by Arif.

Initially, Barzani offered to extend the ceasefire, however, by 1964 Barzani

realised that Kurdish nationalism had no place in Aref's Iraq. Fighting resumed between the central government and Barzani's KDP forces which were supplied with arms by both Israel and Iran. [Vanly 1993: 151-2, Chaliand 1994: 59] Although no evidence has emerged to link the United States with Israeli and Iranian aid, the circumstances would tend to indicate US acquiescence, if not collusion. During the period in question, 1964-66, the Shah was still heavily dependent on American financial aid and 'moral' support. Moreover, the nationalist regimes in Iraq were an uneasy reminder to the Shah of the vulnerability of his own position. As the Shah was so important to US interests, undoubtedly his fears would have been reciprocated in Washington. Moreover, given the fact that the US in 1965 was engaged in subverting nationalist movements in Indonesia and Vietnam it would seem unlikely that the US would be reticent about undermining nationalist self-determination in the Middle East [Blum 1986].

After Qasim's coup in 1958, a 'formal trilateral liaison was established by (Israel's) Mossad with Turkey's National Security Service (TNSS) and Iran's (SAVAK)' [CIA document released by the Iranian students in 1979 quoted in Cockburn & Cockburn 1991: 100]. The liaison grew out of a fear articulated by Ben-Gurion to Eisenhower that the three countries might be threatened by actions resulting from the coup in Iraq. Ben-Gurion saw Turkey as a "weak link" in the Western alliance and commenced secret negotiations with the Turks [Bar-Zohar 1977: pt.3, 1321-26 in Rabinovich and Reinhartz (eds) 1984: 165-171] who were troubled by their own Kurdish problem. The trilateral liaison, known as the 'Trident Organisation', was sponsored by the US, through the CIA. A further element of the scheme, known as KK Mountain, included Mossad working at the behest of the CIA in areas where the latter, for various reasons, found it difficult to operate [Cockburn &

Cockburn 1991: 100]. The Israeli support for Barzani would seem to fit this pattern.

Considering the ill-placed faith Barzani would later place in the US, it seems highly unlikely that Barzani ever discovered from where his aid probably came. The aid provided by Iran and Israel, like the aid provided by the Soviet Union in 1945-6, was never meant to result in a victory for the Kurds. Barzani became once again a pawn duped by masters intent on achieving their own ends. Barzani provided a headache for the Iraqis ensuring stability for the Shah and lessened the risk of Iraq assisting in an Arab assault on Israel. From this duplicity, the United States continued to maintain a balance of power in the Middle East that ensured American control of oil supplies to the West.

Also significant at this time was the rift beginning between the traditional tribal supporters of Barzani within the KDP and the younger, educated and urbanised elements within the party, represented by Jalal Talabani, who later split from Barzani to form the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). From the beginning the KDP had failed to gain support amongst all the Kurdish groups within Iraq. Barzani was a tribal leader, and although his exploits before and after Mahabad had made him a hero to most Kurds, his revolt was tribal-based. During his brief alliance with Qasim, he was periodically at war with rival Kurdish leaders in northern Iraq. When Arif assumed power he was 'simultaneously fighting the Iraqi troops and his opposition within the KDP' [Entessar 1984: 918]. This continual internecine war within a war made the Kurds an even more valuable pawn for external states to cause instability within Iraq.

COVERT ACTION 1968 - 1975

Introduction

In 1968, two events occurred that were to have a permanent impact on the Kurdish question in Iraq. The Ba'ath were returned to power in July 1968 after a successful coup, and in November, Richard Nixon was elected president of the United States. The new Ba'ath rulers, particularly Saddam Hussein, were intent on learning from the mistakes that led to their downfall in 1963. The Ba'ath saw three factors as imperative for their survival; neutralising their military allies, limiting the Kurdish problem and enacting dramatic social and economic change through nationalisation of the oil industry. The first was achieved through a succession of government purges and the realignment of the military / security apparatus under President al-Bakr's and Saddam Hussein's control.

Solutions to the second and third factors were more difficult to implement because of outside powers. Iran and Israel continued to supply arms and training for Barzani's forces. Iraq's involvement in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and its subsequent hardline stance towards peace with Israel made Iranian and Israeli aid for the Kurds imperative.² After intense fighting between 1968 and 1970, Saddam Hussein attempted to neutralise the Kurdish threat by offering Barzani a peace agreement (the March 1970 Manifesto). The agreement guaranteed Kurdish autonomy but was not to come into effect for four years. One of the major points of contention was control of the oil-rich Kurdish province of Kirkuk.³ Saddam Hussein used the four year hiatus to Arabise Kirkuk. When Barzani survived an assassination attempt in September 1971, undoubtedly sponsored by Saddam Hussein, he was

convinced that Saddam had no intention of upholding the agreement.

The Soviet - Iraqi Friendship Treaty

By early 1972, the Ba'ath, now entrenched in power, still needed to solve the Kurdish problem and nationalise the oil industry. Saddam Hussein believed that both aims could be achieved through a treaty with the Soviet Union. Barzani had been a Soviet client since the Second World War. If Iraq became friendly with the Soviet Union, the Soviets could intervene on Baghdad's behalf to neutralise him. In addition, during the 1960s, relations between Iran and the Soviet Union had improved giving the Shah more leeway in his campaign against Iraq [Karsh & Rautsi 1991: 76]. Saddam Hussein realised that a treaty with the Soviet Union would diminish the Iranian threat .

Saddam Hussein, no doubt, realised the dangers of a treaty with the Soviets vis-a-vis the negative response a treaty would elicit from Washington but there was the even greater danger of attempting to nationalise the oil industry without superpower protection, (a lesson Saddam Hussein had learnt from the Mossadeq debacle of 1953). Moreover, Saddam Hussein may have been aware that the United States was already attempting to destabilise the Ba'ath regime. Although, it appears that Barzani had been rebuffed by the Americans in the early 1960s, apparently the Ba'ath accession to power kindled their interest and the Kurds were perceived by the US to be a 'strategic asset'. In August 1969, two US officers attached to CENTO flew to meet Barzani in Iran and signed an agreement which guaranteed \$14 million in US aid ⁴ [Entessar 1992: 119-120]. Meanwhile, across the border, American-trained Turkish commandos 'launched a vast campaign, raking the Kurdish

countryside under the pretext of a general "arms search" [Kendal 1993: 78].

A treaty with the Soviets would also halt Soviet attempts to undermine the Ba'athist regime. In addition to the Israelis, the Iranians and the Americans, the Soviets had been supplying Barzani with aid. The Soviets objected to the government in Baghdad because of its treatment of the Iraqi Communist Party. In addition, they wanted access to Iraqi oil. Support for Barzani, put pressure on Baghdad to move in Moscow's direction. In January 1970, Saddam visited Moscow to ask them to halt arming the Kurds. Without a treaty, the Soviets were not prepared to comply [Timmerman 1992: 11-12].

The Friendship Treaty was signed with the Soviet Union in April 1972. The Soviets would supply Baghdad with arms in return for Iraqi oil. The treaty did not guarantee Soviet intervention in the event of an attack on Iraq but it did provide Baghdad with a de facto security umbrella to resist any Western moves against Iraq's impending nationalisation of the oil industry. The Soviets had hoped that the treaty would enable them to gain influence with Iraq through supply of arms. Saddam Hussein opened a second channel with the French to preserve Iraq's independence. The French were displeased with the impending nationalisation of their share of the Iraqi oil industry. To assuage the French, Saddam offered Paris cut-price oil in return for access to French arms. Later, Saddam would play the French and the Soviets off against each other through arms sales purchases [Timmerman 1992: 13-34].

US Response

The American and Iranian response was swift and once again entailed the use

of Barzani as a Western proxy to destabilise the Iraqi regime. On 30 May 1972, President Nixon and Henry Kissinger arrived in Tehran to visit the Shah after holding arms limitations talks with Brezhnev in Moscow. During the visit, the Shah asked Nixon to provide Iran with unlimited arms supplies and \$16 million in assistance for the KDP to 'make life difficult for (the Shah's) Iraqi neighbour and enemy' [Safire New York Times 5/2/76 quoted in Vanly 1993: 169]. The Shah did not need the money, but Barzani, from previous experience dating back to 1945, distrusted the Shah. At first, Nixon was hesitant, fearing US aid to the Kurds might encourage separatism in the region which would favour the Soviets. He relented after a secret meeting with his advisor, John B. Connally, who persuaded Nixon of the efficacy of the plan [Vanly 1993: 169].

According to a secret 1976 congressional investigation, the Pike Report,⁵ which was leaked to the media, the CIA was given the job of assisting the Kurds without State Department knowledge. On his return to Washington, Kissinger sent the necessary orders to the CIA to commence covert action. The American ambassador in Tehran and the CIA station chief were mortified by Kissinger's action [Isaacson 1992: 564]. Furthermore, the '40 Committee' whose job it was to assess covert actions was presented with a memorandum indicating that the aid was already a *fait accompli* [Shawcross 1988: 165].

The Shah was also given a 'blank cheque' by Nixon to purchase any US arms he desired [Horn 1994: 261], short of nuclear weapons [Shawcross 1988: 163]. Nixon's gesture in providing the 'blank cheque' and covert aid for the Kurds was linked to his desire to support the Shah as the new 'policeman' of the Gulf. Because of the Vietnam debacle, the American public and congress

were reluctant to support further overseas intervention [Saikal 1980: 205-207]. To counter this situation, Nixon proclaimed his eponymous doctrine on Guam in 1969. The Nixon Doctrine '.... underlined America's new desire.... to construct a world system in which the United States..... would help generate strong regional actors, who would secure their own and American interests in their respective regions' [Saikal 1980: 205]. The Shah's Iran was a major focus of this policy.

