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**The plight of Kurdish Nationalism: Critical Analysis of the
Kurdish National Movement in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria
Around The First World War**

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
University Of Waikato

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By Handren Delan
University of Waikato

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Abstract

During recent years the Kurdish question has reappeared, more intensely than before, on the international agenda. For years, this question has been of fundamental concern to the countries of the region, and it has led to extensive internal controversies and economic and social crises. The number of Kurds in the four parts of Kurdistan and within the borders of the four countries that have divided it up between themselves totals about 35 million. This makes the Kurds, after the Arabs, Turks, and Persians, the fourth-largest nation in the Middle East

The Kurds are, together with the Arabs, Persians, and Armenians, one of the most ancient peoples of the Near East. The country they inhabit is called Kurdistan. The Kurds have their own language, Kurdish. Kurdish is a member of the Indo-European family of languages; like Persian, Afghan, and Beluchi, it is one of the Iranian languages. Kurdish is unrelated to the Arabic or Turkish languages

Kurds have played a significant role in the history of this region since its early epochs. A great deal of information on this can be found in numerous Greek, Roman, Arab, and Armenian sources. According to them, the Kurds founded several important states during the Islamic epoch between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, such as Shaddâdiden, Marvâniden, and Ayyûbiden - as well as in the distant past. Sultan Salahaddin (Salâh al-Dîn), the founder of the Ayyûbid state, which included Egypt, Syria, and Kurdistan, played a particularly significant role in history

This thesis attempts to examine the main characteristics of Kurdish nationalism. In order to that, the theses will analyze the social structure of the Kurdish society. The thesis thoroughly explains the agitations of the Kurds against the Ottoman Empire during nineteenth century and beyond. This thesis examines the Kurdish reactions in the course of the First World War against the Empires of Ottomans and Persia, which divided the Kurdish land between themselves. The thesis analysis the stunning obstacles in the face of the Kurds in formation of their national state in aftermath of the Ottoman Empire. This

study can be a cornerstone to understand the inherent weakness of the Kurdish nationalism in integrating all social and sectarian groups within the Kurdish society.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The Kurds are undertaking a period of significant reawakening of their national consciousness as a nation. Kurds have been aware of their distinctive characteristics for over centuries. Being linguistically and culturally different from Arabs, Turks, and Persians, they have had a disturbing history in the region and hence have had uneasy relationship with these hostile nations. In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Kurds have continuously revolted for their national rights. Faced with the combination of remarkable domestic and international developments, the Kurdish society has entered a new era of their national awakening. Their assertiveness has emerged within the context of the modern world of nations-states that have been shaping human life since the Treaty of Westappahila (1648). Today, with spread of the democratic ideals and human rights norms, Kurdish nationalism is surfacing as a formidable entity in the Middle Eastern region. The emergence of a more cohesive nationalist awareness is a political evolution that has been continuing with ups and downs in the last over two centuries. This thesis mainly will attempt in analyzing Kurdish nationalism and the reasons why Kurdish nationalism has not been able to be a currency of a Kurdish national state like the nationalisms of other peoples in this region. This thesis is made of the ten chapters and each chapter will deal with a distinctive context in the history of the Kurdish nationalism.

Chapter two will examine the problems that have been integrative part of the theoretical history of nationalism as a concept. Since nationalism is a Western concept, this chapter explains certain aspect of the problems that have been part of the European history, where for the first time nationalist ideas inspired peoples to raise their voice against the autocratic regimes of the period. This chapter also analyses the main schools of thoughts on nationalism, and in this context, Kurdish nationalism will be examined. Furthermore, this chapter gives us a glimpse of a couple of the Kurdish-poets, Ahmedi Khani and Haji Qadri Koye, whose nationalist aspirations strongly motivated their intellectual work

dating back to seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Since their nationalist-inspired poems correspond to the changes occurring on the European land and since they were fully cognizant of the nationalist-driven revolutions of nineteenth century in Europe, these two poets will be a subject of our analysis in the initial stage of the Kurdish national awakening within the Kurdish intellectual elite from seventeen to the nineteenth century.

Chapter Three attempts to analyze the myths, symbols and language which form the Kurdish distinctive character from that of other neighboring nations which deny the right of nationhood to the Kurds. This chapter will build an understanding on what is distinctive about the Kurds, and how historically Kurds tried to retain their particular characteristics. Additionally, this chapter elaborates on the heterogeneity of the Kurdish religious sects and dialectics. The significance of this chapter can be seen in the fact that Kurds historically invoke their distinctive features to back up their claim of nationhood whereas nations surrounding Kurdistan justify certain aggressive policies to weaken and remove those inherent features of Kurdistan. This chapter finally explains how the lack of a standardized language undermined the efforts of building a cohesive national awakening.

Chapter Four critically discusses the first Kurdish agitations against the Ottomans in the nineteenth century. The motivating factors that stimulated the agitations will be examined. Furthermore, this chapter examines the tribal structure of the Kurdish society, and how this structure hindered the attempts in unifying the Kurdish people during the nineteenth century. Additionally, the question whether the Kurdish agitations were nationalist-inspired or not, will be analyzed. This chapter focuses on the Kurdish last revolt led by Sheikh Ubaidulla, which was a topic of heated debates among the scholars on Kurdish nationalism as the leadership of the revolt presented a clear manifestation of the movement for the first time. Furthermore, this chapter looks into the Kurdish-Ottoman alliance during before the World War I, and the main reasons behind the alliance will be examined.

Chapter Five analyses the status of the Kurdish national movement approaching the World War I. This chapter is an attempt to examine the situation of Kurdish national movement during the war and in post-war. In addition to that, this chapter attempts to critically analyse the divisions within the Kurdish movement, and how this division weakened the Kurdish position in post-war negotiations. The stunning factors that contributed to the Kurdish failure in establishing a state of their own will be examined. The last section elaborates how the rise of Turkish Nationalism in post-war period dramatically changed the balance of power in Turkish favor, and also how major powers reacted to the emerging new political dynamics in Turkey.

Chapter Six attempts to explain the creation of new state of Iraq and the inclusion of the Kurds in it. This chapter examines the identity crisis in the 1920s, and presents the factors that produced a major problem of identity for later generations of the peoples living in the new state. The chapter presents a coherent explanation of the Kurdish reaction to the new state. Furthermore, the causes that had made the Kurds fail in the 1920s will be thoroughly discussed. In order to be able to present the chief factors behind the Kurdish failure, this chapter examines the Kurdish political dynamics in Iraq. Finally, an attempt is made to examine the role of British which chiefly contributed the success of the central government over the Kurdish movement throughout 1920s.

Chapter Seven critically analysis Attaturk's project of nation-building along the line of the western civil notion of nations. In the context of the Kemalists program for building a new nation-state, the Kurdish reaction will be examined. The chapter mainly focuses on the revolution led by the Kurdish nationalist movement against the new state. Furthermore, this chapter explains the reasons why the Kurdish revolution failed. Additionally, this chapter analyses the impact of the Kurdish reaction to the successive governments of Turkey throughout the twenty century. Furthermore, the impact of the Kurdish reaction to the Turkish and Kurdish psyche will be discussed.

Chapter Eight examines the situation of the Kurds in the Persia during the First World War and after. Since the major rebellion occurred in the area of Kurdistan bordering Turkey, particular attention is paid to the rebellion led by Smko, chief of the largest Kurdish tribe. This chapter attempts to highlight and explain the main factors behind the rebellion. Furthermore, the situation of the Kurdish nationalist movement in that part of Kurdistan will be examined. In the context of that, this chapter examines the chief reasons which led to the failure of the Kurdish rebellion.

Chapter Nine attempts to examine the situation of the Kurds in Syria. The Kurds in Syria unlike their ethnic brethren in Iraq and Turkey enjoyed a degree of freedom under the French. In particular, the secular Kurds seemed to have been content with the French mandate, and during the course of the mandate they were allowed to enjoy the use of their language and cultural practices. This certainly changed once the Arab nationalists in the 1950s and later Bahtists in the 1960s took power. This chapter mainly focuses on the situation of the Kurds in the post-French mandate. The policies of Bathists during 1960s and 1970s will be thoroughly examined. Furthermore, this chapter examines the question of the Syrian identity in the post-independence period and its impact on the Kurdish inhabitants. An attempt is also made to address the overall situation of the Kurdish nationalist movement in Syria.

Chapter Ten is an overall conclusion of all the thesis. This chapter will briefly explain the main reasons and factors which led to the failure of the Kurdish national movement in post-Ottoman Kurdistan.

Chapter Two

Methodology of Nationalism

2.1 Introduction

This chapter attempts to examine theoretical definition of nationalism and the ambiguity associated with the concept throughout its modern history. In order to clarify the conceptual problem, first it is important to assign a few pages of the chapter to explain the term ‘nationalism’ within the context of political and sociological thought. Since nationalism is a currency of nation, this chapter analysis the concept of nation and its main forms in contemporary political literature. National consciousness which plays a pivotal role in arousing nationalism and building a nation is thoroughly examined. In order to explain the concept and nationalism coherently, a few European examples will be brought to light. In the context of these elaborations, particular attention is paid to two Kurdish historic figures, namely Ahmed Khani and Haji Aqader Koy who was heavily influenced by European ideas of nationalism and secularism in the nineteenth century. These two figures were the first among the Kurdish intellectual elite in raising the Kurdish distinctiveness from that of their neighbours, and their work became the cornerstones of the Kurdish national awakening. The reason, these two prominent figures are subject of central attention in the Kurdish national consciousness is because they raised the sense of Kurdish-ness as distinct different from that of the Ottoman Turks, Safavid Persians, and Arabs on the South at a time when the concept of nationalism and nation were topics of heated arguments in Europe while it was a matter of taboo in the eyes of the Ottomans.

2.2 Definitional Confusion

Nationalism is a political force that has been shaping the history of mankind over the last two centuries. The roots of modern nationalism dates back to the late eighteen century Western Europe and North America. From there it subsequently spread to the whole of

Europe and eventually to all parts of the world. Nationalism along with socialism is one of the two dominant thoughts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the nineteenth and twenty centuries, nationalism has achieved some tangible success, its importance growing by leaps and bounds in Europe before and after the first world war, and then particularly after the second world war in Asia and Africa¹.

The plethora of phenomenon, which is subsumed under the term 'nationalism', suggests that it is one of the most ambiguous concepts in the contemporary vocabulary of political and analytical thought. The program of the insurgent movements in the Balkan under the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires in the nineteenth century or Africa in the twentieth century may as easily be classified under the category of nationalism as may the expression of one people by another. Nationalism has been and continues to be part of the make-up of both imperialism and anti-imperialism. Also, it can be associated with the forces striving for political, social, economic and cultural emancipation, as well as with those whose goal is oppression².

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, large multi-national empires which had emerged during the course of history, such as the Ottoman or Habsburg empires, broke down asunder in the name of nationalism; these multinational states were succeeded by large number of small nation-states. In the last century and half, new nation-states such as Greece, Italy, the German Reich, Ireland, Poland, and nations of the Middle East were all proclaimed in the name of nationalism. Nationalist aspirations and interests were among the driving force behind the colonial expansion of the European powers as they created overseas empires in Asia, Africa, and other parts of the world. Nationalism which during the French revolution became synonymous with the freedom and liberation of the oppressed, lost its prestigious currency and became synonymous with intolerance, inhumanity and violence between 1918 and 1945. In the name of nationalism, bloody wars were fought and heinous crimes were perpetrated³. It inspired the violent eviction of people from their homelands and justified campaigns of territorial conquest. For

¹ Stuart Wolf, 'Nationalism in Europe: 1815 to the Present', London, Essex University Press, 1996, p.3

² Ibid, p. 4

³ Ibid, p .5

individuals and peoples alike, nationalism signaled danger, restrictions on liberty and a threat to humanity's survival. The policies of expulsion and extermination by the National Socialists during the Second World War are the most horrifying examples witnessed in the recorded history of mankind. And yet at the same time, nationalism could just as often engender hopes for a free and just social order; for many it equated with liberation from political, economic and social discrimination⁴. It is clear that nationalism, so convenient a label and justification for many developments, conceals within itself extreme opposites and contradictions. It, therefore, can mean emancipation, and it can mean oppression. Therefore, nationalism is a repository of dangers as well as opportunities. It has many different forms and variations in space and time that it is often argued whether they can all be accommodated under the one roof. Only with reference to historical context one can say what the term actually does or should dignify.

Current linguistic usage defines 'nationalists' as people whose actions or reasoning gives indiscriminate precedence to the interests of one nation over those of other nations, and who are prepared to disregard those others for sacrosanct honor of their own nations⁵. A modern German encyclopedia defines nationalism as an exaggerated and intolerant form of thought in relation to a nation⁶. This is a clear hint that in modern usage, nationalism has negative connotations, suggesting an extreme ideology and is judged in more or less moral terms. The term nationalism is used to brand forms of collective yearning and aggression arrogantly posturing in the name of a nation. By contrast, the pursuit of national interest and a sense of national pride are wholly laudable, since they are felt to refer to legitimate concerns which do not inevitably conflict with the nationalism or the interests of other peoples. Here, the underlying idea in this case is that equality exists between various nationalisms, and their frequently competing claims can be settled through compromise⁷.

