

The Tragic Modern History of the Kurds

by Hussein Askary

“If you are not a flower, don’t be a thorn.”
—Kurdish proverb

Having lived most of my life among Kurds, I can say that they are a people with a great sense of humor and self-irony. Therefore, they survive tragic developments. However, their political leaders have a self-conception of being “underlings” of major powers involved in a “grand strategy,” not national leaders representing legitimate aspirations of their people. They are today, once again, playing a dangerous game which could end with a tragedy whereby their people will be crushed by regional powers Iran, Turkey, and Syria, which see themselves as threatened by Anglo-American-Israeli schemes in the region. At the same time, the Kurds are risking a civil war in Iraq.

The Kurdish people, about 20 million in number, are geographically spread in mountainous regions spanning northern Iraq, northwest Iran, northeast Syria, southeast Turkey, Armenia, and parts of the Caucasus. They are Muslims; they speak different dialects of an Indo-European-family language, Kurdish, which is closer to Persian, Urdu, and Hindi than to the Semitic languages such as Arabic and Hebrew. About 8 million Kurds live in Turkey, 4-5 million in Iran, 4-5 in Iraq, and the rest in Syria and the Caucasus. The subject of this article is the leadership of the Kurds in Iraq; a longer feature will deal with the complex history of manipulation of the Kurds in “big power” geopolitical chess games.

Decades of Manipulation

The modern history of the Kurds of Iraq is a tragi-comedy of sorts. Just read the words of the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), Masoud Barzani, who is the major U.S. ally in Iraq today. The following are excerpts from an interview given by him to the Arabic daily *Al-Hayat*, published on Nov. 11, 2002, regarding Mullah Mustafa Barzani, Masoud’s father:

Al-Hayat: “Is it possible to lead a complicated struggle in an extremely complex region, on the basis of sincerity?”

Barzani: “[No], that’s why he became a victim of this sincerity many times.

Al-Hayat: “Who deceived Mullah Mustafa Al-Barzani?”

Barzani: “Many did. Many of them were Kurds. When

deceit comes from within the Kurdish household, it is painful. There were those who deceived and annoyed him for some time, but the big double-cross came from Henry Kissinger. The big and effective double-cross came from Kissinger.

Al-Hayat: “Do you mean the 1975 Algeria Agreement between Saddam and the Shah [of Iran]?”

Barzani: “Yes, if it were not for Kissinger’s deceit, the Shah would not have dared to betray Barzani.

Al-Hayat: “The relationship between the Shah and Barzani was not that good.

Barzani: “Not at all; the relationship lacked the crucial element upon which any serious relationship would be built, that is trust.

Al-Hayat: “But Iran did give support to the Kurds, didn’t it?”

Masoud Barzani: “Yes, Iran had an interest and we had certain interests. But, it was obvious that it did not desire the [Kurdish] revolt to succeed. The Kurds needed any help, because their existence was threatened. Iran had disputes with Iraq, and wanted to use the Kurds as a playing card in negotiating with the Iraqi regime on the Shat al-Arab [river] and other issues. But, the Shah’s capability to deceive Barzani was limited. When Kissinger came on the line, it became possible for the Shah to strike a deal with the Iraqis at the expense of the Kurds. And this is what happened.

Al-Hayat: “This means that the Kurdish people keep some bitter memories about Kissinger’s role?”

Barzani: “Of course. Kissinger bears the main responsibility for the disaster which befell the Kurdish people after 1975. In 1993, I was in Washington, and he [Kissinger] asked to meet me, but I refused. For me, he is enemy number one. I will never forget what the Kurds had to pay as a result of his stances, maneuvers, and the deals he made without taking into consideration the suffering these caused.”

Israeli Involvement

The background to this, in brief, is the following:

Mullah Mustafa Barzani was a clan leader in northern Iraq. He founded the KDP in 1946 and joined the 1946-47 Kurdish “Mahabad Republic” uprising in Iran, with the support of Soviet Russia and under its protection, as it was an occupation force in Iran since World War II. The Soviets withdrew in 1947 and the “Mahabad Republic” collapsed. Barzani sought asylum in Russia and was trained by the Russian military. He returned to northern Iraq in the early days of the Cold War as a Soviet asset, against Anglo-American assets Iraq, Iran, and Turkey, who were forming the Baghdad Pact. In 1958, with the outbreak of the Iraqi republican revolution and the overthrow of the British-controlled monarchy, the Kurds joined the revolution. But as Iraq moved more toward the “socialist camp,” the Anglo-American intelligence apparatus was looking for “a client” to destabilize Iraq, and their choice became the Kurds, who would be recruited, in collaboration with the Shah of Iran and Israel, through

promises of support to get independence. This process intensified in the mid-1960s, as Israel was preparing its expansionist assault in the region.