The American aid to Barzani was merely symbolic; the bulk of his support continued to come from the Shah. Barzani was never advised that his allies' plans failed to include a Kurdish victory against Iraq. A CIA memo of March 22, 1974 states the position clearly: 'We would think that Iran would not look with favor on the establishment of a formalized autonomous government. Iran, like ourselves, has seen benefit in a stalemate situation ... in which Iraq is intrinsically weakened by the Kurds' refusal to relinquish [their] self-autonomy. Neither Iran nor ourselves wish to see the matter resolved one way or the other' [*The Village Voice* 16/2/76 quoted in Blum 1986]. Barzani, however, was so taken in by the ruse that he offered to reward the Americans with the Kirkuk oil fields when he defeated the Baghdad regime [Karsh & Rautsi 1991: 79-80]. ⁶

According to William Safire [*New York Times* 23/2/76], Marshal Gretchko, the Soviet Minister of Defence, arrived in Baghdad just after the aforementioned CIA memo was distributed to broker a deal between Iraq and the Kurdish rebels. Moscow was worried the continuing civil war was threatening Iraqi integrity and placing the regional balance of power too far in Iran's and, therefore, the United States' favour. Moscow neither wanted Iraq

destroyed nor too powerful. The Soviets supported autonomy for the Kurds because they believed the end of the civil war would result in a strong Iraq but an Iraq forever apprehensive about an autonomous Kurdish state in the north [Timmerman 1993: 18]. Gretchko hoped to use his influence with both Baghdad and Barzani to end the hostilities. Barzani, by this time, was too close to the Western camp and before agreeing to meet Gretchko consulted with Iran and the United States. The US and Iran advised Barzani to reject the deal. The rejection would have far-reaching consequences for the Kurds.

The Iraqis retaliated with a major offensive in the summer of 1974 which the Kurds resisted. In fact, the Kurdish resistance was perhaps too effective for the Shah's liking. The war had cost Iraq \$4 billion thus far and threatened to bankrupt the state. From March 1974 to March 1975, the Iraqis suffered 60,000 military casualties including 16,000 dead. A further 40,000 civilians had perished due to 'collateral damage'. Shia solidarity with the regime was also threatened. The majority of troops sent to the north were Shia and their losses were significant. [Karsh & Rautsi 1991: 81] Iraq had become vulnerable to disintegration from within. The Shah feared Barzani might succeed in gaining autonomy for the Kurds or perhaps draw him into a war with Iraq [Saikal 1980: 170, Chubin & Tripp 1986: 23].

The Turkish Front

Before commencing the offensive, Saddam had shored up another front. On 8 April, he assured Ankara that Iraq would continue to supply oil to Turkey if Ankara remained neutral in the dispute with the KDP [Vanly 1993: 172]. Turkey kept its border with Iraq closed for the duration of the war. Although

Turkey was an ally of both the United States and Iran, it felt threatened by the Kurdish successes across the border. Turkey was undergoing a constitutional crisis in the wake of the election following the 1971 coup [Ahmad 1993: 148-180]. Parliamentary anarchy was matched by the beginning of civil disorder involving leftist, rightist and Kurdish groups which would later result in the 1980 coup.

On July 20 1974, Turkey invaded Cyprus in response to a Greek initiated coup on the island five days before. Although the failed coup led to the downfall of the Greek military junta, relations between Greece and Turkey continued to deteriorate. On 14 August, the Turks mounted a second invasion occupying 40% of the island. [Ahmad 1993: 164-5] The Turkish military was over-stretched with war in the south (Cyprus), tension in the West (Greece) and the Kurdish insurrection in the southeast. Turkey could ill afford to have the Iraqi civil war spill over onto Turkish soil.

Further, Turkey's use of American supplied arms in the invasion of Cyprus resulted in a US Congress inspired breach in US-Turkish relations. In early 1975, Congress instituted an embargo on military aid and sales to Turkey. Relations between the US and Turkey were soured until 1978 [US State Dept Dispatch 18/2/91]. The Turkish military was therefore ill-equipped to confront well-armed Kurdish insurgents. And from the US point of view Iran became even more important as its major bastion in the Middle East.

The Algiers Agreement

A solution to the Kurdish problem seemed to open up when Saddam Hussein

made overtures towards the Shah after the failure of the summer offensive. As he possessed the upper hand the Shah was only too willing to negotiate.⁷ Had Barzani succeeded in gaining autonomy, the Iranian Kurds would have demanded the same. Moreover, Kissinger had been having problems (because of Syrian intransigence in the wake of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War) in achieving a disengagement between Egypt and Israel. Sadat was open to disengagement but feared the Syrian response. Both Sadat and Kissinger believed that if Iraq could be neutralised through an agreement with Iran, Syria would be left with no support for its position. An Egyptian diplomat was sent to broker the agreement between Tehran and Baghdad. Tehran wanted concessions, particularly a realignment of the border at the Shatt-al-Arab waterway. If Iraq would agree to this arrangement and refuse to back the Syrians, Tehran would close its northern border with Iraq and withdraw its support for the Kurds [Vanly 1993: 170].

Saddam Hussein, although ostensibly still vice president but effectively the strongman, was not ready to accede to these demands. The Shah replied by increasing aid to the Kurds including provision of anti-tank missiles and Iranian operated artillery. To ensure that no weapons could be stockpiled for use against the Shah's own troops the Kurds were never given more than a three day supply of ammunition. By early 1975, Saddam Hussein had no alternative but to sign the Algiers agreement. The Shah gained access to the Shatt-al-Arab which he had always coveted while the Iraqis received the Shah's guarantee to stop interfering in Iraq's internal affairs. The latter translated into a desertion of the KDP. Within six hours of signing the agreement Saddam Hussein launched a major offensive against Barzani's forces. The Shah had already withdrawn air support and the two regiments

assigned to assist the Kurds. Within two weeks, Kurdish resistance had withered resulting in a population transfer of up to three hundred thousand Kurds. In Turkey, Suleyman Demirel had returned to power and saw Barzani's defeat as a perfect opportunity to re-commence commando operations against his own Kurdish minority [Kendal 1993: 71].

In his memoirs, Nixon failed to disclose the Kurdish episode [Nixon 1978]. Kissinger was a little more forthcoming but relegated the episode to a paragraph and a defensive footnote [Kissinger 1979: 1264-1265]. He claimed the policy was successful because of Iraq's limited ability to participate in the Arab-Israeli War of 1973. He further claimed that 'the Shah's decision in 1975 to settle the Kurdish problem with Iraq was based on the judgment that the Kurds were about to be overwhelmed; they could not have been saved without the intervention of two Iranian divisions and \$300 million in assistance from us' [Kissinger 1979: 1265n]. It is difficult to reconcile Kissinger's belated sympathy for the Kurds with his reputed comment to the Pike Committee that 'covert action should not be confused with missionary work.' ⁸

Fragmentation of the Iraqi Kurdish Cause

Barzani's betrayal by the Shah and the United States prompted a split in the ranks of the Iraqi Kurds. Jalal Talabani formed the leftist Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in opposition to Barzani's tribal based KDP. As mentioned above the Iraqi Kurdish movement had been moving in this direction for many years. The young, urban-educated Kurds were impatient with Barzani's methods. 'The PUK was extremely critical of all the old leadership..... It

accused them of having conducted the revolution by "tribal methods" and of being in cahoots with imperialism." Nor was the KDP "provisional leadership" [represented by Barzani's sons, Barzani senior having gone into exile] spared; they were condemned for "having retained links with the Shah and with imperialism" [Vanly 1993: 188]. The younger de-tribalised Kurds adopted a more leftist, secularist line.

Saddam's policies after the Algiers Agreement also inadvertently assisted the Kurdish cause. Apart from the mass deportations of Kurds from northern Iraq, Saddam cleared a security zone 15 kilometres wide from the Iranian to the Syrian border and attempted to 'Arabize' much of northern Iraq. The resulting social dislocation provided a large pool of disenchanting youth prepared to join the guerilla movements. Fighting resumed between the Baghdad regime and the KDP and PUK re-commenced in 1976. Due to the tension generated by Iraq's deal with Iran and rivalry between the Iraqi and Syrian Ba'ath parties, the PUK in particular, received a great deal of support from Damascus [Sherzad 1992: 140].

CHAPTER TWO

THE KURDS AND US FOREIGN POLICY

1979 - 1992

SADDAM HUSSEIN: FROM SPONSOR OF TERRORISM TO 'OUR S.O.B.' ¹

Introduction

The combination of the fall of the Shah in 1979, Khomeini's accession to power and Iraq's subsequent invasion of Iran should have provided the Kurds in Iraq and Iran with an opportunity to re-negotiate their respective positions. Because of many factors this was not to be. First, the Kurdish parties in both Iraq and Iran were divided. They failed to suppress their rivalry to promote a united front; instead the Kurdish parties engaged in an internecine war which permitted Iraq and Iran to play the Kurds off against each other. Second, as the war progressed and the tide of battle favoured either of the major combatants, they would use their advantage to suppress Kurdish insurrections. ² Third, the Turkish coup in 1980 and finally, US policy which will both be examined at length in the next two sections.

The Turkish Coup

One week before Iraq invaded Iran, the Turkish military overthrew the Demirel government. The Turkish republic had been plagued by leftist,

rightist and Kurdish terrorism for the previous five years. In defending the military takeover, its leader, General Evren, claimed that 'the Turkish armed forces were restoring the state authority in an impartial manner' [Ahmad 1993:181]. 'Parallel with an economic policy virtually dictated from Washington, the 12 September regime also adopted a foreign and military policy designed to serve Western interests in the region reeling from the impact of the revolution in Iran' [Ahmad 1993: 183].

Many Turks still believe the generals were acting at the behest of the US government. [Spain 1984: 19] That the coup occurred days before the Iraqi invasion of Iran helps support their argument. Paul B. Henze, then US National Security Council officer-in-charge of Turkish affairs, denies that the Carter administration was involved in the coup. According to Henze, 'Washington was indeed relieved when the military intervened; the Carter administration would not have discouraged the takeover had it been forewarned, but it was glad not to be' [Henze 1991: 106]. There is no reason to doubt Henze's honesty but given recent disclosures concerning the alleged 'October Surprise' affair, ³ claims by Carter officials that they were fully aware of US covert actions are suspect. Gary Sick, then officer-in-charge at the Iran desk of the NSC, has alleged that in the late 1970s and up to Reagan's inauguration on 20 January 1981, officials disloyal to Carter implemented an alternate US foreign policy unbeknownst to Carter and other White House employees [Sick 1991].