⁴ Ibid, p. 7

⁵ Ibid, p. 8

⁶ Ibid, p. 10

⁷ Edward Arnold, Nationalisms, Contemporary History Series, London, 1994, p. 4

The term 'nationalism' did not begin to enter into general linguistic usage until the mid nineteenth century. But today the argument still rages over what nationalism is. Even the academic world has failed to agree on a generally accepted definition. The same is true of the concepts of 'nation' and 'nationality'. In essence, the range of definitions that have been offered reflects the multiformity that nationalism assumed in historical and political reality since the late nineteenth century. Since new hybrids of nationalism are constantly being thrown up in deeds and words, in the definition and study of the phenomenon the depth of the student's experience continue to be equally important as the weight he or she gives the components that, by rather general consensus, must be present in any given nationalism. These common structural components or feathers of nationalism include: consciousness of the uniqueness or peculiarity of a group of people, particularly with respect to their ethnic, linguistic or religious homogeneity; emphasizing of shared socio-cultural attitudes and historical memories; a sense of common mission; disrespect for and animosity towards other peoples (racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism)⁸.

According to American political scientist, Karl W. Duetsch who has conducted extensive research since 1950s, nationalism is a 'state of mind' that gives national messages, memories, and images a preferred status in social communication and a greater weight in the making of decisions⁹. Duetch believes that a nationalist devotes greater attentions to those messages which carry specific symbols of nationality, or which originate from a specific national source, or which are couched in a specific national code of language or culture¹⁰. This definition emphasizes on the massive social communication as a pre-condition for feelings of national identity, is not entirely conclusive, for it considers only some, albeit important, aspects of nationalism. A definition must necessarily be more comprehensive if it attempts to encompass all the forms of nationalism the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have witnessed: the nationalism of peoples which possess a state, and the nationalism of those which do not. According to Bohemian-born sociologist and historian Eugen Lemberg nationalism defines nationalism as system of ideas, values and

⁸ Ibid, p. 5

⁹ Karl W. Duetsch, 'Nation and World', Contemporary Political Science: Towards Empirical Theory, New York, 1967, p.208

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 210

norms, an image of the world and society which makes large social groups aware of where it belongs and invests this sense of belonging with a particular value¹¹. In another word, it integrates the groups and demarcates its environment. Lemberg places emphasis on the group's awareness of its own location that can crystallize shared languages, origins, character and culture¹².

Lemberg's definition of nationalism as an ideology capable of integrating large social groups has been refined by the historian Theodor Schieder, who believes nationalism is a specific integrative ideology that always makes a reference to a nation in one sense or another, and not merely to a social or religious type of group. This broad definition suggests that nationalism such as it has appeared in American and French revolutions is understood as both an ideology and a political movement which holds the nation and the sovereign nation-state to be crucial in dwelling values, and which manages to mobilize the political will of a people or a large section of a population. Nationalism is hence taken to be largely dynamic principle capable of raising hopes, emotions and actions; it is a vehicle for activating human beings and producing political solidarity amongst them for the purpose of achieving a common goal¹³. In accordance with this definition, nationalism exists whenever individuals feel they belong primarily to the nation, and whenever affective attachment and loyalty to that nation override all other attachments and loyalties. Therefore, Schieder eventually presents his definition of nationalism as follows:

“It is not status group, nor religious conviction, nor a dynasty or a particularistic state, not a physical landscape, not genealogical roots, not even social class which determine the supra-individual frame of reference; the tenet of Enlightenment philosophy that the individual is principally a member of human race and thus a citizen of the world no longer holds: individuals perceive themselves, rather, as member of a particular nation”¹⁴.

¹¹ Eugen Lemberg, *Nationalisms*, Rhiebek 1974, Vol.2, p .16

¹² *Ibid*, p.52

¹³ www.eastwestcenter.org/find

¹⁴ www.nationalismproject.org/books/

In the light of this definition, nationalism is identified with its historical and cultural heritage and with the form of its political life, the nation or nation-state represents the site where life is led, and endows the individual's existence with meaning both in the present and the future. The way in which this multi-faceted and subtle process of intellectual transition from humanitarian universalism of the Enlightenment to attachment to the nation and the nation-state affected Germany. This nationalist sentiment has affected the whole Europe, North America in the nineteenth century and Africa and Asia in the twentieth century¹⁵. This became a milestone in the contentious history of nationalism at both the conceptual and practical level.

2.3 Issues in nationalism theory

The first studies of nationalism reflected the generally historical accounts of nationalist movements in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Most sociological theories of nationalism emerged from the French revolution and onwards. The most recent research has looked into the issues that have been part of the history of nationalism. The main question arising is which comes first, nation or nationalism. According to prime-ordealist theories of nationalism, nationalists view themselves as representing a pre-existing nation. They (primorealists) see the nations as a historical phenomenon, and as a social reality that nations have been existent in the long recorded history of mankind¹⁶.

According to the modernist theory, the nations are the recent creations of mankind and their history dates back not earlier than 1800. The modernist paradigm emphasizes that until 1800, people had local loyalties and the broader loyalties towards nations only surfaced with the industrialisation of societies, when people formed massive communication channels. The modernist theory believes that the European states, pre-occupied with the process of nation-building imposed national identity and unity from above. They further assume that the creations of nations became an essential condition to modernise the economy and society. In this process, nationalist conflicts are an

¹⁵ Friedrich Meineck, *Cosmopolitanism and the National State*, Princeton (NJ), 1970, pp. 23-24

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 24

unintended side-effect¹⁷. To the modernists, nations are a socially constructed phenomenon. Benedict Anderson described the nations as "imagined communities". Ernest Gellner reflecting Anderson's view describes nations as a "daily plebiscite"¹⁸. From their perspective, nationalism simply invents the nations where they do not exist. Additionally, the modernist theorists believe capitalism is essential for building nations. The features of capitalism such as free press, expansion of markets facilitate the process of creating nations. In this process, nation and nationalism are intertwined and can not be independent from one another. Interestingly, Marxists agree with modernists in that nations are essential for expanding markets which is main feature of the capitalist system. In this regard, Marxists believe that nationalism justifying the existence of nations is a tool of the bourgeoisie class to gain power. They, therefore, subscribe to the modernist view in that nations are the recent human creations and their history dates back not earlier than 200 years ago¹⁹.

Anthony D. Smith, one of the most prominent scholars on nationalism, seeing the sea of differences between primeordialists (those who believe nations have a long history) and modernists (those believing nations are recent phenomenon in the history of mankind) makes an attempt to synthesize the primeordialists and modernists. Smith believes the preconditions for the formation of a nation are "a fixed territory, high autonomy, hostile surroundings, memories of battles, sacred centres, special customs, historical records and thinking"²⁰. For him, nations are constructed through the inclusion of the whole populace, not just elites as some modernists say, constitution of legal and political institutions, nationalist ideology, international recognition and drawing up of borders. Although distinguishing himself from both schools (primeordialists and modernists), Smith would more lean to modernists than to primeordialists by referring to certain criteria like a constitution, legal and political institutions and international recognition since these criteria form the foundations of modern nations.

¹⁷ Hobsbawm, Eric J. 1992. *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. 2nd ed. Cambridge University Press, p. 16

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 17

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 21

²⁰ Smith, Anthony D. 1986. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* London: Basil Blackwell, Pp. 6–18.

2.4 Nationalism: The Currency of Nation

In nationalism, the nation has a central position. The value of nation resides in its capacity as the sole binding agency of meaning and justification. In our world, nations are regarded as building blocks of humanity and national interests provide the tools of political thought and actions. Religious leaning, according to Carltn Hyes, is intrerwoven with nationalism²¹. In nationalism, religion is secularised and the national is sanctified. Although it it would be misleading to say that religion lost it's sway on nationalism, yet natinonalism flourished while religion became more accomodative and compromising. This was the case with the Hungary, the Greeks, and Armenians who lived within the jurisdiction of the Ottomen Empire formed their own national movements. The clergy openly supported the national movements and played a leading role in the orgnaisation of the national movements and its agitation againt the the Ottomans and Habsburg of the peroid²².

The central question which arisises here is what charecterisies a nation.. As was the case of nationalism definition, the number of definitions is enermous, and none has been accepted as a generally valid formulation. The most elementary answer is a nation is a politically mobilised people²³. Employing his key notion of social communication, Karl Deutech conceives the nation as a body of individuals who can communicate effectively and quickly with each other over a vareity of themes. This communication presupposes a common language, religion and culture. For Deutsch, a nation is a people in possession of a state. This definition implies that a people who has no independent state of their own can not be called a nation²⁴. Nonetheless, it is frequently the case that a nation state is the outcome of a national movement. For exmample, Germans regarded themselves as a nation in the late nineteenth century, even though a united German state was not established until 1871. Likewise, Poles lived in three multinational Empires Russia, the Habsburgs and Prussian/ Germany, they nonetheless constituted a nation. Poles did not gain their

²¹ Baron, S. W, Modern Nationalism and Religion, New York, 1960, p. 12

²² Ibid, p. 13

²³ Deutch, 'Nation and World', p. 200

²⁴ Ibid, p.201

own Polish state until 1918. Deutsch's definition fails to take into consideration those peoples whose nationhood has not been disputed since the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries but have nonetheless failed to establish their own state: Kurds, Scots, Tamils, Sikhs, Tibetians, and Basques, for instance. A further discrepancy with Deutsch's definition is that he believes that "the number of existing states equals the number of nations"²⁵. This is not accurate because a nation may exist without state and a state may exist without a unified nation²⁶. Most of the Arab countries in the gulf created their own state, yet Arab nationalism failed to unite all the Arab under a sole single Arab nation. Tamils, for instance, are a nation but have not gained their own independent state. Therefore, the Deutsch's definition of nation is exclusive, for it narrows down nationhood merely to people who have a state of their own.

For Max Weber, the term nation suggests that it is "proper to expect from certain groups a specific sentiment of solidarity in the face of other groups"²⁷. This definition contains vague terminology because by referring to the 'sentiment', it is not clear exactly what it does imply. The sentiment of solidarity could apply to religious communities, trade unions, professional associations or political parties. But the key word in Weber's definition is the adjective 'specific'. The sense of national solidarity revolves around, and is aroused by factors which as mentioned above constitute the make up of a modern nation: language, culture, historical consciousness, social communication, religion and political goals. The significance of each as an instrument of promoting national unity varies from case to case. For example, right up until nineteenth century it was mainly orthodox Christianity which defined Greeks and Serbs as social groups distinct from Islamic Turks and Bosnians, despite the centuries of symbiosis. When resettlement took place between Turks and Greeks in Asia minor in 1923, the criterion used to determine an individual's nationality was not language, nor the will or personal preference of that individual, but simply religious convictions²⁸. In Ireland, Roman Catholicism has been a paramount factor in dividing the majority of Irish from the indigenous Protestant Anglo-

²⁵ Ibid, p. 202

²⁶ Ibid, p.203

²⁷ Max Weber, *Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. by Guentler Roth and Claus Wittich, Berkeley California, 1978, p. 922

²⁸ Stuart Woolf, *Nationalism in Europe, 1815 to the Present*, 1996, New York, Yale University Press, p .33

Irish ascendancy and from the English as demonstrated by nineteenth century Anglo-Irish history. But in many other cases, language was a more powerful medium of division and separation than religion. For example, the relations between Poles and Germans in upper Silesia and the provinces of the west and east Prussia, between Czeches and Germans in Bohemia, and between Finns and Swedes in Finland²⁹.

Common language is known to bridge even religious differences. This was true of Islamic, Greek Orthodox, and Roman Catholic Albanians under the Ottoman empire. Language has also been the decisive factor in the Romanian's sense of belonging together as a nation. It is obvious that the language has power to demonstrate fundamental consequences of comprehension and miscomprehension. This was part of every day life in multinational dynastic polities such as the Russian, Ottoman and Habsburg empires. In the case of Poles in Tsarist Russia, or early nineteenth century Walloons, Flemings and Dutch, when in 1830-31 the United Netherlands split into the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Kingdom of Belgium, religion and language together have been the foundations of national consciousness and the nation³⁰.