Former Israeli Mossad agent Victor Ostrovsky wrote in one of his books: "Starting in 1958, as part of an alliance with the Shah of Iran, Israel started arming and training Kurds in northern Iraq to revive their struggle against the Baghdad government. In 1963, Mossad increased the volume of aid, turning what up until that time had been a small intelligence contingency kept alive with occasional arms shipments into a massive onslaught of weapons and military advisers, all channeled through Iran. . . . In August 1965, the first training course run by Israeli instructors for Kurdish officers was held in the mountains of Kurdistan. Israeli meetings with Kurdish political leaders were held in Tehran. One result, according to some reports, was that the Kurds mounted an offensive against the Iraqis at the time of the June 1967 war, keeping Iraq from offering aid to other Arab armies. After the 1967 war, the Kurds were supplied with Soviet equipment captured by Israel from Egypt and Syria. Israel also provided the Kurds with some \$500,000 a month, and Iraqi Kurdish leader Mulla Mustafa Barzani visited Israel in 1967 and again in 1973. Also in 1973, the Kurdish rebellion in northern Iraq was expanded from a purely Israeli-Iranian project to include support from the U.S. Several CIA liaison officers were stationed in Barzani's headquarters."

Barzani visited Israel in 1968, to meet with government officials and leaders of different parties.

The new Iraqi Baathist government, which came to power in 1968 through a military coup, realized that the Israelis and other world powers were intending to play the Kurds once again as a geopolitical card, and decided to negotiate an "autonomy" agreement with Barzani. Ironically, the negotiations were headed on the Iraqi side by then-Vice President Saddam Hussein; in March 1970, the Kurdish Autonomy agreement was concluded, which stated that the Kurds were a distinct cultural group and had the right to practice that culture and their language, and to run their own internal security and political affairs within the framework of a unified Iraq. Several Kurds would be included in the central government in Baghdad. The two sensitive aspects over which the Kurdish autonomous region could not have power, were oil revenues and the army.

Henry Kissinger came into the picture when he started pushing the Kurds to demand further rights, mainly control over the petroleum wealth of Kirkuk, and an independent economic policy. Kissinger promised the Kurds support if they went against the agreement, and assured them of the support of the U.S.-puppet, the Shah of Iran, in a rebellion to be financed by the CIA to the tune of \$61 million.

The rebellion started in 1973. At that point the Iraqis were ready even to talk about the new Kurdish demands. Barzani's advisors told him that this was the best the Kurds could ever get; but he replied that he had assurances from the U.S. side.

However, by 1974-75, Kissinger turned around and arranged a deal between Iran and Iraq, whereby Iraq would hand over to the Iranians, control of the eastern bank of the Shat al-Arab River in southern Iraq on the border between the two countries. In return, Iran would drop its support for the "Kurdish cause." This became known as the 1975 Algeria Agreement.

The Kurds were double-crossed, their uprising finished, and 200,000 refugees fled to Iran. The Shah made a good deal, and Kissinger won some favors with the Iraqi regime, which was leaning more and more toward the Soviet Union, especially after the nationalization of Iraqi oil away from British control in 1972.

Now, this was the exact time-frame in which Lyndon LaRouche was involved with the Israeli, Iraqi, and other Arab nations, to find a peaceful solution for the region on the basis of "peace through development." Kissinger worked feverishly to sabotage that effort.

Barzani went down to ultimate humiliation when the Shah refused to meet him, and when he went to the United States the next year, no American top official would either. He was only provided with a bed in a hospital where he died of cancer in 1979.

So, what makes Masoud Barzani, with all this insight into the treatment accorded his father, trust a Paul Wolfowitz (a less sophisticated thug than Kissinger)? Is it the "underling" mentality, which turns him and the Kurds repeatedly into tools of big powers?

Future Prospects for the Kurds

It is obvious from a look at the map that the Kurds will never be allowed to play a negative strategic role against the nations of the region. The Kurds are metaphorically and physically "landlocked." Forget about the oil of Kirkuk. How would an independent Kurdistan transport crude oil to the world markets? By aircraft? So, how should they define their relationship to the nations of the region and the world?

This author, who became aware of the reality of the political world in the midst of the suffering of the Kurdish people, intends to be a "flower, not a thorn." Therefore, in discussion with Kurdish politicians, he lays out the only viable solution for the "Kurdish Question." In the framework of the LaRouche Doctrine and LaRouche's Eurasian Land-Bridge strategy, the Kurdish areas could become one of the most developed regions in Eurasia. It has water, energy, minerals, arable land, and an educated labor force. Like the population of Iraq, they are highly motivated and oriented toward economic and cultural development. The Kurds could turn their region into a center of development, transportation, and trade among peacefully cooperating nation-states; nation-states that are equally sovereign and unified, where, in each respective nation, the Kurds are regarded as equal citizens, although retaining their distinct language and cultural features that have to be respected and protected.