Considering the effect of the Shah's fall on the Americans, plus the anarchy reigning in Turkey prior to the coup and the need for the United States to find a replacement for the Shah, it is not inconceivable that some elements of the

US foreign policy community may have precipitated and / or backed the Turkish coup. The reactions of the Reagan administration towards Turkey over the next few years seems to suggest this. 'To Pentagon strategists like General Alexander Haig, Secretary of State in the Reagan administration, Turkey became "absolutely irreplaceable" and worth supporting at virtually any price' [Ahmad 1993: 206]. The US, under Reagan, rewarded the military regime in Turkey with IMF credits, postponement of loan credits and increased economic and military aid. In addition the US government and media turned a blind eye to the increasingly brutal suppression of the Kurds in the southeast. ⁴

By 1983, the Turkish military's suppression of the Kurds had precipitated a widespread Kurdish insurrection. Abdullah Ocalan formed the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) in November 1978. Previously he had been involved in radical leftist student politics while studying in Ankara. Just before the military took power in 1980 he escaped to Syria. Two months after the military put 20,000 suspected leftists, rightists and Kurdish separatists on trial, the PKK (in May 1983) retaliated with an attack on a Turkish army unit in the southeast and then escaped over the border into Iraq. Baghdad permitted Turkey to cross into northern Iraq in pursuit of the PKK. In July of the same year, the PKK and the KDP signed a protocol permitting the PKK to establish bases in KDP controlled areas of Iraq. The protocol included a condemnation of imperialism, particularly that of the United States [Gunter 1990: 67-73]. It is perversely ironic that many Turks believe the United States sponsored the PKK offensive to force Turkey into the war on the side of Iraq. [Gunter 1990: 116] Fearing that an Iranian victory might result in both a change in the balance of power in the region and an independent Kurdish state, Turkey sided with Baghdad. Saddam Hussein permitted further Turkish incursions

into northern Iraq . Many of these incursions resulted in air strikes on KDP and PUK strongholds.

The United States

When the Shah was overthrown, the United States lost its major ally in the Middle East. Despite its traditional antipathy towards Baghdad, the US saw Saddam Hussein, the 'secular strongman', as more attractive than Ayatollah Khomeini, the 'religious zealot'. In American eyes, Khomeini's accession to power had produced a catastrophic change in the balance of power in the Middle East. The strategic loss occasioned by the fall of the Shah was transformed into an emotional loss when Iranian students seized the American embassy in Tehran and took its staff hostage.

The last year of Carter's presidency was consumed by the Iranian hostage crisis. Carter's administration also initiated the United States' inexorable shift towards Saddam Hussein. Although Carter refused to sanction Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran in September 1980, he appears to have been aware of it. The Financial Times alleged that US intelligence and satellite data was made available to Iraq before the war through friendly Arab governments. [Hitchens 1991: 112] Moreover, before the invasion, Brzezinski, Carter's hawkish National Security Advisor, stated that he 'would not object to "an Iraqi move against Iran"' [Hitchens 1991: 72]. Earlier, in July 1980, Brzezinski visited Amman ostensibly to meet King Hussein, however, it has been claimed that he met senior Iraqi officials to discuss the Iranian situation. According to Gary Sick, 'Brzezinski was letting Saddam assume there was a green light, because there was no explicit red light. But to say the US planned

and plotted it all out in advance is simply not true' [Sick interview quoted in Timmerman 1992: 76-77]. (It should be noted in passing, that alleged US green / red lights towards Saddam Hussein were to have a profound effect ten years later.)

When Ronald Reagan defeated Carter in the 1980 election, support for Saddam Hussein increased. On 12 April 1981, Reagan sent Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Draper to Baghdad to discuss US - Iraqi relations [Miller & Mylroie 1990: 143]. At this point, Saddam was not ready for open relations with the US. Because of successful Iranian offensives in 1982, Saddam changed his mind. In the same year, the Reagan administration, without congressional consultation, removed Iraq from the list of states that promote terrorism despite the fact that Iraq's disavowal of terrorism was merely cosmetic. [Jentleson 1994: 186-8] To placate Congress, Saddam acquiesced to Reagan's demand that Abu Nidal be asked to leave Baghdad but other 'terrorists' including Abu Abbas of Achille Lauro fame remained in Iraq. [Friedman 1993: 134, 179] According to Noel Koch, the Department of Defense's director for counterterrorism, 'no one had any doubts about [the Iraqis'] continued involvement with terrorism. The real reason was to help them succeed in the war against Iran' [*Washington Post* interview quoted in Miller & Mylroie 1990: 144].

Within a couple of months Iraq itself was engaged in terrorism. In London, on 3 June 1982, an attempt was made on the Israeli ambassador's life. The assassination squad was organised and supplied with weapons by an Iraqi intelligence colonel attached to the London embassy [Jentleson 1994: 52, Timmerman 1992: 114]. The Israelis, assigning guilt to the Palestinians, used

the assassination attempt as a pretext to invade Lebanon. It appears that Saddam Hussein had hoped for this reaction as he was facing defeat in the war against Iran. He offered the Iranians a ceasefire and suggested that Iran and Iraq join together in a retaliatory war against Israel. The Iranians declined the offer. [Karsh & Rautsi 1991: 165, Jentleson 1994: 52] At the same time, with a touch of cynical irony, Saddam in a meeting with Rep. Stephen Solarz (NY), accepted Israel's right to exist [Miller & Mylroie 1990: 144]; a *volteface* of Iraq's policy of the previous fifteen years.

Having removed Iraq from the terrorism list, the Reagan administration gave the Department of Agriculture authority, through the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), to advance Iraq \$300 million in credits to purchase rice and wheat [Jentleson 1994: 42]. (By 1987, CCC credits to Iraq totalled \$567 million) The United States' wheat and rice belts are found in the American Midwest, the Republican heartland. 'By the end of the (Iran-Iraq) war, Iraq was importing around \$30 billion worth of food, principally from the United States and Turkey' [Sluglett and Farouk-Sluglett 1991: 98]. By then, the United States was in the midst of recession and the section of the US economy that was hurting most was the agricultural sector, particularly the Midwest farming belt. As one commentator noted, the administration's policy towards Iraq was 'a market-driven quest to relieve the Republican heartland.' From 1985-90 the US government provided more than \$4 billion in credit guarantees and loans to Iraq. ⁵

Despite ongoing support for Iraq during the two Reagan administrations, the US was under no delusion that Saddam Hussein could ever replace the Shah. Western interests would be best served if neither Iraq nor Iran won the war.

Washington spent the duration of the war ensuring this by engaging in 'low-grade Machiavellianism' including 'the apparent "cooking" of intelligence data given to the two sides' [Bell 1989: 138]. Furthermore, while supporting the Iraqi side in the UN and through the flagging of Kuwaiti tankers, the Reagan White House covertly supplied arms to Iran; the infamous Iran-Contra deals which nearly brought down the Reagan presidency.

The Anfal Campaign

During the Iran-Iraq war, Saddam Hussein used chemical and biological weapons against Iranian mass attacks. Towards the end of the war, when US assistance had given him the upper hand, he turned the weapons on the Kurds. The first chemical attacks occurred in May 1987 and continued into June when Kurdish villages in Iran were gassed. In March 1988, the most (in)famous attack occurred when the Kurdish town of Halabja was bombed with chemical laden shells.

The chemical attacks resulted in 55,000 Kurdish refugees fleeing towards the Turkish border. Turkey was forced to admit the Kurds but denied them refugee status relying on a loophole in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees which refers only to European refugees [Kirisci 1993: 5-7]. Meanwhile, the Turkish military was engaged in its own offensive against the Kurds in the southeast. In September 1988, both governments rejected United Nations' requests to send teams to assess the situation [Chaliand 1994: 71].

While the chemical attacks have received the most publicity, particularly after

the Kuwait War, they formed only part of a well-organised genocidal offensive against the Kurdish population of Iraq, the Anfal campaign, which lasted from April 1987 to April 1989. The Kurdish insurrections during the Iran-Iraq War provided the catalyst for the campaign but the war was a cover for the campaign not a pretext. As discussed above 'the Iraqi regime's anti-Kurdish drive dates back ... more than fifteen years, well before the outbreak of that war' [Salih 1995].

Baghdad did not attempt to disguise the Anfal campaign; it was celebrated with the same degree of nationalistic triumphalism that distinguished its victories in the Iran-Iraq War. In response, the US Senate in 1988 unanimously passed the 'Prevention of Genocide Act' which mandated a trade embargo on Iraq. The White House opposed the legislation and used various procedures to have it delayed in the House. It eventually died [Miller & Mylroie 1990: 148]. Reagan subsequently approved a further \$1 billion in CCC credits for Iraq to purchase agricultural commodities [Entessar 1992: 139]. The Reagan administration was primarily concerned with the continuing risk of Islamic revolution in the Middle East. Iraq was viewed as the only possible candidate to contain Iran. Therefore, the White House accepted Saddam's promise not to use chemical weapons in the future [Karsh & Rautsi 1991: 199]. When Bush succeeded Reagan, US policy followed the same pattern.

On 2 October, 1989, Bush signed the then classified National Security Directive 26 (NSD 26) which stated that 'normal relations (with Iraq)... would serve ... (US) interests and promote stability in the Middle East.' In particular, 'economic and political incentives for Iraq to moderate its behaviour (were to

be investigated and attempts made) to increase our influence in Iraq'. Mention was made of Iraqi chemical, biological and possible nuclear weapons, human rights abuses and Iraqi interference in neighbouring countries, however, the main thrust of the directive to 'pursue and ... facilitate, opportunities for US firms to participate in ... reconstruction of (the) Iraqi economy, particularly in the energy area.' The United States was not limited to economic cooperation with Iraq, 'sales of non-lethal forms of military assistance, e.g. training courses and medical exchanges, on a case by case basis' could also be promoted [Simpson 1995: 907-909].

As for the Kurdish deaths caused by chemical attacks, the *New York Times* reported in April 1991 that 'recent studies by the Bush administration suggest that the deaths occurred "during fierce fighting in the final months of the Iran-Iraq war.'" According to the Times, the administration tried to cloud the issue further by suggesting that 'both sides used chemical weapons' and therefore 'there probably wasn't an attempt on either side to kill the villagers, but instead, they were fighting over territory' [quoted in Smith 1992: 45].

The Business of the United States is Business

Had the Shah of Iran survived, no doubt, at some point the United States would have destabilised the Iraqi regime. Baghdad had committed two cardinal sins the US abhorred; it nationalised the oil industry and followed an independent foreign policy unlike other Arab states which after nationalisation tended to acquiesce to the US inspired balance of power in the Middle East. (Barzani appears to have recognised this when he offered the Americans the Mosul oilfields in 1972) However, because of the Shah's overthrow, the

United States needed the Ba'ath regime and the Ba'ath regime needed American technology and agricultural produce. Baghdad's importance to the United States was not solely predicated on the need for a bulwark against the Islamic regime in Tehran. The 'loss' of Iran had entailed a significant economic loss for American business, particularly the military-industrial complex and development / construction firms. Iran, like Saudi Arabia, was a major American arms purchaser and unlike Egypt and Israel paid for arms with its own money.