On the basis of this historical evidence, the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin believed that it was possible to define a nation in terms of what he regarded as objective, scientific criteria. In his essay on Marxism and the National Question, he describes the nation as a historically evolved, stable community. It is characterised by four main features: community of language, of territory, of economic life, and of psychological make up manifested in a community of culture³¹. For Stalin, a nation did not exist until all four features were present. It is obvious that Stalin used this definition to deny the right of significant populations within domains of the Soviet Union to their nationhood. For Stalin and his communists proponents, If one was absent, then the nation ceased to be. For example, he demonstrated the contingency by pointing to the Baltic Germans and Latvians in Tsarist Russia. For Stalin, they did not constitute a nation in the nineteenth century despite their common territory and economic life³². By dint of his involvement in the theoretical problem of the nation and nationalism, Stalin in 1917 was appointed the

²⁹ Ibid, p. 35

³⁰ Ibid, p. 41

³¹ Ibid, p.43

³² Ibid, p.44

first Commissar of Nationalities, the post from which he began his rapid rise to absolute power.

In an attempt to devise a definition what a nation is, Hugh Seton Watson, one of the most prominent scholars of modern nationalism, believes that “the number of a nation must feel they are bound together by a sense of solidarity, a common culture and a national consciousness. For him, a nation exists if a significant members of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation”³³. In the light of this definition the nineteenth century Kurdish revolts against the Ottoman Empire will be analysed.

2.5 Nation: Cultural or Political ?

The most contentious enquiry into a nation is the discrepancy between a cultural nation and political nation. According to the Friedrich Meinecke, the modern nation is basically founded upon equality or commonality. The political nation places emphasis on the idea of the individual and collective self-determination. It derives from the individual’s free and subjective commitment to the nation. Ernest Renan, the French historian on nationalism, defines nation as a ‘daily plebiscite’. To him, “existence of a nation depends on the free will of the individuals: the population of a given, historically evolved territory perceives to be a nation, and citizenship is equated with nationality”³⁴. The concept of political nation has its historical reference in France, England, and the United States. In the nations regarded as political nations, a process of political transformation generated a community of politically aware citizens equal before the law irrespective of their social and economic status, ethnic origin and religious beliefs. Nation and state are synonymous, the unifying whole is created by a uniform language, a uniform judicial and administrative system, a central government and shared political ideals. The sovereignty of the people is the foundation of state power³⁵.

³³ Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and States: An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism*, London, 1977, p. 5

³⁴ Tamir Yael, ‘Liberal Nationalism’, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 13

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 15

By contrast, with nations regarded as cultural, the main focus is placed on the objective criteria such as common heritage and language, a distinct area of settlement, religion, customs and history³⁶. The spirit of unity is not mediated by a national state or other political form. The cultural nation principle which emphasizes common heritage and language, is the main characteristic of the emergence of nations in Central Europe, Italy, East Central Europe, Middle East, Africa and Asia. Unlike political nations explained above, in the cultural nations individuals have little say as to which nation he or she belongs to. Hence, membership of a nation is not a matter of voluntary choice. Nature and history decides a fate of individuals. Thus, western voluntarist, liberal-democratic concept of nation is contrasted by a deterministic one that is frequently deemed undemocratic and irrational³⁷. Despite the theoretical distinctions between subjective and objective criteria to define nation, the boundaries between them are crossed. For instance, to some people the Alsacians are Germans because their cultural, local custom, and their religion to an extent, assign them to the German cultural nation, while to others they are French because of their willingness to be citizens of the French state with which they felt close ties since the revolution of 1789 and the Napoleonic era. The same thing is true of the Kurds; they regard themselves as one nation while their neighbours regard them as part of the broader nations of the states among which Kurdistan has been divided³⁸. Speaking from a historic context, the concept of political nation is a long process of convergence taking place in a larger state framework, and on occasion, receiving tremendous impetus from a state that pursues certain types of policies like the introduction of linguistic or judicial uniformity. This historic fact is frequently ignored by those who define nations in a subjective form³⁹. In other words, the concept of nation represents an interlocking of objective actualities and the circumstances of subjective political will.

2.6 National Awakening: Europe

³⁶ Shil Edward, 'Primordial, Personal, Sacred, and Civil Ties', 1997, *British Journal of Sociology*, p.7

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 13

³⁸ Strohmier Martin, 'The Crucial Images in the Presentation of Kurdish National Identity', Electronic Source, Waikato University Library, p. 13

³⁹ Shil Edward, p. 14

Since national awakening forms the backbone of the modern nationalism and nation, it is important to understand what is meant by the concept and how to measure it. In principle, national awakening is independent of a national state. Without a coherent national consciousness, a national movement would be doomed to failure. National consciousness is mediated by education in the widest sense of the word, and can undergo transformation as much as values, objects and symbols to which it refers. In the development of national awakening, social groups place emphasis on the various commonalities such as language, culture, religion, myths, memories, political ideals and history. Social groups also tend to define their national identity and national consciousness in a negative sense, for example, through distinction from or comparison with their neighbours. Encounters with the 'alien'- other forms of language, religion, customs, political systems- make people aware of the close ties, shared values and common ground that render communication with their own kind so much easier than with outsiders. In some cases, national awakening can be openly directed against a presumed enemy at least temporarily, another nation or existing multi-national states in which a social group or a political movement or nation lives. This is still the case for the peoples struggling to form their nation-state such as the Kurds throughout the past century until now, the Germans and Italians in the nineteenth century. For instance, Napoleonic rule perceived by many as oppression sparked off German political awakening in the early nineteenth century. The national movement in Germany matured between 1806 and 1813. The German's anti French sentiments mounted to a high peak, particularly when the French embarked an expansionist policy eastwards, encroaching upon the Rhine border and thereby calling into question the German title to a part of their historic homeland. It was to predominate for almost a hundred years.

National awakening can be inspired by myths and glories of the past. For instance, nineteenth century Italian national consciousness was mainly inspired by the glory of ancient Rome and by the enmity of the Habsburg monarchy⁴⁰. National awakening is also inspired by the physical presence of an alien force or domination. For people of the southern Balkans and the Middle East including the Kurds, the struggle against the

⁴⁰ Ibid, 47

Ottomans right up until the First World War remained an important ingredient of their national awakening. Likewise, in many African and Asian, states which emerged after 1945, their struggle against European colonialism and imperialism was the origin of their national awakening. Despite the national awakening the national movements posed, concept of national awakening dates back to the Middle Ages. In the case of European peoples, prototypes of national consciousness and nationalist discourse date back as early as the fourteenth century and in some cases even before. Machiavelli's *Prince* (1513) commonly mentions the works of Shakespeare, Petrarche and Dante, which incite Italians to liberate themselves from the barbarians and become a united country⁴¹. In general, it is practically impossible to place an exact date on when a social group or people first conceives of itself as a nation. Aside from a few cases, the nation is a goal rather than an actuality. In another words, nations are not God's creation, rather they are human constructions. They have to be constructed in a complicated educational process. In this sense, Ronald Barthes assumes that nations have not been existential in history, but rather simply a realm of political myth⁴².

National awakening is a pre-requisite of the nation building. The process of nation building is engineered by small minority of intellectuals and directed at the social group as a whole. Nation building is a drawn-out process of social and political integration. Nation-building is, in another word, a process of integrating all significant social and political forces within a single national framework. Even if a nation has gained it's own independent state, nation-building as a process continues. A political awakening capable of successfully containing internal conflicts among the social groups and in some cases among sectarian groups within a nation concerned does not evolve in a persistent and smooth way. Rather, it's development is constantly bogged down by delays and setbacks. Hence, nation-building is a process of ups and downs given it's historic context. The aim of nation building is to integrate and harmonise socially, regionally, politically and institutionally divided section of population with, perhaps in some cases, different social customs and even languages. In a contemporary history, nationalism as an ideology and political movement as an instrument of it has been a significant part of the process of

⁴¹ Machiavelli, 'The Prince'. Penguin, New York Book store, 1980, p. 45

⁴² Cited in Smith's 'Nations in History', Hanover, University of New England Press, 2000, p .34

nation building. It's success depends on the establishment of a cohesive awakening that can bind all social and sectarian forces to a particular national group, and define it's uniqueness as the substance of a national ideology. According to Elie Kedouiri, nation building and nationalism are methods of teaching the right determination of will. Hence, they are clearly linked, and one compliments the other⁴³.

National awakening can be also created by a state whose main goals are centralisation, uniformity and efficiency. In this regard, nation-building proceeds within a framework identical with the state frontiers. This was the case in France, England, Portugal and Sweden, where state-building went hand in hand with nation building. In those nations, the concept of nation embraces population of varying origins, cultures and languages. Thus, political nation is created from the above⁴⁴. National consciousness is oriented around real frontiers of state. Nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw many instances of the process in which nation-building set in before nation-states came about. It often transcended existing borders, rendering them obsolete, and eventually led to the formation of new states with new frontiers. Shared language and culture underly this process, the goal of which is to build up a cohesive national awakening among the population within a given territory. National awakening is a condition of any organised national movement aspiring to create a nation-state in th first stages of nation building.

2.7 National Awakening: Kurdish Case

There are a number of schools of thoughts about the roots of the Kurdish nationalism but for our purpose in analyzing Kurdish nationalism and for their prominent scholarly position we would draw on two schools of thoughts. The first school of thought is led by Amir Hasana Pure, who believes that “Kurdish national awakening emerged as an ideology long before the formation of the Kurds as a nation, not in the middle class milieu but in a largely agrarian society with a powerful tribal component”⁴⁵. According to him and the proponents of this position, from the 16th century to the mid-19th century,

⁴³ Ibid, p. 35

⁴⁴ Marina Ottawy, “Again Nation-Building”, *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 4, No. 6, 2003, p .3

⁴⁵ Hassanpour, Amir, *Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan*, San Francisco, Mellen Research University Press, 1992, p. 14

much of Kurdistan was ruled by Kurdish independent and autonomous principalities which in effect created a flourishing urban and rural way of life in the seventeenth century. They believe Kurdish life drastically changed when the Ottoman and the Persian Empires used Kurdistan as a sphere of influence which in effect resulted in the first division of Kurdistan in an agreement signed in 1639 between the two Empires. According to this paradigm, the war that was fought either between the empires over total control of Kurdistan or between Kurds and the Empires which destroyed the agrarian system, devastated the towns and urban life, and caused the mass migration of the Kurds and settlement of Turkish tribes in Kurdistan⁴⁶. These wars fought on Kurdish lands destroyed Kurdish urban life which the Kurds enjoyed since the era of glory (1250-1514), and these wars further reinforced the tribal way of life.

Despite the fact that wars prevented the Kurds from building up a sustainable urban life which could have been a milestone in the early stage of the nation-building process, the devastation of Kurdish life as a consequences of the wars incited a strong political consciousness which had no parallel in the Middle East at the time. The first signals of the national awakening emerged in the realm of literature in the sixteenth century. In 1597, the Prince of Bidlis, a powerful principality, wrote the first history of Kurdistan. This text, albeit written in Persia, contained two very important things: a Kurdish dynasty which had the privilege of royalty, and the degree of independence the Kurdish dynasty enjoyed in striking the coins and reciting the Friday prayers in their names. The most prominent assertion of the political awakening of the time was Ahmed-e-Khani who wrote “Mam –o-Zin in the form of a poetic narrative romance”⁴⁷. In Mam o Zin, Khani clearly asks “why have the Kurds been deprived, why have they all been subjugated?” According to Khani, the Kurdish statelessness is not because the Kurds are ignorant, rather because they have no powerful King to unite all Kurdish discordant principalities to form a United Kurdish Kingdom. Khani was modern in his classification of the Kurds as a nation and nationalism as their movement. He refers to the Kurds, Arabs, Persians,

⁴⁶ Ibid, p .15

⁴⁷ Ibid, p .20

and Turks as ‘Milal’, a plural of Milla in the then-prevailing meaning of religious community but in the ethnic sense⁴⁸.

The proponents of this school refer to the nineteenth century as the second wave of the Kurdish national awakening. They often refer to the Haji Qader’s poetry works in the late 19th century who attacked the Sheiks (religious figures) and Mullahs (those who formally get religious training) who did not care about the Kurdish language and notables who completely ignored the grievances of their own people⁴⁹. It is worthwhile to note that Haji Qader lived his last years in Istanbul and was fully cognizant with the creation of modern nations in Europe which were preoccupied with the nation-building process. He relentlessly called on the Kurds to use the Kurdish language and urged his intellectual counterparts of the period to publish books and magazines in Kurdish.

The reason this school of thought emphasizes that the Kurdish national awakening dates back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is because the intellectual elite of the period had a full grasp of the nationalist-inspired developments in Europe. Furthermore, they assume that Kurdish political conscious intellectuals were intent on emulating the Europeans. To a point, there is truth in it since in the first place the whole process of nation-building on Western European land was stimulated by the intellectual elite. This process started a century earlier, when in the seventeenth century the intellectuals of European countries, in particular France and United States, set in motion a framework for creating modern nations whose main features such as language, culture, and social customs were distinctive from that of their neighboring peoples. The same thing is true of the Kurdish intellectuals like Khani and Haji Qader. They clearly asserted that the Kurds are a distinct people with a distinctive territory, language, and social customs. They believed that the road to freedom is only to form an independent Kurdistan. From ideological aspect, Qader, and Khani were different from one another since Khani called for unification of Kurdish principalities under a powerful King, whereas Qader called for liberation of the Kurds from yokes of their hostile nations and building their own nations.