As noted above, Iraq throughout the 1980s, became a major purchaser of US agricultural produce through the CCC program. When congress and other critics demanded that Iraq be embargoed the Reagan administration resisted the moves. The 'Prevention of Genocide Act', which the White House effectively destroyed, had been sponsored by the strange alliance of Senators Pell and Helms, the former an Eastern liberal, the latter a staunch conservative from the South; neither represented the wheat and rice belt. The Senate unanimously voted for the bill but over the following two years senators from the Midwest engaged in a program of support for the continuation of CCC credits to Iraq. In early 1990, Senator Robert Dole led a delegation to Iraq to convince Saddam Hussein that the United States still viewed Iraq as a strong ally. During this visit the Senators condemned the American media's attacks on Saddam Hussein and reassured him of Bush's continued personal support [Transcript of Meeting between US Senators And Saddam Hussein, Baghdad, 12/4/90 in Ridgeway (ed) 1991: 35-38]. After the invasion of Kuwait, on the eve of sanctions being passed, Republican senators were still engaged in a rearguard action to continue CCC credits to Iraq [Waller 1990: 13-14].

The notion that US business success equates with US national interest is not a recent phenomenon and deserves further investigation. US business interests have converged with US foreign policy in many Cold War interventions. In 1954, the US State Department and the CIA helped overthrow the nationalist government of Guatemala led by Guzman Arbenz on the pretext that Arbenz was a dupe of the Communists. In actual fact, the Soviet Union had little or no interest in Guatemala. [Blum 1986: chap. 10] It was not revealed until much later that the Secretary of State and the CIA director, John Foster and Allen Dulles, were major stockholders in the United Fruit Company which had most to lose from Arbenz's policies [Horowitz 1971: 169]. The previous year, the brothers Dulles had been instrumental in the overthrow of Mossadeq in Iran. Again their links with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company were not revealed until much later [Horowitz 1971: 185].

During the period 1971-73, the United States used its Export-Import Bank and influence over the World Bank to strangle the Chilean economy because the socialist government of Salvador Allende 'threatened' the interests of the US multinational, ITT (known as AT & T within the United States and subsequently overseas) . When this failed the CIA backed a military coup [Blum 1986: chap. 34]. Allende's election victory in 1970 prompted another of Henry Kissinger's famous quips, 'I don't see why we need to stand by and watch a country go communist because of the irresponsibility of its own people' [quoted in Blum 1986].

The convergence of business and national interest is also evident in the United States' non-agricultural trade relationship with Iraq. ⁶ It is far beyond the scope of this essay to outline the full relationship between US business

interests, the Reagan-Bush White Houses and Iraq, however, a discussion of some aspects may elucidate why the United States was loathe to ostracise Iraq even after the Anfal campaign against the Kurds. ⁷

The first thaw in US-Iraq relations occurred in 1979 within months of the Islamic revolution in Iran. Iraq had signed contracts with an Italian firm to purchase a turnkey navy. The Italian contract was premised on the same grounds as the earlier trade with the French; freeing Iraq from dependence on the Soviets. To the surprise of the Italians Iraq demanded that the new navy be fitted with US built General Electric engines. The US Commerce Department agreed to the sale, but in February 1980, the US Senate blocked it because Iraq was on the 'terrorism list'. The Carter White House and the State Department worked hard to overturn the Senate's decision. Eventually the sale went through, in addition to a Carter backed sale of Boeing jets [Timmerman 1992: 78]. It should be remembered that Ronald Reagan had been both an employee and associate of General Electric [Cannon: 1991: various references]. Such 'coincidences' continued to 'crop up' over the next decade.

On June 25, 1982, Reagan replaced Alexander Haig with George Schultz as Secretary of State. Shultz was the president of Bechtel Corporation, one of the largest building contractors in the world, with immense interests in the Middle East [Cannon 1991: 204-205]. (Previously Reagan had appointed the general counsel of Bechtel, Caspar Weinberger, his Secretary of Defense). During the Reagan presidency, Bechtel was to win two \$1 billion contracts with the Iraqi government. The first, to build an oil pipeline from Iraq to Aqaba in Jordan [Friedman 1993: 29] and the second, to build a

petrochemical complex south of Baghdad. It has been alleged that the latter could have been used for mustard gas and fuel air explosive (napalm) production [Timmerman 1992: 360].

In May 1985, Marshall Wiley, recently retired from the State Department, set up the US - Iraq Business Forum supported by sponsorship from Westinghouse (a major high-tech and weapons producer) and Mobil Oil. Although the Forum was never registered as a lobby for the Iraqi government, the Forum became the major conduit for American business with Iraq [Timmerman 1992: 219-20]. The growth in membership of the Forum was as dramatic as the increase in American sales to Iraq; from approximately \$400 million in 1985 to \$1.5 billion in 1989 [Conason 1990: 15]. By July 1990, the Forum included more than seventy of *Fortune* magazine's 'Top 500' companies. Among these were A.T. & T. (of Chile fame), Bechtel Corporation, several oil companies (Amoco, British Petroleum, Exxon, Hunt Oil of Texas, Mobil and Texaco) and defence contractors (Bell Helicopter, General Motors and Westinghouse Electric).

In May 1988, two months after Iraq gassed Halabja, the Forum sponsored a seminar on Iraq in Washington. Guest speakers included the Iraqi ambassador, the Iraqi oil minister and A. Peter Burleigh, deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs. In his address, Burleigh stated that the Reagan administration 'looked "to those in the ... Forum to help preserve - and expand - the overall US-Iraqi relationship ..."' [Conason 1990: 15] Within months, Wiley was pressuring the White House to quash Senate attempts to place a commercial embargo on Iraq. (The Pell - Helms Act) Because of media pressure, the White House publicly condemned Iraq's campaign against

the Kurds but privately sent Iraq a letter of conciliation. [Gigot 1991: 5].

In November 1988, Bush won the presidential election and appointed his close associates James A. Baker III, General Brent Scowcroft and Lawrence Eagleburger, Secretary of State, National Security Advisor and Under Secretary of State, respectively. In his recent memoirs, Baker claims that close friendships between members of the Bush administration resulted in one of the most cohesive executive branches in recent history [Baker 1995: 17-37]. Both Bush and Baker had been involved in the Texas oil industry. According to a disclosure made by Baker when he was appointed Secretary of State, he held stock in Amoco, Exxon, Texaco and United Technologies; all members of the US-Iraqi Business Forum ['Holdings of James A. Baker III, and his Immediate Family', 25/1/89 in Friedman 1993: 342].

Brent Scowcroft and Lawrence Eagleburger left jobs with Kissinger Associates to accept their government appointments. Although Kissinger Associates was not a member of the Forum, many of its clients 'received export licences for exports to Iraq' [*Financial Times* 26/4/91]. According to documents released by the House Banking Committee, Scowcroft held significant shareholdings in six major Forum companies including Mobil Oil and General Motors [Letter from Henry Gonzalez, Chairman, Committee on Banking, Finance & Urban Affairs to George Bush 2/5/91; *Financial Times* 26/4/91]. General Motors had done business with Iraq since the early 1980s but their greatest coup occurred in 1989 when they won a contract worth \$1 billion to supply the Iraqi Interior Ministry with military trucks [Timmerman 1992: 347]. Iraq financed the purchase of the trucks (and many other contracts with Forum members) through loans from the Italian

government owned Banco Nazionale del Lavoro (BNL) on whose international advisory board Henry Kissinger sat as a paid member. Lawrence Eagleburger had been on the board of BNL's Yugoslav subsidiary after he had served there as American ambassador.

BNL emerged as the central focus of what became known as the Iraqgate scandal. It was alleged that the bank's Atlanta (GA) branch provided Iraq with loans for illegal purchases of US high-tech goods. Further allegations concerned the bank's conversion of CCC credits, permitting the Iraqi government to finance its arms industry through US agricultural credits. When the BNL scandal broke in May 1990 the Bush administration secretly terminated CCC credits to Iraq. [Karabell 1995: 43] In January 1995, the Department of Justice's (DOJ) investigator's 'found no evidence "that US agencies or officials illegally armed Iraq or that crimes were committed through bartering of CCC commodities for military equipment"' [*Arms Sales Monitor* 28 (15/2/95): 4]. Subsequently, the DOJ announced that the Department of Agriculture's CCC would pay BNL \$400 million to settle its claims on the US government [DOJ Press Release 16/2/95]. Some have alleged that no other conclusion was possible. House Banking Chairman, Henry Gonzalez, a Democrat from Texas, who led the call for an investigation, claims that the Department of Agriculture destroyed all the incriminating evidence in a weekend shredding spree just prior to the November 1992 presidential election [Pizzo, Fricker & Hogan Jan/Feb 1993: 1].⁸

THE NEW WORLD ORDER

August 1990

The Anfal campaign provoked little response from the Bush administration and Britain's Thatcher government. It was left to other Western governments to air their indignation. As has been suggested above, it was not in US national interest to chastise Saddam Hussein for his genocidal offensive against the Kurds. With the Iran-Iraq War over, and neither side victorious, the Kurds were a superfluous hindrance to US economic policies in the Middle East. The same could be said of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government. The British government was as much involved in coddling Saddam for profit as the US was. According to the recently released Scott Report, members of the British government were engaged in actions as questionable as those of their 'cousins' across the Atlantic [*The Times* 16/2/96; *The Electronic Telegraph* 16/2/96].

It was therefore surprising that when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait the most vehement opposition emanated from Britain and the United States led by Margaret Thatcher and George Bush. Conventional wisdom supports the thesis, posited by both Bush and James A. Baker, that it was imperative to intervene on Kuwait's behalf because of the threat Saddam's control of Iraqi and Kuwaiti oil posed to Western oil supplies.⁹ Telhami has cogently argued that oil was a factor but not the only factor. He points out that despite Japanese and German dependence on Middle Eastern oil, they were, initially, the most reluctant to join the US-British coalition against Iraq [Telhami 1994: 154-5]. Britain and the United States, of course, possess their own oil.