⁴⁸Ibid, p. 21

⁴⁹Ibid, p .24

Qader's ideas clearly could mean the transformation of Kurdish society in a modern sense⁵⁰.

The second school of thought draws on the argument made by Abas Wali and his proponents. To them, the Kurdish national awakening dates back to not earlier than the late nineteenth century, when for the first time the Kurdish intellectual elite began publishing the first Kurdish journal in 1898, namely 'Kurdistan'. They believe the Kurdish national awakening emerged within the Kurdish intelligentsia during and after the World War I. Wali, in his analysis of Kurdish nationalism, describes the period of World War I as the beginning of the Kurdish nationalism. He and his proponents are of the opinion that the Kurdish national awakening emerged as a response to the emerging nation-states on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire⁵¹. To them, the Kurdish national awakening was non-existent in the nineteenth century, and the feudal and tribal interests motivated the Kurdish revolts against the Ottoman encroachment in the nineteenth century. Given this perspective, nationalism was not an inspiring factor behind the Kurdish uprisings in the nineteenth century. The Kurdish national awakening emerged simply as reflection of other national movements during and after World War I, when Ottoman authority weakened under the pressure of external and internal forces. Although these two schools put Kurdish national awakening in different historical periods, both sides agree that the Kurdish intelligentsia was main vehicle of developing the Kurdish national awakening. Both sides subscribe to the view that the modernity that touched the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire during nineteenth and eighteenth centuries inspired the Kurdish intellectual elite to present themselves as a distinct group from that of other groups such as Turks, Arabs and Farses in this region⁵².

⁵⁰ Ibid,p. 25

⁵¹ Cited in Wali,Abbas's Modernity and the Stateless: The Kurdish Question in Iran, London, I.B. Tauris, 2002, p. 7

⁵² Published Interview by Wali on Kurdish media, available at www.kurdishmedia.com/archives

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that nations and nationalism are closely dependent on one another. They are interwoven and intertwined. It is nationalism that constructs nations and it is a nation that justifies nationalism in politics and the social realm. No matter whether nations are cultural or political, it is nationalism which is the main medium of communication among peoples. It is also nationalism that marks the boundaries between or among the distinctive groups of human beings. Given the history of the last two centuries, nationalism is solely responsible for breaking down the multi-national empires. Nationalism creates new nations while disintegrating others. Hence, it is clear that nationalism has a variety of forms, and each form surfaces in a totally distinctive way. National awakening as an instrument of fueling nationalist feelings and attachments is primarily an enterprise of intellectual elite.

The Kurdish elite that was part of the Ottoman bureaucracy in the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries were intent on emulating the intellectual elite in Europe, yet the Kurdish national awakening remained passive for centuries, and it never became that coherent to integrate all Kurdish social and sectarian groups. Also, the Kurds had no external support from major powers to assist them in their effort in building their nation-state. The Kurds, in this sense, should not only be ones to blame, but also the major powers to whom the strategic expediency took precedence over moral principle. In post-war period, a number of nation-states had been built, yet their creation has no thing to do with the national consciousness of their people. Those states were created merely to protect the interest of the major powers, and the boundaries never reflected the natural borders of these people. This mainly explains why the process of state-building is not a guarantee for cohesive nation-building. This is truly the case of Middle Eastern states created after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Those state were the creations of the external projects and the boundaries of those states have always remained a matter of dispute which at times resulted in physical confrontation of either state-to-state conflict or ethnic or sectarian conflicts within the states concerned. This further reinforces the fact that without a national consciousness among the peoples of the concerned territory,

national movement, albeit enjoying a generous support from major states, is doomed to failure. Kurdish national consciousness during the First World War emerged as a reaction to the weakness of Ottoman Empire, but the division of the Kurdish national movement was used by major powers merely for their strategic interest.

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Chapter Three

Myths, Memories, Symbols, Language and Religion

3.1 Introduction

As mentioned in chapter two, myths, memories, language, customs and shared history form the backbone of modern nationalism. These social norms and values are normally invoked during the stage of the rise of national consciousness. In the light of the importance of these myths, memories and symbols which are closely associated with nationalist movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this chapter will cast some light on myths, memories, language, and social customs which demonstrate the Kurdish distinctness from that of their neighbours. Furthermore, the origins of the Kurds will be analysed briefly. Additionally, this chapter will analyse the historic contact of the Kurds with Islam and their adoption of the new faith in the early waves of Islamic expansion towards Asia and the Caucasus. The significance of the Kurdish adoption of Islam as their new religion will be thoroughly examined. Fragmentation of Islam between the Sunnis and Shiites made an impact on the Kurds dividing across the Islamic sects: the Shiites and Sunnis. In the light of this historic significance, this chapter will analyse the sects of Islam among which the Kurds are divided. With the Turkish Ottoman gaining a foothold in the region, there had been competition between the Turks and Kurds over who is to be a guardian of Islam. In this context, the Kurdish position will be elaborated. Finally, the evolution of the term Kurdistan will be examined in historic phases.

3.2 What does Form the Distinctness of the Kurds?

3.2.1 The Myth and Memory of Zohak

The Newruz (New Day)¹ and the legend of Zohak contain one of several folk myths of the origins of the Kurds. According to the Kurdish Folklore, Zohak was a tyrant

¹ New Ruz means a new day. Kurds mark Newruz in the first day of spring each year and celebrate it by going to picnics and set large fires on the peak of mountains. Until recently, all countries in which Kurds live with the exception of Iran prohibited the Kurds from celebrating and the reason Iran is *more*

who had snakes growing on his shoulders, a deformity which the physicians were not able to cure. Satan came to the tyrant and told him that he would be cured if he had fed the snakes each day with the brain of the two young people. The executioner appointed to the task of providing the brains took pity on his victims, and each day spared one of them and substituted the brains of a sheep. The survivors were smuggled to the safety of the mountains, where they became the founders a new people, the forefathers of the Kurds². Zohak himself was overthrown when one of the tyrant's intended victims rebelled against his fate and killed him³. Newruz means a new day, a day the tyrant Zohak was killed. Historically the Kurdish calendar dates from the defeat of the Assyrian Empire at Nineveh, north of Mussel, by the forces of the Medes. The myth of Zohak, according to the Kurdish perspective, represents their existence as one of the ancient people in the region. The end of Zohak tyranny represents a great amount of relief⁴. This myth is still commemorated on 21 March of every year, equivalent to the first day of the Kurdish New Year. The myth of Newruz was used by Kurdish nationalists to rally and galvanise the Kurdish support around their political cause against the new national states in which Kurds are divided. New Ruz has always been a day of violent clashes between Kurdish nationalists who memorises by setting a large fire on mountains and hills of Kurdistan and security forces of hostile nations.

3.2.2 Variant Historic Perspectives on the Kurdish Origins

Because little research has been conducted on the origins of the Kurds, the question of where the Kurds came from and who the Kurds are has for a long time remained an enigma. Moreover, much of the research, which has been carried out cannot be considered accurate, because of racial or cultural biases for or against the Kurdish ethnic group. While there is no definitive answer to these questions, most of the

flexible than other countries is because Persians also mark their new year in the first day of the spring and they similarly celebrate Newruz.

² Maria T. Oshia, "Between the Maps and Reality: Some Fundamental Myths of The Kurdish Nationalism", Peoples Mediterrenaneens, No 68-69, July-December, 1994: p 9

³ According to the Kurdish narrations, the victims name was Kawa and he killed Zohak by Hammer. This echoes in the Kurdish literature on Newruz and even these days Kurds praise the Hammer of Kawa and to them Hamer was sacred which was used by kawa to kill the tyrant Zohak.

⁴ Mehrddad Azadi, The Kurds: A concise Handbook, Washington, Tayler and Francis International Publishers, 1992: p.34

literature suggest that an identifiable people has inhabited north of Mesopotamia for four millennium .The overall scholarship refers to the following perspectives:

3.2.2.1 Xenophone's Account:

The first historic reference to the forefather of the Kurds appear in Xenophone's Anabis, the contemporary account of the epic journey of Greek 10,000 men as they fled the Persian Empire in 401 BC after the defeat of Cyprus, and of their encounters with barbarians. As they head north from Mesopotamia to the Black sea, Xenophon and his fellow Greeks enter the territory of Carduchi⁵, or Kardoukhoi. After twenty four centuries the identity of the barbarians may be still obscure, but their name and their location-north of modern day Musel link them to today's Kurds. According to Xenophon's account, these people lived in the mountains and they were not subject to the Persian King⁶. The Royal army of Persia with 120,000 men invaded their territory but not a man of them got back because of the harsh conditions of the territory they had to go through. Xenophon does not explain much about the Cardouchi beyond their war-like qualities and their skill with catttle. The Greeks spoke with these people through interpreters. Xenophone's account simply suggests that Kurds are ancient people in this region, and their existence on the land called Kurdistan dates back to at least 4,000 years ago.

3.2.2.2 Linguistic Account:

From a linguistic and classical historic perspective, it is generally assumed that the Kurds are descended from the ancient Medes, an Iranian people who moved down from central Asia and settled in the twelfth BC in the Zagros Mountains and around Lake of Orumiyah in what is now western Azerbaijan⁷ in modern Turkey. Herodotus, a prominent historian, believes that the Kurds and Persians were mutually comprehensible in ancient times. The Medes conquered the Assyrian Empire and the great cities of Nimrud and Nineveh, near present day Mussel, but they were in turn defeated by Persians. The Kurds themselves have traditionally favoured the theory of

⁵ Garduchi is an old term used to describe the territory inhabited by the Kurds.

⁶ No Friend But Mountains, John Buloch and Harvey Mooris, New York: Penguin USA Inc, 1993: pp 55-60

⁷ Ibid, p 50

their Median ancestry⁸. The Kurdish Median ancestry is disputed by Persian nationalist historians, who believe Kurds an offshoot of the ancient Persians⁹.

3.2.2.3 Scythian Account:

Another strand of the Kurdish heritage can be traced back to the Scythians, an Indo-European people who moved down from what is now Ukraine and established a kingdom in Iranian Kurdistan in the eight century BC¹⁰. This account holds merits to some extent, Kurdish is related to Sanskrit and many of the languages of modern Europe including English. This relationship can be seen in many basic words: new (new), bru (eyebrow), rubar (river), dlop (drop of water), mara (Mary),etc

3.2.2.4 Anthropological Account:

Modern day Kurds are almost certainly descended from a much more complex racial mixture than the Indo-European origin of their language would imply .Anthropological theory has largely discredited the idea that ancient indigenous peoples were supplanted by the mass migration of more sophisticated or war-like newcomers. Rather, it is believed that newcomers brought their language and contributed to a richer racial mix. Given this context, modern Kurds probably owe their origins as much as to the pre-Iranian inhabitants of the region as to the Indo-European tribes who came to dominate them. This process, whereby the ancient inhabitants of the region were culturally and linguistically Indo-Europeanised, reflects another traditional myth about the origins of the Kurds. It relates how Noah's ark came to rest after the flood on the peak of the Mount Cudi in Iraq, 4490 years before the birth of the Prophet Mohammad, and that a great city was built there which was ruled by Melik Kurdim of the tribe of Noah. When Melik Kurduim reached the age of 600, he invented a new language which his people called Kurduim, the language of the Kurds¹¹.

⁸ Their favor of Median ancestry reflects in their art and their revolutionary songs. Meda is also a name given to the girl children. The language of modern Kurds is closely related to Persian, and belongs the north-western Iranian group alongside the languages of Afghanistan, Baluchistan and Tajikistan.

⁹ Cited in Bulosh and Morris, p 59

¹⁰ Richard Bukley, Kurds: Nations Caught Between Nations, Berlin, European Schoolbook Publishing Ltd, 1994: p. 16

¹¹ Ibid, p 2-3

The mountain tribes became gradually Indo-Europeanised from the third millennium onwards as fresh waves of conquerors moved south. But it was a process which was not completed until the fifth century B.C, at around the time of Xenophon, when peoples of the mountain had been racially and culturally amalgamated into the identifiable forerunners of the modern Kurds. The racial mix became more complex over subsequent centuries as Turkish and Arab tribes pressed in on the Kurdish heartland. In early medieval times, some ethnically Turkish tribes became Kurdified while some ethnically Kurdish tribes became Turkified. As a result of this intermixture, some Turkish and Arabic words entered the vocabulary of Kurdish dialectics¹².

These historic perspectives analysed above on the origins of the Kurds have their own different reasons to support their arguments, but all these perspectives in no way undermine the Kurdish claim to be a separate nation. The idea that racial purity is a necessary condition for nationhood or statehood has long been discredited. On the contrary, the argument here is that the Kurds represent a unique racial and cultural mix which has led to their being recognised by themselves and others as an identifiable nation.

3.3 The Kurds and Coming of Islam

Before the coming of Islam in the seventh century A.D. the people of Kurdistan predominantly followed the Zoroastrian religion. The Kurds were relatively slow in adopting the new religion that emerged from the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century and swept into the Levant, central Asia and across North Africa to southern Europe. The Kurdish first contact with the army of Islam was in 637, when the invaders captured the city of Tikret, 100 miles north of Baghdad. By capturing Tikret, the Muslim army reached the fringes of the Kurdish territory and gained a foothold on the borders of Kurdish territory. At that time, Kurds fought on the side of the Persian governor of Ahwaz, as the fading Zoroastrian Empire struggled to hold back the tides of the new religion. Thus the Arabs established their first physical

¹² Ibid: p 6

presence in Kurdistan in 643 after defeating the Kurdish armies in a bloody battle in what is now called the province of Suleimania in Iraqi Kurdistan¹³.

In the early attempts of Islam to Islamise Kurdistan, Kurds offered stiff resistance and slowed the advance of the Islamic army. The close tribal structure of Kurdish society and the natural isolation of their mountain homeland may have been a factor in their stiff resistance to the new religion. Furthermore, the Kurds were religious zealots. Despite the resistance they showed to Islam, they eventually succumbed to it. Their submission to Islam may have more to do, as it did elsewhere, with the fact that Muslims escaped the tax on unbelievers than with strong adherence to the spiritual tenets of the new religion. Speaking generally, Islam came to the Kurds in the early phases of its expansion, and the few urban centres in Kurdistan — such cities as Cizre, Arbil and Amid (Diyarbakir) — soon were integrated into the world of Islamic learning and civilisation. Because of its mountainous nature, however, most of Kurdistan remained peripheral to the Islamic world and maintained an ambivalent relationship with learned, orthodox Islam. On the one hand, some centres of orthodox Islamic learning emerged in even the most isolated places. On the other hand, however, it was in this physical environment that heterodox religious communities could survive longest and that groups and individuals that were persecuted for political or religious reasons sought refuge¹⁴. Thus Kurdistan paradoxically became at once a centre of strict Sunni orthodoxy (adhering to the Shafi'i school of law rather than the more flexible Hanafi school that was adopted by most of the surrounding Arabs and Turks), and the home of some of the most heterodox communities of the Middle East.

Once converted, the majority of the Kurdish tribes became the most devoted and rigorous defenders of the new faith. For almost twelve centuries after the coming of Islam, religion was the most important factor linking the peoples of Middle East whether ruled by Arabs or Turkish dynasties. Islam played a central in uniting the people of the Middle East. The Islamic domination of the region, in effect, created Pan-Islamism that lasted until the nineteenth century when it came gradually to be

¹³, Boyce, Mary, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, New York, Routledge, 2002, pp. 18-29

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p 21

supplanted by European ideas of nationalism. Pan-Islamism established a unity of purpose among the people, there was a conscious awareness among the Kurds that others were taking advantage of their divisions and that the Kurdish nation by allowing itself to be exploited as a mercenary force, was losing out¹⁵. It is worthwhile to note that the coming of Islam had, in a sense, a positive impact on Kurdish society and brought a form of civilisation to previously primitive and isolated corners of the Middle East¹⁶. Kurdistan due to its isolated geography and mountainous nature had a primitive tribal structure. The coming of Islam, to an extent, unified the Kurdish people in a loose dynastic and principality structure which lasted for 400 years until the nineteenth century, the decline of the Ottoman Empire.

3.4 The Era of Glory and Prosperity

The early middle ages saw the first emergence of a distinctive Kurdish culture and the establishment of powerful principalities and dynasties. As the power of Arabs after the first Islamic staunch victory declined with fragmentation of Islam across the Sunni and Shiites theological lines, the Kurds and Turkish tribes moved to fill the administrative, political and spiritual vacuum. The Kurdish and Turkish movement into the Levant from central Asia brought new blood and new vigour to the Islamic cause. Around the same time, the most glorious of Kurdish independent dynasties were established, and the most significant dynasty was that of Chaddaties, founded by Mohammad Chaddad Ben Karatan. Mohammad Chaddad belonged to the tribe of Rawadi that later produced Saladin who became Islam's saviour¹⁷. The other Kurdish dynasty was the Merwanids that lasted for a hundred years from 950, after its foundation by Kurd Bad, a former shepherd turned warrior prince. He made himself master of Nusieben and Diayrbakr, the main cities of what is now south western Turkey. The eastern half of Kurdistan was ruled in the same century by the two other Kurdish dynasties: the Hassan Wahid (995-1015) and the Banu Annaz (950-1016)¹⁸.

¹⁵ Ibid, p 23

¹⁶ Ibid, p 54

¹⁷ Phillippe Kreyenbroek & Christine Allison, *Kurdish Identity and Culture*, London, Zed Books Ltd, 1996: p 88

¹⁸ Ibid 97

It was in this era that Kurdistan served as a battlefield between rival empires. In the west the Christian Byzantine Empire was trying to extend its control towards Lake Van (Turkish Kurdistan), which around the same time in the south Seljuk Turks were emerging as the dominant military dynasty in the Muslim caliphate centred at Baghdad. Kurd Bad's nephew, Abu Nasr, who ruled from 1010 to 1061, took the precaution of maintaining good relations with powers. Because of skilful diplomacy of maintaining balance among these powerful dynasties surrounding his own, he practised his reign over the most prosperous and splendid flowering Merwanid's civilisation. He established a Kurdish court in Diyarbakir which rivalled those of Damascus or Cairo. Some historians believe that the era of glory and prosperity lasted when in the second half of eleventh century Seljuk entered Baghdad and in effect assumed the role of protectors of the politically powerless Caliph, the nominal ruler of Islamic world¹⁹.

Around the same time, there began a competition between the Turks and Kurds on assuming the role of guarantor of the Islam. By the end of eleventh century, the Seljuk Turks defeated Merwains but took precaution of suppressing the independent Kurdish principality on the frontier. In a more strict sense, the era of Kurdish glory ended by the start of the twelfth century, when the Seljuk Turks defeated the Kurds and in the process curtailed the power of Kurdish independent principality. For the first time the name of Kurdistan was used. Seljukes adopted the term to describe a Sanjak or a province, stretching from Hamadan and Kirmanshah from the east to Sinjar in the west. The province was divided into six districts, bordered by Arab Iraq in the south, Khuzistan in south-east and Azerbaijan in the north, area Arab geographers termed Jabal (mountain). The province became part of the expanding Seljuk Empire. Although, in practise the Turks distributed fiefs to the Kurdish chieftains which administered their tribal areas as semi-independent vassals of the Seljukes²⁰.

¹⁹ Ibid, p 76

²⁰ Cited in Buloch 's No Friend But Mountains, pp 45-46

John Buloch and Harvey Morris, the two prominent experts in Kurdish history argue that Saladin²¹, originally Kurdish, was part of the era of the glory and prosperity of the Kurds. His rise illustrates the importance of Kurdish power in the early middle ages, an era in which the Kurds rivalled the Turks, the Arabs and the Persians in terms of culture and military prowess in the Muslim world. It is widely believed that the development and expansion of Kurdish power might have been greater had it not been for the next scourge which was to afflict the Middle East, and in which Kurdistan was once again a battlefield- Mongol invasion²².

3.5 The Emergence of Ottoman Foundations and Kurdish Fate

While the era of Kurdish glory ended with the start of the twelfth century, the indications of the foundations of Ottoman Empire emerged and this became apparent when Emir Othman declared himself the Sultan of the Turks in 1290²³. The Mongols, who rivalled the Ottomans during the mid 12th century, were fading away. With the decline of the power of Mongols, the Ottomans expanded their reign to the north of the Black sea and into Southern Eastern Europe, in effect encircling the Byzantine Empire, which eventually fell with the capture of Constantinople in 1453 by the Ottomans. By the fifteenth century the power of Ottomans eclipsed that of all its rivals in Middle East. As Ottomans established their institutions and consolidated their power, in practice Ottomans became the master of Kurds. After the collapse of Tamerlane's Kurdish Empire in 1404, which was centred at Samarkand, the

²¹The most famous Kurd in history is Saladin, who in all accounts emerges as the greatest military mind on either side of the Crusades, and the wisest and most famous Muslim ruler. Saladin was born in Tikrit in 1137, into a prominent Kurdish family. Saladin grew up in educated circles and distinguished himself militarily in his twenties by playing a significant part in keeping Egypt out of the hands of the First Crusade. Through his own accomplishments and with the help of his powerful family, he was appointed commander of the Syrian troops and vizier of Egypt at the age of 31. He subsequently became the sole ruler of Egypt and soon set out to unite the Muslim territories of Syria, northern Mesopotamia (Iraq), Kurdistan, Palestine, and the rest of Egypt. He proved to be a wise but firm ruler, skilled in diplomacy, free of corruption and cruelty, and dedicated to the spread of Islam. In 1187, he led the reconquest of Jerusalem and occupied it with compassion and courtesy. He died in 1193. Saladin did not accentuate his Kurdishness. He was not himself a tribal Kurdish leader, as were many of his generals in the army he commanded were made up of the chiefs of Turkish and Kurdish tribes. For him, the defense of Islam was a more important cause than the furtherance of his own race. As a consequence, Saladin is more often revered publicly as the hero of the Arab nationalists such as Saddam Hussein, while only his own people remember him first and foremost as a Kurd.

²² *Buloch and Morris, p 61*

²³ *Ibid, p 67*

Ottomans and Persians began to emerge as the two rival powers in the region. They in the process developed into something approaching modern multi-national states, with ill-defined frontiers running through Kurdistan²⁴.

Ottomans moved eastwards into Kurdistan Mountains, massacring the leading Kurdish families as a means of curbing Kurdish independent power. The Turkish ruler, Uzun Hassan, used Kurdistan as a base to move into Persia and Azerbaijan. Under Sultan Mehmed II, the Ottoman Empire expanded further, bringing it into open conflict with the Safavid dynasty which had been founded by Shah Ismael in Persia at the turn of the sixteenth century. Under the Safavids, Shiism became the state religion of Persia. Shiism, being the official state religion, created a cause of conflict for Ottomans, whose core religious make up was Sunni, and to large extent for the Kurds the majority of whom were Sunni vassals²⁵.

Rivalry between the two empires led to an open warfare, which was settled on the Kurdish territory at the Chaldaran, north-east of Lake Van in what is now Turkish Kurdistan in 1514. At Chaldaran the forces of Sultan Selim defeated Ismael's army and advanced to take Tabriz. With Selim's victory, the leading Kurds pledged their loyalty to the Ottomans. Twenty prominent Emirs had declared their allegiance to Selim even before Chaldaran campaign under way. The Kurdish allegiance to Ottomans changed the balance in the favour of Turks. The Kurdish emirs were under the guidance of Idris Batlis²⁶, a Kurdish nobleman who later became the first historian of the Ottoman Empire. Idris Batlis was one of the most prominent intellectuals of the period. He had an intellectual and spiritual authority over his people, and he was a central figure in rallying the Kurds around the Ottoman cause. Some believe that he had in mind that if Kurds were able to ally with Ottomans against Persians, they may have in return receive better treatment from the Ottomans. In a way, Kurds were better treated under Ottomans than the Persians who ruled over the large swath of current Turkish Kurdistan. This had a lot to do with the Ottoman's leanings towards the Sunni Kurds who were largely populated on southern fringes of

²⁴ Ibid, p 69

²⁵ Ibid, p 75

the Empire. They ,Kurds and Turks, united to expel Qizilbash²⁷, who fought on the side of the Persians and ruled over Diyarbakir and other Kurdish enclaves. As a result of the Kurdish-Ottoman alliance, Qizilbash and his forces fled to Persia.

The battle of Chaldaran was a turning point as it established a frontier between the Ottomans and Persian empires. Although, the frontier continued to be disputed ,in effect it remained in place for 400 years until the conclusion of World War I. Most of the Kurdish territory in what is now Turkey, Iraq, and Syria was in Ottoman hands, while several other Kurdish tribes remained under Persian domination²⁸.

The Ottomans acknowledged the importance of Kurdish support in the war against Persia as well as their strategic location on the edge of the empire. In order to secure the support of the Kurds, Ottomans appointed the loyal emirs' hereditary governors, an anomaly in the Ottoman political tradition. The old feudal lords were restored to their traditional powers and privileges and were left virtually independent to run their own affairs as long as they collected and transferred taxes to the Sublime Porte, the Ottoman court of Constantinople. Some areas, so-called Kurd "Hukumate" or autonomous region enjoyed complete independence with right to strike their own coinage and Friday prayers said in the name of their emirs, while the bulk of Kurdistan was divided into three governorates or Villayates²⁹. It was a situation virtually unchanged until the nineteenth century, when the Ottoman Empire began to decay. With flood of nationalist ideas reaching the boundaries of the empire and the subjects who live in it, this old pattern of rule began to change simultaneously.