Moreover, the major American and British oil companies were members of the US-Iraqi Business Forum. The increase in oil prices, desired by Iraq, could only have benefited them.

The US-British response may have been precipitated by other factors. Scott has argued that the estimated \$250 billion invested by Kuwait in the UK and the US may have prompted the Anglo-American response [Scott 1991: 161-3]. Had Saddam gained control of Kuwait's investments he could have held Britain and the US to ransom as he wreaked havoc with their economies. The theory is attractive for two reasons. First, if the solution to the crisis had been left to the Arabs, eventually, an Iraqi puppet government would have achieved legitimacy. In the first weeks of the crisis Saddam claimed that he had been 'invited' into Kuwait by opposition elements opposed to the al-Sabah monarchy. He did not annex Kuwait as an Iraqi province until late August (after the formation of the coalition). Given Arab antipathy towards the Kuwaiti monarchy, there seems little reason to believe that the Arabs would have independently challenged Saddam. Furthermore, Iraq possessed the best military machine in the Middle East. For the Arabs to confront Iraq, they would have needed Iranian assistance - an unthinkable proposition.

Second, on 24 February in a speech delivered at the Arab Co-operation Council (ACC) in Amman, Saddam Hussein 'voiced his worry that with the decline of the USSR, the United States would behave in an "undisciplined and irresponsible" manner' in the Middle East. He, therefore, recommended that 'just as Israel controls interests to put pressure on the administration, hundreds of billions invested by the Arabs in the United States and the West (should) be similarly deployed .. some of these

investments may be diverted to the USSR and East European countries' [quoted in Cockburn & Cohen 1991: 10]. At the time, the US ignored the speech. The US was used to Saddam scoring points against them in the Middle East while continuing to rely on American credits and investment. Perhaps, after the invasion, Bush and Thatcher feared that he might really come through with his threats.

A second factor coincides with Scott's argument. Since the end of the First World War, British, followed by American, primacy over the world economy has been bolstered by control of Middle Eastern oil. By the late 1980s, the British and American economies were floundering while the Japanese and German economies were flourishing. American hegemony in the Middle East was one of the few levers the Anglo-American alliance possessed to stave off the Japanese-German threat [Chomsky 2/91]. If Saddam Hussein had gained control of Kuwaiti oil and hegemony over the Middle East, the United States would have been denied control over Japanese and German oil supplies. Moreover, if Saddam had decided to replace Anglo-American investment with German-Japanese, undoubtedly Japan and Germany would have gleefully accepted the offer. This may explain why the Germans and the Japanese were initially reluctant to support the Anglo-American coalition.

In the end, it was not the threat to Western oil that was important, it was the threat to American control of Western oil supplies and Arab investment. On these grounds it is difficult to argue with Chomsky's contention that 'Saddam Hussein's crimes were of no account until he committed the crime of disobedience' [Chomsky 1993: 89].

Turkey and the Kuwait War

Before turning to the effect of the Kuwait War on the Iraqi Kurds it is necessary to examine the background of Turkey's support for the US in the build-up to Operation Desert Storm. With the demise of the Soviet threat, Turkey was adrift in world politics. For the previous forty four years, in the eyes of the West, its *raison d'etre* had been as the southeastern flank of NATO. A history of military coups and flagrant suppression of democratic and human rights were ignored by successive US administrations intent on retaining Turkey as a bulwark against the Soviet Union.

The onset of the Gulf Crisis generated few strong feelings of antipathy towards Iraq amongst the Turkish populace or military. Turkey had co-operated with Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War to suppress both Turkish and Iraqi Kurdish insurrection. Iraq had also been forced to rely on a pipeline that ran through Turkey to export its oil. The pipeline provided Turkey with a revenue of \$500 million p.a. and access to cheap oil. Despite the benefits to Turkey, President Ozal perceived that co-operation with President Bush was in Turkey's future interest. Many factors prompted this decision. The PKK insurgency in the southeast was intensifying and adverse publicity generated by the government's suppression of the insurrection was damaging Turkey's credibility. Members of the US Congress and European Parliament never failed to chastise Turkey over its handling of the Kurdish problem. Turkish military equipment was also rapidly becoming obsolete, hampering its ability to prosecute the Kurdish war. Without the Cold War, Turkey's importance to the United States might dissipate to the point where the US Congress could successfully argue for a reduction in military assistance. By supporting Bush,

Turkey's profile in Washington would rise dramatically, facilitating potential economic and political benefits. Last, and politically crucial to Ozal, public support for his Motherland Party (ANAP) had dropped to 22% and while Ozal (for the time being) was safe in his position, his parliamentary colleagues faced an election the following year. Like Bush, Ozal incorrectly believed that success in the Gulf would later translate into political victory. (ANAP was defeated by Demirel's True Path Party (DYP) in late 1991).

Bush immediately embraced Ozal's support, later declaring him 'a protector of peacewho stand(s) up for 'civilised values' around the world' [Chomsky 2 / 1991]. While standing up for 'civilised values', Ozal, in early August, used the cover of the Gulf crisis to suspend the European Convention on Human Rights in the Kurdish provinces. This move elicited little protest from Western governments [*Human Rights Watch Report*, 1991 cited in Chomsky, 2/ 1991]. As the crisis developed the Turkish military intensified its war against the Kurds in the southeast. In addition, Ozal agreed to support Bush's war on the proviso that whatever the outcome, no independent Kurdish state be established in northern Iraq [McDowall 1992: 115].

Ozal's secret diplomacy with Bush and his failure to consult with his colleagues led to the resignation of his foreign and defence ministers in October 1990. These resignations were followed on December 3 by that of the Turkish military's Chief of Staff, General Torumtay. Whether Torumtay resigned because of disagreement with the president's war policy or because of the slight he felt at not being properly consulted is still a matter of dispute [Ahmad 1993: 201]. Whatever the reason many Turks felt that Ozal's

adventurist policy negated the legacy of Kemalist foreign policy which was represented by the slogan 'Peace at home, Peace abroad'. As will be discussed below, Ozal's political gamble paid off in the aftermath of the Gulf War and in subsequent US-Turkish relations.

The Kurdish-Shia Revolt

In a report prepared by the Bush transition team in January 1989, foreign policy analysts concluded that "in no way should we associate ourselves with the 60 year Kurdish rebellion in Iraq or oppose Iraq's *legitimate attempts* to suppress it" (emphasis added) [Bill & Springborg 1994: 388]. It should be remembered that nine months prior to the preparation of the report Saddam's 'legitimate attempts' to suppress the Kurds included gassing women and children in Halabja. The tone for the Bush administration's attitude towards the Kurdish rebellion was already set.

Further evidence of the administration's ambivalent attitude towards self-determination occurred in the week before the war started. In early January, tension mounted in the Baltic republics. By January 11, tension in Lithuania had translated into mass protests against the Soviet government which replied by sending in commandos who fired on one demonstration and then surrounded the television station and other strategically important buildings. European governments were outraged by the crackdown and threatened to deny further aid to the Soviet Union. As James Baker recounted in his memoirs, the United States found itself in an invidious position. In normal circumstances, US reaction would have been loud and vocal, however, with two days to go before the start of Desert Storm, Baker found 'crafting the

appropriate response to the situation tricky.' On the one hand, the US government was morally required to protest the use of force by the Soviets. Not to do so would have brought strong condemnation from the White House's critics in Congress. On the other hand, 'coming down too hard might embolden (Gorbachev's) critics and weaken his standing, which obviously was contrary to American *strategic interests*.' (emphasis added) In the end, Baker 'struck (a) delicate balance' by advising the Soviets that 'peaceful dialogue, not force is the only path to long-term legitimacy and stability' [Baker 1995: 178-80].

Bearing these two episodes in mind, the White House reaction to the Kurdish and Shia revolts after the Kuwait War is not surprising. Throughout the Kuwait War, Bush and the White House called on the 'people and army' of Iraq to overthrow Saddam Hussein. After the ceasefire the calls continued publicly and allegedly covertly via CIA clandestine radio broadcasts into Iraq [Kondracke 1991: 11]. The people and army (or at least retreating officers and conscripts retreating into Iraq) did take up the call and insurrections broke out first in the Shia south and later in the Kurdish north. The Iraqi opposition expected the US to assist the revolts given the calls that precipitated the revolt. The US, however, ordered its troops to desist from assisting the rebels. This order included denying rebel generals access to Iraqi weapons dumps in the south [Chomsky 1994: 8].

The Republican Guard quelled the revolts with attack helicopters. At the ceasefire meeting at Safwan, the Iraqi generals had requested permission from General Schwarzkopf to continue using their helicopters because of the damage caused to the Iraqi road and bridge system by the allied air assault.

As Schwarzkopf himself flew to Safwan and saw the degree of devastation, he acquiesced to their request. Later, when it became evident that attack helicopters were the prime tool used by the Iraqi military for suppressing the Kurdish and Shia revolts, Schwarzkopf claimed that he had been 'snookered'. Recently, however, he claimed that he hadn't been snookered at all; the initial request had been made in the spirit it was given; in other words the Iraqis only later realised that they were left with an effective weapon to quell the revolts. [PBS *Frontline* 1996] Baker defends the decision not to shoot down the helicopters on the grounds that General Powell advised that such action would have dragged the US into the civil war [Baker 1995: 440; also *cf* Kondracke 1991: 11]. In effect, the US military wittingly or unwittingly assisted in the suppression of the Shia and Kurdish revolts.

The Iraqi assault on Kurdistan began on 28 March and by 30 March, Kirkuk had been retaken followed by Sulaymaniya on 2 April. Despite calls from the Iraqi opposition, Bush refused to intervene. The Iraqi opposition believes that Bush was acting at the behest of Turkey and Saudi Arabia [Kondracke 1991: 11; McDowall 1992: 117]. This reasoning seems partly correct. Ankara was adamant that the Kurdish rebellion should not result in Kurdish independence. The Saudis were fearful of a Shia state on their doorstep. But if the argument is accepted it tends to absolve the White House of responsibility for the disaster when, in fact, the White House itself was leary of the Shias and the Kurds attaining victory. The White House refused to contemplate a divided Iraq, with Iran dominating the south and Turkey threatened in the north. Should division occur, within months, US forces would probably have been back in the Gulf combatting Iranians.