3.6 The Definition of the Term Kurdistan and its Historic Evolution

²⁷ Ismael used primitive and war-like Turkish tribes from the Asian hinterland- the so-called Qizilbash, or redheads to extend the power of Safavid into Kurdistan. Diyarbakir fell to Ismael's brother-in-law, Mohammad Beg Ustajlu, who had the old noble families slaughtered. Qizilbash were put in charge of Kurdish lands. He was such a tyrant that he killed inhabitants and burned down the Christian churches. For the Christians there was little difference between the Qizilbash levies and Kurdish chieftains' rule. It is not surprising that in the face of the Cruel Qizilbash Kurds themselves opted to seek protection from the Ottomans.

²⁸ David McDowell, *Modern History of The Kurds*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004: pp 51-53

²⁹ *Ibid*, p 65

3.6.1 Old Term:

In the third millennium, the ancient Sumerian people living in the modern day Iraq called the ancient land of the Kurds ‘Karda’, and they also called ‘Gutti’³⁰. In the second millennium B.C. the Babylonians called the Kurds ‘Garda’, which means brave. Also, in the second and first millennium B.C. the Assyrians called the ancient Kurds ‘Kardak’³¹. In 401 B.C the Greek historian Xenophone referred to the Kurds in his writings as ‘Kurdock’. He wrote to the Greeks about ‘Kurdock’ when 10,000 soldiers passed Zagros Highlands (north of present day Kurdistan) north of their expedition in Mesopotamia. Starting in the fourth century, the historians began writing the name of ‘Kurdoin when referring to the land of north Zagors highlands’³². In the seventh century A.D. the first century of Islam, the Arab writers called Zagros Highland people ‘Kurd’ for the first time in their writings. In the Arabic language, the letter K is used in instead of G

3.6.2 Modern Usage

The term Kurdistan contains two words: Kurd + istan. Kurd means the name of people called Kurds and Istan means the land on which the Kurds live. Given the history of the modern use, it has evolved over the centuries:

3.6.2.1 The First Usage:

As mentioned above, the term for the first time entered public discourse at around 12th century. The Seljuks, who began to dominate the region were first to adopt the term Kurdistan. They used the term to describe a Sanjak or province that stretched from Hamadan and Kirmanshah in the east to Sanjar in the west³³. It is noteworthy to observe that the first description was the term was mainly used by the Seljuk elite.

³⁰ www.xs4all.nl/~tank/kurdish/htdocs/his/orig.html

³¹ Christian Bird, “A Thousand Sighs: A Thousand Revolts”, New York, Random House Publishing Group, 2004: p 12

³² *ibid*, p 13

³³ John Buloch & Harvey Mooris, *No Friend But Mountains*, New York: Penguin Books Inc, 1993: p 63

3.6.2.2 The Second Usage:

The description of Kurdistan surfaced for the second time in mid-seventeenth century. A Turkish Traveller, Evilya Celebi, who exclusively travelled through all isolated regions of the empire, used the term. He described the independence of the Kurdish khans³⁴, the multiplicity of their dialectics and the sophistication of their towns and villages. He describes a vast area to Kurdistan including a portion of Syria and Iraq. According to Elivya:

“In these vast territories, live 500,000 men carrying guns, faithful Muslims of Shafite School and there are 776 fortresses, all inhabited. Pray God that these districts of Kurdistan will remain for eternity as a barrier between the greatest of all dynasties, The House of Ossoman and the Shah of Persia”³⁵

The term Kurdistan surfaced in the literature by two stages: the first usage was largely used by the intellectual and political elite, while after seventeenth century the term vigorously entered the literature and public discourse. The term of a great Kurdistan surfaced in Kurdish intellectual discourse and hence has become integrated in Kurdish consciousness. The usage of the term ‘Kurdistan’ including all Kurdish lands seems to have been used since the seventeenth century. In the seventeenth century, for example, the classical poet Ahmed Khani mentioned in chapter two, in the epic of Mum o Zin describes the Kurds and Kurdistan as follows:

“I live to God’s wisdom
The Kurds in this world’s state
Why are they deprived of their rights?
Why they all are doomed?
See, from the Arabs to Georgians
Every thing is Kurdish, as with a citadels,
The Turks and Persians besiege them
From four sides at once
And they both make the Kurdish people
Into a target for fate’s arrow”³⁶

³⁴ Khan is a Kurdish term which means the chief of the tribe or a man who can practice authority over large rural area.

³⁵ See John Buloch and Harevy Mooris, P 72

³⁶ Phillip Kreyenborek & Christine Allison, *The Kurdish Culture and Identity*, London: Zed Books, 1996: p 10

3.7 Language

The Kurds speak various dialects of the Kurdish that can be divided into three main groups:

3.7.1 The Northern Kurmanji called '**Bahdini**' is spoken by around seventy five percent of the Kurds. Most of the Kurds in Turkey, a large portion of the Kurds in Iraq, Iran, and almost the entire Kurdish population in Syria speak '**Bahdini**'.

3.7.2 The Central Kurmanji called '**Sorani**' is spoken by a great majority in Iraqi and Iranian Kurdistan.

3.7.3 The Pahlawani dialect is mainly divided into two groups: Dilimi (Zaza o Hawaramy) and Gorani (Kirmashani or southern Kurmanji). Pahlawani is spoken by the Kurds of Kirmanshah region in Iranian Kurdistan and small portion of Iraqi Kurdistan. All of these dialectics are further divided into the scores of sub-dialects. Though all dialects are comprehensible to one another and people understand each other's dialects easily, yet the Kurdish language is not standardised³⁷. (See Map.1)

The lack of a standardised or unified language has been used on argument that the Kurds are not a nation in a modern sense. But the Kurdish dialects are essentially as close as, for instance, Portuguese and Spanish, and even closer than the languages of modern China or nineteenth century Italy. The political circumstance that emerged in Kurdistan undermined all efforts to uniform and standardize the diverse Kurdish dialects. It is worth to note that the diverse dialects played its part in the division of the Kurds politically³⁸.

3.8 Religion

At least three quarter of the Kurds (75%) are Sunni Muslims that belong to the Shafi I school of Islam, in contrast to their Arab and Turkish neighbours who are mostly adherents of the Hanafi School. Sunni Kurds are divided into two sub-groups: Tariqas, the mystical order or Naqashabani and Qadiri³⁹. Their Azaris and Persians

³⁷ Mehr Izzady, International Journal of the Kurdish Studies, NOs 1-2, pp 251-257, Also for better insight of the Kurdish Dialects see , Amir Hassanpour, "Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan,1918-1985", Sanfarnesco, Mellan Research University Press, 1992.

³⁸ Ibid, p 201

³⁹ Martin van Bruinessen, "Religion in Kurdistan," Kurdish Times 4 (Summer-Fall 1991), p. 7.

neighbours are the Shiites. Most of the remaining Kurds are adherents of heterodox, syncretistic sects with beliefs and rituals that have been, to a great extent, influenced by Islam, but owe much to other religions notably Old Iranian religion. Such sects include the Alevites with an estimated three million, the Ahl-i-Haq (People of Truth) and the Yazidis. In the various parts of Kurdistan, especially in the region where the borders of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq meet and in Armenia, there are Kurdish Yezidi communities. In earlier times, the Yezidi faith⁴⁰ was a widely shared religious orientation. Its roots go back to Zoroastrianism. The Alevites are in the majority in the northern and western areas of Turkish Kurdistan and in the Chorasani region of Iran. There are also several thousands of the Christian Kurds and more than 150,000 Jewish Kurds mostly residing in Israel⁴¹.

Although most Kurdish rebellions in the past century were led by the religious figures, yet these sectarian fault lines were one of the main weaknesses of the Kurdish nationalist movement. For instance, the Sunni groups of mystical orders Nakshabandi and Qadiri⁴² never effectively cooperated with each other in the rebellions instigated by either side's leader. The Shiite Kurds in Iranian Kurdistan never actively took part in the Kurdish national movement, and they paid their allegiance more to the national

⁴⁰ The main site of their religion is the tomb of Shaykh Adi just north of Al Mawsil (Northern of modern Iraq) in Lalish. The Yazidis call themselves the Dawasin. The Yazidi religion has elements of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, as well as some paganism. They consider the Bible and the Quran to be sacred. They are also well known as 'devil worshipers' by other people who live near them. The 'Peacock Angel' is their symbol for a fallen angel Malik Taus, who is their euphemism for evil or the devil, who they fear and seek to appease. According to them evil is part of divinity as is good. The Peacock Angel is used in their festivals where they carry out strange and very secret rituals. They also believe that evil is found in lettuce, and are very careful around lettuces. The Yazidis put God on top, but only as a creator, he is no longer seen as an acting force. This responsibility is taken by Shaykh Adi and the Malik Taus. Malik Taus is said to have repented for his sins, and cried for 7000 years filling 7 jars full of tears, which were used to put out the fire in hell, thus there is no hell in Yazidism.

⁴¹ Yona Sabar, "Jews of Kurdistan," in *Encyclopedia of World Cultures, Volume IX: Africa and the Middle East*, edited by John Middleton and Amal Rassam (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall and Co., 1995), pp. 144-147, for better treatment of the Jewish-Kurdish deep-seated tie, see , Brinkmann, C., et al. "Human Y-chromosomal STR haplotypes in a Kurdish population sample." *International Journal of Legal Medicine* 112 (1999): pp,181-183

⁴² The three main Sufi schools, Suharwardy, Qadri and Naqshandi, emerged from the city and spread to other parts of the world. Although Sufis do not like to be bracketed with any particular sect, these three schools belong to the Sunni sect. Other schools principally follow Sunni Islam. The Qadri school is the largest. Abdul Qadir was the founder of the Qadri school) 80 million disciples are affiliated to the Qadri school all over the world. The entire philosophy of the Sufis, especially those of the Qadri school, rotates around spirits and souls, which interact with the world through shrines and tombs. According to Salafi jurists, Sufis, especially Qadris, misinterpret and misrepresent the teachings of Islam with their personal ideals, while for the Qadris, the Salafis have lost the real essence of Islam with their extremist notions. Traditionally, the Qadri school and the Salafis have been bitter rivals. The Salafis oppose shrines and tombs. They believe that after death, interaction of the body and soul with the world ends.

state than to the Kurdish national movement. On other hand, the Kurdish Alevis, fearing the fanaticism of the Sunni Kurds do not actively support the Kurdish national movement. This suggests that the sectarian fault lines contributed vigorously to the weakening of Kurdish nationalism as a cohesive and substantial movement ⁴³(See Map.1). This sectarian division played a pivotal role in undermining the emergence of a strong national consciousness throughout the history of the Kurdish national movement.



Map 1 shows the dialectical boundaries of Kurdistan⁴⁴

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has established that the Kurds are one of the ancient people in the Middle East. Nonetheless, there is no definitive answer to their origins. What is clear is about 4,000 years ago, the first vanguard of the Indo-European-speaking peoples were trickling into the present-day Kurdish areas in limited numbers and settling there. They formed the aristocracy of the Mittani and Hittite kingdoms, while the common peoples there remained solidly Hurrian and Hattian, respectively⁴⁵. About 3,000 years ago, the trickle had turned into a flood, and Indo-Europeans quickly outnumbered the Hurrians. However, the Hurrian legacy, despite its linguistic eclipse, remains the

⁴³ Martin Van Bruinessen , Religion in Kurdistan," Kurdish Times 4 (Summer-Fall 1991):pp 12-14

⁴⁴ www.kurdistanica.com/english/geography/maps/maps

⁴⁵ The Seleucid Army: Organization and Tactics in the Great Campaigns, by Bezalel Bar-Kochva, Cambridge University Press, 1976, ISBN 0521206677, p.50

single most important element of Kurdish culture today. Medes, Scythians and Sagarthians are the better-known clans of the Indo-European-speaking Aryans who settled in the area. About 2,600 years ago, the Medes had set up an empire that included all of the present-day Kurdish areas and vast territories far beyond. By 1200 BCE, Medes conquered Hurrian cities and by 850 BCE, the old language of the Kurds (probably from a Dene-Caucasian family) had changed to Indo-European⁴⁶.

The most flourishing period of Kurdish power was probably during the 12th century, when Saladin, who belonged to the Rawendi branch of the Hadabani (or Adiabene) tribe, founded the Ayyubite (1171-1250) dynasty of Syria, and Kurdish chieftainships were established, not only to the east and west of the Kurdistan mountains, but as far as Khorasan upon one side and Egypt and Yemen on the other⁴⁷. After the Mongol period, Kurds established several independent states or principalities such as Ardalan, Badinan, Baban, Soran, Hakkari and Badlis. The battle of Chaldraran in 1914 constituted a turning point in the Kurdish fate as for the first time Kurdistan was divided into two zones: one zone under Persia and other under Ottomans. The Ottomans after defeating the Persia Shah Ismail I in 1514, annexed Armenia and Kurdistan, he entrusted the organisation of the conquered territories to Idris, the historian, who was a Kurd of Bitlis. He divided the territory into sanjaks or districts, and, making no attempt to interfere with the principle of heredity, installed the local chiefs as governors. He also resettled the rich pastoral country between Erzerum and Erivan, which had lain waste since the passage of Timur, with Kurds from the Hakkari and Bohtan districts. The rest of the Kurdish tribes in the Eastern Kurdistan were placed under the authority of Persia. This status quo remained unchanged until the closing stage of the World War I⁴⁸.

The fragmentation of Islam across Sunni and Shiite traditions played a role in the division of Kurdish loyalty towards the Ottomans Turks, who by and large are Sunnis, and Persian Safavids, largely the Shites. These religious fault lines remained effective in the division of file and rank of the Kurdish national movement which emerged in the aftermath of the collapse of the Ottoman and Persian empires. This

⁴⁶ Ibid, p 52

⁴⁷ Cited in Bruinseen's Paper on Kurdish Nationalism and Ethnic Loyalties, available on www.martinvanbruinseen.com

⁴⁸ Ibid, p 2

chapter further analysed that the diverse dialects the Kurds speak by and large hindered communication between Kurdish regions, and this contributed to reinforcing tribalism and regionalism among the Kurds. The standardisation of the dialects normally strengthens the cohesion of nations⁴⁹. The lack of a standardised language coupled with their religious divisions undermined and still undermines the emergence of a coherent national movement. This trend is evident in all national states having significant Kurdish populations.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p 3

Chapter Four

Stirrings in the Kurdish World: The Kurds and Decline of the Ottoman Empire

4.1 Introduction

The chapter will examine the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the Kurdish reactions to the fragile and weakening Empire. With the Empire being in an administrative, legal and management crisis, the Kurds began revolting against the authority of Constantinople. As mentioned in chapter two, Kurdish elite in the nineteenth century were part of the Ottoman beaurucracy and had been in a close contact with Europeans. They were fully aware of the political developments taking place on the European continent. This chapter analyses the slow pace of the decline of the Empire and the main reasons behind it. This chapter is also an attempt to explain the Kurdish reactions to the Ottoman centralisation project in the nineteenth century which resulted in numerous bloody uprising against the Sultan. Furthermore, the fundamental reasons behind the Kurdish failures in installing their own kingdom modelled on European monarchy of the period will be analysed . Most of these revolts were instigated by Kurdish political elite.

4.2 The Signals of the Decline

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Ottoman Empire was still the most powerful state in the world both in wealth and military capability. The personal style of government, however, cultivated among the earlier Sultans had declined. In place of Sultanic government, the bureaucracy pretty much ran the show. Power struggles among the various elements of the bureaucracy: the grand vizier, the *Diwan*, or Supreme Court, and especially the military, the Janissaries, led to a constant shifting of government power¹. According to some Muslim historians, the growth of bureaucratic power and the disinterest of the Sultans led to corrupt and predatory local

¹ Lord Kinross, *The Ottoman Centuries: the Rise and Fall of the Turkish Empire*, 1990, p .12

government which eroded popular support². Western historians point to internal decline in the bureaucracy along with increased military efficiency of European powers as the principle reason for the decline of the Empire. The decline of the Ottomans was a staggered affair lasting over two centuries. The Empire itself would exist until World War I, at which point it was finally erased from the maps by European powers³.

Perhaps the most significant innovation in Sultanic government was the preservation of the brothers of the Sultan. While Sultanic succession is hotly disputed among both Islamic and Western historians, it seems clear that the Ottomans believed that the Sultan was selected primarily through divine *kut*, which in Turkish means "favour." All the members of the ruling family, according to some historians, had an equal claim to the throne. This explains the Ottoman practice of killing the brothers of the Sultan and their sons; the purpose of this practice was to obviate rebellion or rival claims to the throne. In the late sixteenth century, the Ottoman Sultans abandoned this practice, yet still distrusted filial loyalty. So the brothers of the Sultan were locked away in the harem in the palace. While they lived in luxury, they were still forced to live in small rooms and often in isolated conditions. Many of them went mad, but most simply became fat and lazy, addicted to alcohol and food and lying about. All of them made bad Sultans, completely disengaged from the government. In addition, the Sultans abandoned the practice of training their sons to assume the Sultanate by having them serve in the government and the military. In both Islamic and Western perspectives in respect of the Ottomans, this decline in the Sultanate is regarded as one of the prime causes of its decline⁴.

As a result of the disintegration of the institution of the Sultanate, power had to go somewhere. It principally went to the Janissaries, the military arm of the government. Throughout the seventeenth, the Janissaries slowly took over the military and administrative posts in the government and passed these offices on to their sons, mainly by bribing officials. Because of this practice, Ottoman government soon began

² Ibid, p. 13

³ Ibid, p. 15

⁴ Ibid, p. 16

to be ruled by a military feudal class⁵. Under the early Ottomans, positions in the government were determined solely through merit. After the sixteenth century, position in government was largely determined by hereditary. The quality of the administration and bureaucracy declined precipitously⁶. According to some historians, the sole reason for the decline is that the empire engaged in wars with Europe⁷. While these wars were significant, Ottoman decline was more pronounced internally and economically in the eighteenth century. There are two overwhelming aspects of this decline: steep population increase and the refusal to modernize⁸.

What is clear about Ottoman decline is the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were periods of relative prosperity. As a result, however, the population of the Empire doubled. This eventually produced endemic unemployment and famine when the economic resources of the country could not support such a large population⁹. The wealth of the Ottomans was largely due to their presence on trade routes. The Empire stood astride the crossroads of all the continents and sub-continent: Africa, Asia, India, and Europe. However, European expansion created new trade routes that bypassed Ottoman territories. Vast amounts of revenue began to disappear from the economy. Because the state collected tariffs on all goods passing through the Empire, the imperial government itself lost vast amounts of its revenue. In addition, the Ottomans did not industrialize in the way Europeans were doing in the eighteenth century. Industrialization isn't only *mechanization*. It also involves a complete overhaul of labour practices. The Ottomans retained old labour practices, in which production was concentrated among craft guilds. Increasingly, the economic relationships between the Ottomans and the Europeans shifted gears. Europeans increasingly bought only raw materials from the Ottomans, and then shipped back finished products manufactured in Europe. Since these finished products were produced with new, industrial methods, they were far cheaper than similar products produced in Ottoman territories. This practice effectively destroyed the Ottoman craft industries in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries¹⁰.

⁵ Ibid, p. 18

⁶ Surraya Faruoghi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around it*, New York, Yale University Press, 1993, p. 5

⁷ Ibid, p. 11

⁸ Ibid, p. 12

⁹ Ibid, p. 14

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 17

There is certainly evidence that the Ottoman government was losing control it had exerted in earlier periods. In Asia Minor from the end of the 16th century there were violent disturbances involving discharged soldiers, dissatisfied peasants, and discontented tribesmen. Later, in Anatolia, there grew up so-called valley lords who controlled their own regions and paid little heed to the government. Similar groups, notably the commanders of fortresses, came to exercise autonomous authority in Rumelia. Bedouin, Kurds, Albanians, and other traditionally independent groups became yet more resistant to authority in the 18th century. In Egypt, the Mameluke factions overawed the Ottoman Pasha, and in Syria and Lebanon local notables and officials ignored or defied the Government in Istanbul. There is also evidence that the registers, once so carefully maintained, were not kept up, indicating a decline in government control¹¹.

4.3 The First Kurdish Irritations

Ottoman Empire had been in a relatively slow decline since 1683, when the army of the empire had been pushed back at the gate of Vienna. By the early years of the nineteenth century the empire's decline had become apparent. The Medieval Ottoman was unable to cope with the tasks of administering and defending a far-flung empire. The Ottoman's grip on European territory to a large extent weakened as the ideas of nationalism, equality and independence inspired by the French revolution spread all over the continent. On the military front, the imperial powers of Britain and Russia were pressing on the Ottoman territory¹².

Ottoman response to the decaying that emerged in the Empire was to centralise power and extend direct rule to regions such as Kurdistan. Thus Kurdistan constituted a linchpin in political power centralisation scheme by the Ottomans, for the Kurds are territorially the closest to the Ottoman Turks and besides that they shared the Sunni brand of Islam¹³. It is worthwhile to note that until nineteenth century, Asian subjects of the Sublime Porte- Turks, Arabs, Greeks, Armenians and Jews slumbered in the

¹¹ Janet Klein, 'The Decline of the Ottoman Empire and National Movements', Montana, Montana University Press, 1996, p.6

¹² Peter Alter, Nationalism, London, Oxford University Press, 1994: pp 24-25

¹³ Ibid, p. 65

Ottoman twilight. Muslims among them paid allegiance to the Sultan as caliph of Islam. National identity was less important than shared religion. Kurdistan had declined from its early glory as a result of the wars fought on Kurdistan between Turks and Persians: the rival Empires. Kurdish destinies changed radically around this time, when the Ottoman and Persian empires divided Kurdistan into spheres of influence, agreeing on a border in 1639. In order to protect their sovereignty, the principalities supported one or the other power, for most of the next three centuries a prevailing war economy destroyed the agrarian system, devastated villages and towns, precipitated massacres and led to forcible migrations of Kurds and settlement of Turkish tribes in parts of Kurdistan. All of this inhibited further growth of urban areas and settled agrarian production relations, reinforcing tribal ways of life. This is in addition to the constant warfare among the Kurds themselves. Towns and cities declined, castles were abandoned. War-like mountain tribes were preyed on the settled populations of the valleys and the plains¹⁴.

Under the Ottomans Kurds were ruled by their own princes on the behalf of the Sublime Porte. From the beginning of nineteenth century, Ottomans began to reform their governing structure and directly began interference in Kurdish affairs. The reason for the intervention was to use Kurdistan as a buffer zone on one hand and on the other hand Kurdistan represented the source of manpower for the Sultan's colonial wars in Europe and elsewhere. This direct intervention in Kurdish affairs brought on a challenge to the power of Kurdish feudal chiefs, who were happy to pay loyalty to the Sublime Porte, as long as they were left free to run their own affairs¹⁵.

The first signals of decaying in the old pattern of rule emerged in the first quarter of the nineteenth century in areas ruled by the Ottoman Sultanate. Signals represented numerous uprisings that erupted within Ottoman boundaries. As a result Egypt broke away from Ottoman rule (1811-18), Serbia revolted (1815-17) and Greek launched their war of independence in (1821-31)¹⁶. Martin Van Bruinseen, a prominent expert on Kurdish nationalism, believes that the emergence of Kurdish nationalism received a firm boost from the news of Greek and Slav independence. He goes further

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 23

¹⁵ Lytle, Elizabeth Edith, A bibliography of the Kurds, Kurdistan, and the Kurdish question, Monticello, Ill, Council of Planning Librarians, 1977: pp. 34-37

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 41

suggesting that the Kurds became more self-aware when British and Russia advanced militarily in the face of the Ottoman Empire. According to him, the nineteenth century witnessed, for obvious reasons, the emergence of 'pro-British' and 'pro-Russian' wings in Kurdistan's ruling circles. By the second half of the century Russia and Britain had become the most significant powers in the environment. The actions of the leading Kurds were strongly influenced by their perception that those states were stronger than the Ottomans and the Iranians, and that both intended to acquire control of Kurdistan¹⁷. It seems that the Kurdish ruling establishment oversimplified the complex nature of power politics played by major powers in the region at the time.

Assuming the furtherance of chaos within empire, Ottomans wanted to solidify their power structure and secure the integrity of the southern fringes of the empire from the dismemberment which was geographically close to their power seat. To counter these half-heart nationalist-inspired uprisings, the Ottomans forcibly raised levies from among Kurdish tribes. In another move, Ottomans imposed military conscription on the Kurds. These moves offended the Kurds and as a result numerous major rebellions erupted against the Ottoman rule. Before examining the nineteenth century rebellions, it is important to examine the tribal structure of the Kurdish society and then explain why all rebellions ended in failure.

4.4 Tribalism and Religion in Action: Kurdish Social Structure and its Impact in Undermining the Development of a Coherent National Consciousness

In order to build up an understanding as to what was the chief stumbling block in the way of developing national awakening of the Kurds, it is important to examine the social structure of the Kurdish society. Traditional Kurdish society was divided into members of the tribes. The members of the tribe paid their absolute obedience to the powerful, landowning chieftains. The first duty of the members of tribe is to the chief of tribe and second to religion. Edward Arnold believes that national consciousness foremost is a pre-requisite for success of national. Given the status of the Kurdish rebellions, he believes that the concept of national consciousness towards fellow

¹⁷ *Ibid*, P. 54

Kurds in a nationalistic context was almost non-existent¹⁸. If a chief of tribe decreed that it was in the interest of the tribe to fight on the side of non-Kurdish state authorities, then his followers would obey. Given that kind of tribal psyche, the Kurds cooperated with their own existential enemies without any sense that they are betraying a higher national Kurdish cause¹⁹.