As the disaster unfolded, Bush continued to sit on his hands in Washington, denying audience to Talabani and other leaders of the Iraqi opposition. When the opposition leaders publicly reminded Bush of the encouragement he had given them, his aides went into spin control. They 'pointed out that Bush had said that if the Iraqi people "and the army" rose up, the international community would support them. Because the Iraqi army never rose up and rebelled the United States was unable to come to the aid of the Kurds and the Shiites' [Editors, *US News and World Report* 1992: 403].

Bush's defence deserves further examination. Leaving aside the fact that many of the rebels were retreating Iraqi officers (including generals) and conscripts, it is hard to reconcile Bush's defence with traditional American attitudes towards spreading democracy across the world. The Cold War had been fought ostensibly to liberate humanity from the 'slavery' of Soviet communism. But in 1991, the president of the United States was arguing that a popular revolt against an authoritarian regime was insufficient to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the world in general, and the United States in particular. Achieving legitimacy, according to George Bush, necessitates the military overthrowing a dictator and replacing him with an oligarchy of the United States' liking. For the first time an American president admitted what many had claimed for decades: the United States prefers stable military governments to popular revolutions, however, democratic. As one scholar has remarked, one legacy of the Cold War has persisted in the New World Order, a US 'commitment to unsavoury regimes' [Merrill 1984: 181]. The restoration of the al-Sabah monarchy in Kuwait, the cited justification for the war, is an apt example.

The Bush argument for restraint in the civil war was destroyed by James Baker in his recently published memoirs. He admits that the decision was made on 'geopolitical' grounds. The Iranian president, Rafsanjani, had been calling for the overthrow of the Saddam regime by the Shia in the south. The White House was still worried about the spread of 'Iranian fundamentalism' in the region and fearful of 'inadvertently helping the ayatollahs in Tehran by helping the Shia in Iraq.' In the north the Kurds were 'very fragmented' and posed a threat to Turkish integrity. The worst case scenario would have been the 'Lebanonization of Iraq' and this eventuality was not in the interests of the US or the region [Baker 1995: 439].

Operation Provide Comfort

As the Republican Guard pushed north into Kurdistan, 2,000,000 Kurds fled towards the Turkish and Iranian borders. Kurdish sources have suggested two reasons for the magnitude of the refugee problem. The first was a feeling of betrayal by the US. The US had called for the revolt but failed to support it. It was 1975 re-visited. In addition, despite US proscription of fixed-wing aircraft, many Kurds claimed they had been attacked by Iraqi jet fighters and bombers [Bierman 1991: 36]. The second, memory of the Anfal campaign was still fresh. The Kurds were terrified that Saddam would use gas again but this time annihilate them [Korn 1991].

Initially, the Iranians threatened to close their borders but relented. They were to receive the bulk of the refugees (1.2 - 1.5 million) but the least aid from the outside world to cope with the situation. The US argued that the Iranians had refused much of the aid offered because the Iranians were fearful of a

Western presence on their soil. The Iranians argued that very little aid was in fact offered.

On the Turkish side, Ozal closed the border as soon as the human waves began approaching. He wanted some form of UN support before allowing thousands of refugees into Turkey [Kirisci 1993: 1]. He felt justified in doing this because after the Anfal campaign in 1988 Turkey had accepted thousands of Kurdish refugees but also received little aid from the outside world. The primitive camps provided by the Turks had provoked a strong response from the Europeans. (The Turks retorted that the Europeans were practising a double standard because they had refused to adequately assist Turkey or accept refugees themselves) [Kirisci 1993: 10].

The Turkish government, buoyed by their new found position in the New World Order, refused to be subjected to the same tirades again. Of more importance, the Turks refused to admit the Kurdish refugees because of the volatile situation in the southeast. The degree of threat perceived by the Turks is evidenced by the fact that on April 2 the National Security Council (the High Command and the most senior politicians) and not the civilian Cabinet was convened to deal with the refugee issue [Kirisci 1993: 5].

Initially, Bush refused to be drawn into the situation but was subjected to intense pressure from both Prime Minister Major and President Ozal. Additional pressure came from the world, and particularly, US media. Perhaps making up for their subservient role during Operation Desert Storm, the media, especially television, brought scenes of Kurdish suffering into the living rooms of Middle America [Korn 1991]. The plight of the Shia were

ignored because the media were forbidden access to the south of Iraq. The latter brings up the thought that perhaps the Turkish government had initiated the blanket media coverage. Although no evidence exists to support this contention, the circumstances tend to point in that direction.

Caving into intense pressure from home and abroad, Bush supported Resolution 688 in the UN Security Council. Resolution 688 condemned Iraq's repression of its citizens, demanded that Baghdad desist from continuing the repression and insisted that Iraq permit 'immediate access by international humanitarian organisations to all those in need of assistance in all parts of Iraq' [UNSC Resolution 688, 5/4/91 quoted in Editors, *US News & World Report* 1992: 437]. Three days later, John Major, prompted by Margaret Thatcher, [Freedman & Karsh 1993: 423] took up Ozal's suggestion that a 'safe haven' be set up in northern Iraq. Major used the term 'enclave'. Apparently, he initially proposed an autonomous region for the Kurds but the Turks balked at the idea [McDowall 1992: 118]. Major announced his plan at an EC summit, mindful that so public an arena would spur the US into taking some form of action. The White House 'damned (the idea) with faintpraise - it had "some meritsat least worthy of consideration"' [Freedman & Karsh 1993: 423].

Although Democrats demanded action [Korn 1991] Bush still insisted that he 'did not want one single soldier or airman shoved into a civil war in Iraq that has been going on for ages' [Bush speech 13/4/91 quoted in Freedman & Karsh 1993: 423-4]. Five days before, Baker had visited northern Iraq. (The idea came from his press spokeswoman, Margaret Tutwiler) [Baker 1995: 429]. Baker was emotionally affected by the visit. He called Bush and

convinced him of the gravity of the situation and within hours Operation Provide Comfort was born. The safe havens were not created until April 16 when Bush finally acquiesced.

The benefits of Operation Provide Comfort cannot be denied, however, the Bush administration's tardiness in becoming involved and their reasons for doing so are questionable. As noted above, it took the world media, and the leaders of Turkey and the UK to gain the president's attention. In addition, the catalyst that eventually pushed the White House into action, Baker's visit to northern Iraq, grew out of a publicity stunt thought up by Margaret Tutwiler, Baker's spokeswoman. The reasoning behind the decision was not solely humanitarian as Robert Gates, Bush's Deputy National Security Advisor admitted in a recent interview for American television. 'The President wasn't as moved as (Baker) I think that the decision to act was primarily motivated by two factors. The first was pragmatic the concern of our ally Turkey. We still needed Turkish co-operation (it was) still a major staging base for US forces, (Turkey was) opposite Iraq and so on. So their concerns about the Kurds were an important factor for us and a sort of *hardheaded world of geo-politics*, I also think that there was a humanitarian element to it' (emphasis added) [PBS *Frontline* 1996].

Despite the larger movement of Kurdish refugees towards the Iranian border, the 'safe haven' was limited to the province of Dohuk which abuts Turkey. The Iranian response was ambiguous. At first they requested that the safe haven be extended towards the east to include the larger Kurdish region bordering Iran. When they were ignored they opposed the safe haven - perhaps they saw the establishment of the safe haven as the beginnings of a

another, Western-inspired 'Israel' [Ala 'Aldeen 1994: 234]. It appears, therefore, that Operation Provide Comfort, in the eyes of the White House was an 'attempt to appease the Turks' [Ala 'Aldeen 1994: 234] as suggested by Gates.

It is also significant that the West made no attempt to create a safe haven in southern Iraq for the Shia nor was the West interested in Turkish atrocities against its Kurds [Chomsky 1994: 15]. On August 27 1992, the White House declared a 'no-fly zone' below the 32nd parallel but by then Baghdad had been permitted fourteen months' grace to pacify the area. A Pentagon spokesman stressed that 'the allies (were) establishing "a no-fly zone, not a security zone" - meaning (as the reporter noted) that the allies have no intention of offering the Shiite population blanket protection from government attacks, as they had for the Kurds last year in Operation Provide Comfort' [*LA Times* 27/8/92: Part A, Page 1]. At this point, an election loomed and Bush was trailing Bill Clinton badly at the polls and the victorious shine of Desert Storm had worn off. Bush denied that the no-fly zone was an election ploy. He 'was motivated only by "new evidence of harsh repression" by Saddam Hussein' [*LA Times* 27/8/92: Part A, Page 1].

The Kurdish Election - 1992

On 19 May 1992, Kurds in the safe haven voted in not only the first democratic Kurdish election but also the first democratic election on Iraqi soil. The PUK and the KDP received almost equal support (43.8% and 45.5% respectively) and gained virtually all the seats in the 105 seat assembly [Prince 1993: 18-19]. For the Kurds the election manifested long-

desired hopes for self-determination. Optimism, however, soon turned to pessimism because of the close vote between the PUK and the KDP. A dual leadership emerged which lacked a 'clear division of power causing renewed friction and bloodshed' [Bengio 1995: 80].

In Iraq and neighbouring states, the impending election elicited only general alarm. To gain Turkish acquiescence the Kurds were forced to agree to help Turkey in its war against the PKK insurrection. The United States greeted the election with trepidation. Initially, the State Department attempted to discourage it. Representatives from the International Human Rights Law Group in Washington D.C., invited as observers by the Kurds, were threatened with prosecution if they chose to go because special permission was required by American citizens to enter Iraq and State refused to supply the permission. The State Department also proscribed the use of the term 'Kurdistan' in relation to northern Iraq [Korn 1994].

Once preparations for the election were set in motion the US State Department issued a statement wishing the voters ('Turcomans, Assyrians and Kurds' - in that order) well but noted that the election was designed to resolve 'local administrative issues' and not a preliminary move towards 'separatism.' The statement further reiterated the US government's support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state of Iraq.' US official observers would not be attending the election, the statement concluded, because US passports were not valid for Iraq without 'a special State Department validation' and these would not be issued because of the dangerous situation in northern Iraq' [Tutwiler statement 15/5/92 in US State Dept *Dispatch* 18/5/92].

Once again, US foreign policy had subverted Kurdish self-determination in the interests of the regional balance of power. As had occurred at the end of the Kuwait War, their argument was based on the legal question of the territorial integrity of Iraq. Of interest is the fact that the territorial integrity of Iraq had been breached when Operation Provide Comfort and the safe haven had been instituted. Bush had initially argued that international law prohibited the safe haven but under congressional and public pressure chose to ignore it. Now, the legality of the safe haven was again a matter of dispute because it suited US national interest.

Iraq's legal rights were relegated to second place six months later when Turkey mounted an invasion into northern Iraq. Fifteen thousand soldiers penetrated up to twenty five kilometers into Iraq in, as Turkey claimed, pursuit of PKK guerillas. Some of the areas attacked were not PKK controlled. An Iraqi Kurdish spokesman claimed that the Turkish forces' major targets were the Iraqi Kurds not the PKK [Bengio 1995: 82-4]. According to the State Department, because the PKK was a terrorist organisation, Turkey had 'legitimate rights' to enter northern Iraq and subdue them. No mention was made of Iraq's territorial integrity [US State Dept. Daily Press Briefing 8/10/92].

Before the Kuwait War, both the Reagan and Bush administrations had ignored the plight of the Kurds because Kurdish self-determination, if not survival, conflicted with US national interests. With the war over, and Saddam Hussein still ensconced in power, the Bush administration was forced to take some account of the Kurds but Kurdish self-determination remained inimical to the maintenance of United States' interests in the Middle East.

CONCLUSION

Although US policy towards the Kurds, from the late 1940s until the late 1960s, was indirect it had a profound effect. Attempts to stifle Arab nationalism through support for the Baghdad Pact and subsequently CENTO, arming of the Shah and destabilisation of successive Iraqi governments furthered Kurdish demands for self-determination. Kurdish self-determination was, however, as antipathetic to US national interests as Arab nationalism. Covert support for Barzani's KDP was not given with the intention that the Kurds achieve success. The Kurds were merely another pawn in the game of Middle Eastern *realpolitik*. Concrete evidence of this is established by the fact that when, in 1969, US officers were meeting with Barzani in Iraq, in Turkey at the same time, US trained commandos were suppressing Kurds in the southeast.

The US justified its *realpolitik* in the Middle East on the grounds that it was engaged in the Cold War with the Soviet Union. Its defence, however, is hard to reconcile with the fact that the Soviets were simultaneously supplying the KDP with arms, destabilising Iraq and attempting to gain influence with Iran. Both superpowers appear to have had identical policy ends: access to oil, suppression of an Iraq able to dominate the Arab world and friendship with Iran. In this respect, Soviet designs appear to have been less involved in communist expansion and more to do with equitable access to Middle East markets.

The Nixon-Kissinger involvement with the Shah could be interpreted as a mis-

application of the principles of realist foreign policy making. Both appear to have been seduced by the Shah; Nixon, when vice-president under Eisenhower, and Kissinger, as Nixon's National Security Advisor [Nixon 1978: 133, Kissinger 1979: 1258ff]. Apparently, both permitted self-delusion to translate into unquestioning support for the Shah. Gaddis has argued this phenomenon was symptomatic of Kissinger's approach to regional policy formulation. Kissinger, according to Gaddis, failed to interpret regional problems in a regional context, preferring to translate the overarching superpower rivalry into all situations that developed [Gaddis 1982: 333-4]. From a realist perspective, there may be some grounds for accepting Gaddis' critique; after all, Saddam Hussein's lurch towards the Soviet Union was the catalyst for Nixon and Kissinger's decision to provide covert aid to the Kurdish insurrection in Iraq.

Saddam Hussein's policy shift was, however, strategic, not ideological. His intention was to gain a *de facto* security umbrella to stabilise the Iraqi political situation and nationalise the Iraqi oil industry. He *had* learnt something from the Mossadeq disaster, while the Americans would not learn their lesson until 1979, when the Shah was overthrown. Soviet impact was limited because Saddam successfully played the Soviets off against the French. Also, the Soviets were still intent on establishing a relationship with Iran as their subsequent denial of arms to Iraq proved.

Kissinger may have erred in pinning too much hope on the Shah but Kissinger used the Kurdish problem to solve the impasse between Israel and Egypt in the aftermath of the 1973 war. The Kurdish insurrection also denied the Iraqis the ability to effectively participate in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War.

The relationship between the Kurdish-Iraq civil war and the Arab-Israeli War provides further evidence of Kissinger's motives in the Middle East. Kissinger was quite prepared for the Kurds to reduce Iraq's ability to fight in the war but he was against the Kurds denying Iraq total participation. During the war, 'Israeli paramilitary advisors suggested to the Kurds that now was the time for a big offensive against Iraq. Barzani thought this a good idea; the White House did not. On October 16, 1973, Kissinger instructed the Director of the CIA to order the Kurds not to make the attack. Barzani relented' [Prados 1986: 314]. Obviously, Kissinger didn't want the Israelis to be too successful. An overwhelming Israeli victory would have destroyed any chance of peace in the Middle East and Sadat would have been unable to continue his move towards the West which Kissinger so highly desired. Perhaps Kissinger hadn't mistakenly translated the overarching superpower rivalry into the situation as Gaddis claims.

Kissinger and Nixon may have failed to predict the effect their support and massive arms sales would have on the eventual downfall of the Shah but as was discussed in chapter two, the United States soon found a new proxy in the form of Iraq. And despite the oil price increase in 1973 and the subsequent inflationary pressures on Western economies, major American corporations (oil companies, arms manufacturers and development firms) found a secure market in the Middle East and reaped massive profits. The containment of Iraq ensured that revolutionary nationalism was impeded for most of the 1970s: Arab nationalism, Palestinian and Kurdish self-determination were held in check. Revisionist history is, therefore, correct in asserting that Cold War foreign policy had more to do with protecting American interests than containing Soviet expansion. If anything, the

Friendship Treaty gave the United States the pretext to further assert its influence in the region thus ensuring increased control over Middle Eastern oil, OPEC's attempts to assert its independence notwithstanding.

The Nixon-Kissinger foreign policy is probably best articulated in Nixon's first annual report on foreign policy which Kissinger drafted:

'Our objective, in the first instance, is to support our *interests* over the long run with a sound foreign policy. The more that policy is based on a realistic assessment of our and others' interests, the more effective our role in the world can be. We are not involved in the world because we have commitments; we have commitments because we are involved. Our interests must shape our commitments, rather than the other way round.' (emphasis in original) [First Annual Report to the Congress on United States foreign policy for the 1970s', 18/2/70, in *Nixon Papers*, 1970 vol., p.119, quoted in Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 1994, 711-12].

Support for the Kurds fell into the 'interest' basket rather than 'commitment', and the Iraqi Kurds lost out on all counts. If they had accepted the autonomy deal initially offered by Saddam Hussein, perhaps, they would have gained the respite necessary to co-ordinate their opposition to the regime in Baghdad. Continuing the insurrection only led to further suffering. Barzani failed to take heed of the important lesson of the Mahabad Republic. Also Barzani, foolishly believed that the United States would be more honourable than either the Soviets or the Shah had been in 1945, forgetting that British and US pressure had forced the hand of the Soviet Union in the first place. Barzani's blind faith in the Americans also led to further fragmentation of the Kurdish cause when the young, educated rebels defected to form the PUK.

The Khomeini regime precipitated the downfall of Jimmy Carter and with Carter's loss, came Reagan's electoral gain. (And an even greater gain for the US military-industrial complex.) It is difficult to defend the Reagan policy towards Iran during the Iran-Iraq War as one solely based on containment. The duplicitous support of both sides belies this argument. Although the failure of both sides to achieve victory permitted the United States to maintain its hegemony in the region and maintain a cheap supply of oil, it also permitted US business to reap massive profits from the sale of arms, not only from the protagonists, but also from fearful neighbouring states. When a ceasefire was mediated by the US and the Soviet Union, American business continued to reap benefits through tax-payer subsidised loans and credits to Iraq.

The Kurdish insurrections in Iraq and Iran also indirectly furthered American aims. Because of their failure to unite, the Kurds achieved little for themselves but provided the United States with nuisance value in the war. A Kurdish success would have been a threat to US interests. A Kurdish state would have been a loose cannon undermining the territorial integrity of Iran, Iraq and Turkey. When Saddam Hussein launched the Anfal campaign against the Kurds it was also not in US national interest, strategically or economically, to intervene. Once again the Kurds were sacrificed to expediency. Furthermore, the Iran-Iraq War permitted the Turkish military to continue its suppression of the Kurds with impunity.

America's response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait stands in stark contrast to its reaction to Iraq's Anfal campaign. The latter elicited few of the emotions of

the former despite the comparative lack of brutality of Iraqi troops in Kuwait. Bush's shock and horror at the invasion reflected a more atavistic fear; the loss of US hegemony in the Middle East. The subsequent war permitted Bush to punish a disobedient proxy. When this was achieved, Bush's main concern was the maintenance of the territorial integrity of Iraq. After it became apparent that Saddam Hussein would not be dislodged by elements within his armed forces, Bush initiated a program designed to stifle Kurdish and Shia self-determination. If the Western media hadn't brought the Kurdish refugee problem to the world's attention, Saddam Hussein may have succeeded in annihilating them; no doubt with the complicity of the Turkish military.

The United States, Iran, Iraq and Turkey should not be forced to shoulder all the blame for the plight of the Kurds. The Kurds are not innocent either. Historically, and as noted in the divisions of the PUK and the KDP, they have failed to unite against their oppressors. More often than not one group of Kurds has chosen to collaborate with its host state against another group. The major reason for this is the tribal nature of Kurdish society.

As discussed in chapter one, Barzani was essentially a tribal leader. His son, who continues to lead the KDP, maintains his position through tribal support. Urbanised Iraqi Kurds resented and disavowed tribal support which led to the formation of the PUK. The rifts between the PUK and the KDP continues to this day, despite outside attempts at mediation; the most recent in Dublin last year. Again, the outsiders are not interested in uniting the KDP and the PUK for the sake of Kurdish self-determination. The United States and Turkey, the major sponsors of the peace talks, are more interested in suppressing the PKK

which poses a greater threat to US and Turkish interests. The Iraqi Kurds continue to live in their safe haven at the pleasure of the United States and Turkey. Should they attempt to assert any degree of independence, protection would be withdrawn. This would result in further oppression from Baghdad. The Kurds are aware of this and tread lightly in their relationship with Turkey.

In March and April 1995, Turkey invaded the safe haven in pursuit of PKK guerillas. Despite Turkey's claims to the contrary, often the targets were either Iraqi Kurds or Turkish Kurds who had sought refuge from the war in the southeast. The United States acquiesced to Turkey's invasion to the point that American aircraft, ostensibly in the region to protect Kurds from aggression, were grounded. Once again, an American administration paid scant regard to the territorial integrity of Iraq. While the Europeans objected vociferously, the United States' response was mute. When evidence eventually pointed to Turkish human rights abuses, the United States called for Turkey's quick withdrawal from Iraq. Little pressure, however, was placed on the Turkish government.

Turkey is now too important to US interests in the region to occasion punishment for transgressions of international law. Central to American foreign policy is containment of both Iraq and Iran. Turkey is the new US 'policeman' of the Gulf entrusted with its implementation. Despite Turkey's human rights record, (much of it documented by the US State Department), and congressional opposition, the Clinton administration continues to supply Turkey with attack helicopters, cluster bombs and other arms which the Turkish military uses against both Iraqi and Turkish Kurds. Little has

changed, therefore, in the last fifty years. The Kurds continue to be subject to US national interest.

NOTES**Introduction**

¹ 'Dirk Hoerder calls the Revolutionary leadership "the Sons of Liberty type drawn from the middling interest and well-to-do merchants a hesitant leadership," wanting to spur action against Great Britain, yet worrying about maintaining control over the crowds at home.' Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, 1980, p.65-6

² A rebuttal of the opposing realist and neo-realist arguments is not within the scope of this essay. Hopefully, the essay itself will refute their supposed value.

NOTES

Chapter One

¹ Wilson's commitment to self-determination is suspect given that during his two administrations (1913-21) the United States invaded and / or interfered with Mexico (1914-17, 1918-19), Haiti (1915), Cuba (1917), Soviet Russia (1918-) *et al.* Apparently Wilson's view of self-determination was predicated on the idea that it should only apply to ethnic groups subject to European colonialism but not those subject to US 'manifest destiny'. In this respect his idealism seems akin to that of Franklin D. Roosevelt whose calls during the Second World War for self-determination after Germany and Japan's defeat appear to have been based on the subtext that dissolution of colonial empires would provide new markets for American business. (*cf* Blum, *The CIA: A Forgotten History*, 1986, Appendix II, Chomsky *Year 501: The Conquest Continues*, 1993)

² The Shah was also threatened by Iranian Kurdish insurrectionists. Part of the deal to continue supplying Barzani with arms was a stipulation that the Iraqi KDP would desist from assisting the Iranian KDP [Chaliand, *The Kurdish Tragedy*, 1994, p.61].

³In 1971, forty thousand Kurds were deported to Iran on the pretext, no doubt dubious, that they were illegal immigrants. Also, during 1972, tens of thousands of Kurds left the province due to the pressure caused by Saddam's transfer of Iraqi Arabs to northern Iraq.

⁴ According to the secret agreement the Americans would supply arms and training on the following conditions: 1. only high ranking Kurds were to be informed of the deal, 2. Barzani would overthrow the Ba'ath, 3. Barzani would accept no aid from the Soviets, 4. the KDP would create no problems for the Shah and 5. no communists were to be involved in Barzani's insurrection. Entessar *Kurdish Ethnonationalism* 1992, p.119. Barzani attempted to fulfil most of the conditions but refused to give up his Soviet aid. According to Timmerman, (*The Death Lobby*, 1993, p.12) Barzani was in receipt of Soviet aid until atleast the signing of the 1972 Friendship Treaty between Iraq and the USSR, if not later.

⁵ The full Pike Report has never been released. Sections of the report were published in New York's *Village Voice* weekly newspaper on 16 and 23 February, 1976. The report was also referred to by William Safire in two of his columns for the *New York Times* on 5 and 12 February, 1976. The *New York Times* declined to publish the report in its news pages. In addition, details of the report were published in the French newspaper *L'Express* from 8 -14 March 1976.

⁶ Barzani is also credited with declaring that he would make 'Kurdistan' the 51st state of the US. Blum, *The CIA: A Forgotten History*, 1994, [CD-ROM edn] And when Kissinger was married, he sent a wedding present, the existence of which was kept secret from the American public. Vanly, 'Kurdistan in Iraq' in Chaliand (ed), *A People Without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan*, (2nd edn), 1993, p.170

⁷ According to a CIA memo dated 17/10/72, the Shah had offered peace to the Iraqis two months after the US and Iran started to back the Kurds. The central demand from the Shah related to Iraq

'publicly abrogating an old frontier treaty' concerning the Shatt-al-arab. At that time, Saddam Hussein was not ready to negotiate. Pike Report quoted in Vanly, *op.cit.*, p.171

⁸ Later Kissinger was more contrite. In a newspaper column on the Kurdish tragedy following the 1991 Kuwait War, Kissinger said that his 1975 decision had been "painful, even heartbreaking." *ibid* p.564 (Body and footnote quote). Whether much stock can be placed in Kissinger's latter-day contrition is doubtful considering that Kissinger has continually defended his and Nixon's secret war in Cambodia (Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* 1982, pp. 335ff and pp.1217-1230, Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 1994, pp.692ff) and Kissinger and Associates were prime movers of the US investment drive into Iraq in the late 1980s. (Conason, 'The Iraqi Lobby', *The New Republic*, 1/10/90, 14-16)

NOTES

Chapter Two

¹ 'It wasn't that we wanted Iraq to win the war; we did not want Iraq to lose. We really weren't naive. We knew (Saddam) was an S.O.B., but he was our S.O.B.' Geoffrey Kemp, head of the Middle East section in the Reagan White House. Miller & Mylroie, *Saddam Hussein and the Crisis in the Gulf*, 1990, p.143, quoted in Smith, *George Bush's War*, 1992, p.43.

² In mid 1980 the Kurds controlled 120,000 sq. kms of Iranian Kurdistan. When Iran had the upper hand in the war they launched an offensive against the Kurds. By early 1984, the Kurdish controlled region had been virtually eliminated. McDowall, *The Kurds: A Divided Nation*, 1992, pp.75-77.

³ Sick alleges that the Reagan campaign staff were fearful that Carter would pull off an 'October Surprise' before the 1980 election and obtain the release of the American hostages in Iran, thus guaranteeing his re-election in November. According to Sick, William Casey (then Reagan's campaign director and subsequently CIA director) and George Bush supported by intelligence and foreign policy officials disenchanted with the Carter administration negotiated a secret deal with Tehran to postpone the release of the hostages until Reagan was president in return for arms supplies - the beginnings of the Iran-Contra scandal. The hostages were released 20 minutes after Reagan was inaugurated president on 20 January, 1980. Considering the way, Casey subsequently directed the CIA, there may be some truth to the allegations. (cf: Woodward, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA 1981-87*) Sick, *October Surprise: America's Hostages in Iran and the Election of Ronald Reagan*, 1991. Also see Hitchens, 'Minority Report' column, *The Nation*, 22/4/91, 511, Corn, 'Probing "October Surprise": Leads Congress Should Pursue', *The Nation*, 24/6/91, 844-846 and Cornduff and Corrigan, 'The October Surprise', *Z magazine*, June 1991.

⁴ A Social Democratic Populist Party (SHP) report published in Turkey in 1986 alleged that eastern Turkey was 'a sort of concentration camp (with) every citizen a suspect.' McDowall, *op.cit.*, p.47.

⁵ cf Cockburn & Cohen, *op.cit. Contra*: Telhami ('Between Theory and Fact: Explaining US Behaviour in the Gulf Crisis' in Ismael & Ismael (eds), *The Gulf War and the New World Order*, 1994, 153-183) disputes this assertion claiming that by the spring of 1990, the US was turning away from Iraq. She cites as evidence Saddam's speech in early 1990 warning Arab leaders that the US was now the major power in the region and the Arab states should therefore consider withdrawing their investments in the Western world and perhaps re-invest in Eastern Europe and Russia. She contends that the US reacted to this speech by cooling relations with Iraq. Telhami's argument is unique in studies of the period and appears to contradict the available evidence. The administration did withdraw CCC credits to Iraq, however, this decision seems to have been precipitated by the brewing scandal that came to be known as Iraqgate. cf. references cited in note 8.

⁶ For detailed accounts of the relationship see Karabell, 'Backfire: US Policy Toward Iraq, 1988-2 August 1990', *Middle East Journal*, vol 49, no.1, (Winter 1995), 28-47, Gigot, 'A Great American Screw-Up: The US and Iraq, 1980-1990', *The National Interest*, 22, (Winter 1990/91), 3-10, Cockburn & Cohen, 'The Unnecessary War' in Brittain (ed), *The Gulf Between Us: The Gulf War and Beyond*, 1991, pp.1-25, Timmerman, *The Death Lobby: How the West Armed Iraq*, 1992,

Darwish & Alexander, *Unholy Babylon: The Secret History of Saddam's War*, 1991 and Hitchens, 'Realpolitik in the Gulf: A Game Gone Tilt', *Harper's*, January 1991, in Sifry & Cerf (eds), *The Gulf War Reader*, 1991, pp.107-118.

⁷ N.B. In the discussion that follows I am not attempting to infer or allege that members of the Bush and Reagan administrations engaged in criminal activities in their relationships with American companies and the government of Iraq and its representatives.

⁸For a detailed examination of 'Iraqgate' see Friedman, *Spider's Web*, 1993, Timmerman, *The Death Lobby*, 1992, Pizzo, Fricker & Hogan, 'Shredded Justice', *Mother Jones*, January/February 1993, Pizzo, 'Dirty Justice', *Mother Jones*, March/April 1993, Safire, 'Cover-Up Triumphs', *San Francisco Chronicle*, 21/2/95, A17, 'Justice Dept. Finds There Was No "Iraqgate"', *Arms Sales Monitor* 28, (15/2/95), 4, 'Bush Administration Cleared in Iraqgate', *San Francisco Chronicle*, 24/1/95, A3, and Juster, 'The Myth of Iraqgate', *Foreign Policy*, 94, (Spring 1994), 105-119, Karabell, 'Backfire: US Policy Toward Iraq, 1988 - 2 August 1990', *Middle East Journal*, 49/1, (Winter 1995), 28-47

⁹ For Bush see 'A Collective Effort to Reverse Iraqi Aggression', 22 and 30 August 1990, *Current Policy* 1296 (Washington DC: US Dept of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, 1990) cited in Telhami, *op.cit.*, 154. Baker initially argued that the invasion threatened American jobs. When this didn't wash with the American people or Congress, he changed his tack and began to argue that the invasion threatened oil supplies. Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 1995, p.335ff.

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