This tribal trend was dominant in the Kurdish social and political life by the start of the nineteenth century and remained so over decades. Blood ties which bind the members of tribe are often more mythical than real and tribesmen can rarely trace their ancestors back more than a few generations. The tribes formed alliances of convenience which so often shifts according to circumstances. At times, a section of a tribe would break away and seek protection from a more powerful tribe and eventually became integrated with it. Thus some tribes would grow powerful, while others would decline. Tribes were generally associated with particular region, to which they gave their names. A number of traditions and practises were strictly adhered and these tribal traditions were designed to secure the integrity of the tribe. Among the most important social practises were marriage and the pursuit of the blood feuds. The tradition of blood feud set tribal loyalty above other national considerations. If a Kurd were killed, relatives would seek out the first member of the tribe responsible and kill him. It was not thought necessary to pursue the actual killer. This prompts cycle of revenge and counter revenge which could last for generations and was one of the main causes of tribal rivalry. Within the Kurdish tribal society, there is a tradition of marriage between cousins. A girls' first cousin is accepted to have an automatic right to her hand in marriage and therefore to enjoy a theoretical veto on her marrying any one else. In case of a failure marriage between cousins, parents would always prefer to find a partner among other close rather than distant relatives, and any relative is considered preferable to someone else from outside the tribe. Given this tribal context, Kurdish society was collective-based and socially very inter-twined²⁰.

¹⁸ Boyed C. Shafir, "Faces of Nationalism: New Realities and Old Myths, New York, 1971: p 16

¹⁹ Willian Egelton, *Kurdish Rugs and Other Wavings*, New York, Interlink Books, 1980: pp 44-59

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 76

Within Kurdish culture, the group takes precedence over the individual. Loyalty to the group is highly valued, and responsibility is generally considered to fall upon the group in its entirety rather than on any particular individual. Distant cousins, neighbours, and friends can develop bonds as strong as any between close family members. Kinship ties are sometimes fabricated, denied, and manipulated to accommodate these social realities. Because of the primacy of the group, obligations of group members to one another are wide, varied, and powerful²¹. Instead of asserting their separateness and privacy as independent individuals, the Kurds tend to interact as members of a group-family, clan, village, neighbourhood, tribe, etc. Group norms guide individual behaviour, and the Kurds display a high need for social approval. Shaming is the primary instrument with which the Kurdish society enforces conformity. The group often determines a person's identity, status, and prospects for success in life. As a result, the Kurds are subjected to immense family and community pressures

The benefit of belonging to a tribe is that it provides mutual protection and security, for which in return the tribesman pay absolute loyalty to his tribal chief. It can be said that tribalism is more important in times of conflict than in times of peace. This became a social norm and thus has become an integrated and often repeated pattern in Kurdish tribal politics. Where necessary, tribes would join together in larger confederations out of mutual self-interest, usually warfare against rival tribes²². A large Kurdish tribal confederacy called a shiret (tribe) is divided into a number of tribes or sub-tribes called tira. The tira is the primary political and landowning group. Membership in it is patrilineally inherited. The genealogical depth of the tiras varies. Each tira is led by a hereditary raiz (leader). The leader's position is hereditary within the clan and a new leader must have the approval of the senior male members of the tira. Growth of population and internal tension may lead a branch of a tira to split and form a new tira. The whole tira rarely camps in one unit, but generally divides into several tent camps called khel (composed of a number of households.) Each khel is led by an older man informally elected because of his prestige, power, and capabilities. The sense of belonging to a larger national context was almost non-existent. Given the nationalist perspective, this tribal system divided the Kurdish

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 83

²² *Ibid*, p. 87

nation. For the Kurdish tribes and their chieftains, the Ottomans and Persians were source of power and influence. Antagonism among the Kurdish tribes was therefore a mixed blessing for the Ottomans and Persian empires or central governments in that it offered an opportunity to divide and rule the Kurdish nation, but it also meant that for every loyal chieftain there was likely to be rebellious one²³.

Kurdish tribes show up such a bewildering variety in size and forms of internal organisation that it may seem misleading to refer to all by the same term. They share a common descent, endogamy (parallel cousin marriage) and segmentary alliances. These principles do actually operate at the level of the smaller sub-tribes, but they are contradicted by the political alliances and authority relations integrating these sub-tribes into larger wholes. In larger tribes, one often finds leading lineages that are at best distantly related to the commoner lineages making up the bulk of the tribe, and their authority is often shored up by an armed retinue and/or by recognition by the state apparatus, which also implies ultimately violent sanctions²⁴.

The tribal trend continued to be an important factor in Kurdish social life and in Kurdish national politics. The role of the tribal chiefs towards the central governments could also affect the attitude of non-tribal peasants who were regarded by the chieftains as assets with little status, as Buloch put it “little more status than flocks of sheep”²⁵. In some cases, they were even denied the right of free movement outside their village unless they had permission of their tribal landlord. What is more, townspeople had chosen to align themselves to powerful tribes in their immediate vicinity in order to enjoy their protection. Tribal loyalties continue to dominate Kurdish society, and the allegiance of the majority of the Kurds has been to their extended families, clans, and tribes. Harvey Morris believes that Kurdish tribal leaders have played key roles in galvanizing and leading the Kurdish nationalist movement, but tribal ties undermined a more general and all-encompassing Kurdish nationalism²⁶. The tribes remained the centre of authority and nationalism never took the central position in the Kurdish consciousness during the decades that nationalism inspired

²³ IbidP., 83

²⁴ For the chronology of the events and the role of the tribes, see Kinnane London, Oxford University Press: 1964: Pp. 59-81

²⁵ Buloch and Harvey Morris, *No Friends But Mountains*, New York, Penguin Books Inc, 1994: p. 78

²⁶ Martin van Bruinessen, “Kurds, states, and tribes”, New York, Utrecht University, 1992: pp 23-24

many subjects of the Ottoman Empire. As Morris put it “nationalism never became the centre of authority and cohesion in the early days of the Kurdish rebellions”²⁷. The tribal psyche which dominated Kurdish politics played a central role in undermining the emergence of national cohesion and solidarity in the decaying stage of the Ottoman Empire and its aftermath.

4.5 Reactions to the Ottoman Empire

The first Kurdish reactions started in the early nineteenth century when the Ottoman Empire began the implementation of centralisation programme. In order to do that, the Constanipole asked the chiefs of the Kurdish principalities to pay their tax to the Sultanate based in Constanipole and contribute their troops to help the Empire which is already preoccupied with the wars on the European front. The Kurdish principalities refused the Sultanate request, and as a result major uprisings occurred in Kurdistan. The most significant rebellions are as follows:

4.5.1 The Baban Uprising 1806-1809

The first Kurdish revolt was launched by Abdurrahman Pash from Baban tribe against the Sublime Porte. He declared war on the Sublime Port in 1806, when the Ottomans appointed Emir from a rival tribe. The Ottoman appointment of Emir from a rival tribe was mainly aimed at weakening the Baban family which commanded a great deal of respect among the Kurds. Furthermore, Baban family after having been semi-independent over decades refused to pay taxes and allegiance to the Ottomans. Initially, Babans liberated a large swath of Kurdish land and built up the city of Sulemiania in what is now Iraqi Kurdistan²⁸. The Baban revolt lasted for three years. It was finally defeated by an alliance between the Turkish and Kurdish tribes who

²⁷ Ibid, p. 30

²⁸ Bruinseen, ‘Kurdish Revolts in 18th Century’, Zed Books, London, 1991, p. 15

were traditional rivals of the Baban²⁹. In the first of many attempts to achieve the Kurdish independence, the Kurdish rebels were betrayed by fellow Kurds.

4.5.2 Mir Mohammad of Rawanduz Uprising 1826-1838

The second major rebellion broke out in southern Kurdistan in 1826. Mir Mohammad of Rawanduz, the prince of Soran, a descendent of Salahadin led the rebellion. He proclaimed independence from the Sublime Porte. Mir Mohammad deployed a two-pronged strategy: on the diplomatic front he opened diplomatic relations with Egypt under Mohammad Ali and Persia under the Shah, while on other hand he established an armament industry at Rawanduz and created an army of 10,000 cavalry and 20,000 infantry. His aim was to unite all Kurdish tribes and in effect establishes a Kurdish independent Kingdom³⁰. Kandal Nazan believes that the ideas held by Mir Mohammad to unify Kurdistan had been parallel to the dreams of the Germans nationalists in 1830s and 1840s to assemble all German states in a single nation state. According to him, the pan-Kurdism of the time was inspired in part by the developments in the Europe³¹.

Mir Mohammad sought the support of the Kurdish neighbouring prince of Botan, who had his own aspirations to become King. He also sent envoys to the Kurdish tribes in Iran to earn their support in his war of Liberation. In 1834, He successfully fended off the counter-offensive by the Sultan's forces, and the following year conquered Iranian Kurdistan. This alarmed the Shah and he called in the Russians to help contain Kurdish forces. Assuming a joint offensive by Persians and Ottomans, Mir Mohammad withdrew his forces to his stronghold, Rawanduz. At the same time, he played a diplomatic trick against the Sultan by offering to recognise Persian sovereignty over Kurdish provinces in Iranian Kurdistan³².

²⁹, Ibid, 34, Also For better treatment of this article, see Maria T. Oshia, "Between the Map and Reality: Some Fundamental Myths of Kurdish Nationalism", Peoples Medeterrence, No 68-69, July-December 1994, pp .76-83

³⁰ Ibid, p 91

³¹ Kandal Nezan, "The Rebellions of Nineteenth Century in Kurdistan", Paris, Institute of Kurdish Studies", 1981: p 81

³² Ibid, p. 88

In July 1836, Mir Mohammad's forces once more fended off Ottoman armies but this time the Sultan used his most powerful weapon, religion. The Sultan resorted to religious solidarity to defeat the rebels. A Fatwa³³ was issued which stated that all those who fought the armies of the Sultan-Caliph were infidels. Mir Mohammad refused to bow to this blackmail. But appeal to Islam lost him support among his followers. This time it was religion which undermined the national cause³⁴. Mir Mohammad was forced to surrender and exiled to Constantinople. The Sultan II gave him symbolic honours and six months later he was released. On his return to Kurdistan, the Sultan's men assassinated him at Trebizond³⁵.

4.5.3 Botta Rebellion 1828- 1855

The rebellion was led by Bedir Khan, who succeeded his father in 1821 as Emir of Botta. Botta was an unruly collection of nomadic and other tribes centred on the Jezireh, where the modern frontiers of Turkey, Syria and Iraq meet. Bedir Khan showed independence from Constantinople and refused to commit Kurdish troops in the Russo-Turkish war in 1828. It is widely believed that Bidir Khan had some of the attributes of a modern, though autocratic, leader. He brought security and prosperity to his principality by punishing lawlessness and brigandage with extreme severity³⁶.

Like Mir Mohammad, Bedir Khan organised the tribes along regimental lines and struck alliances with other tribal leaders, including the powerful Hakkari tribe, the largest tribe bordering Iraqi and Iranian Kurdistan. When the Ottomans besieged his capital at Cizre in 1836, his Kurdish allies sent a mixture of forces comprising of Kurds, Christians, Assyrians, and Armenians to relieve him. Bedir Khan survived and in 1840 with the defeat of the Ottomans by the Egyptian forces under leadership of Ibrahim Pasha, he saw an opportunity to liberate Kurdistan as a whole. He secured the control of all of the Ottoman Kurdistan principally through alliances with his

³³ Fatwa is Arabic concept, which means a religious decree. People with high religious credentials have authority to pass it. When Fatwa is issues, it becomes the duty of all Muslim believers to follow it. Given the traditional meaning of the concept, any Muslim is not obedient to Fatwa, his religious beliefs become suspicious.

³⁴ Maria T. Oshia, "Between the Map and Reality: Some Fundamental Myths of Kurdish Nationalism", Peoples Medeterrence, No 68-69, July-December 1994. pp .70

³⁵ Ibid, p .73

³⁶ See David McDowell, The Modern History of The Kurds, London:I.B.Tauris, 1996: P. 34

fellow Kurdish princess and chieftains. Again the Ottomans used their powerful weapon, religion. But this time the Sublime Porte changed the tack by asking Christian missionaries to persuade Christians not to fight on the side of the Kurds. It is noteworthy to note that despite the tolerance Bedir Khan showed towards the Christians, there had been massacre of Christians and this contributed to the decision of Christians to withdraw their support from Bedir Khan³⁷. The decisions of the Christians simultaneously impacted on the European powers to lose the sympathy for the Kurds. This constituted a milestone in weakening the Kurdish position diplomatically.

The Kurdish-Ottoman war continued until 1847, when the Ottomans persuaded Bedir Khan's nephew, Yazdan Sher, to change the sides. Yazdan was a senior commander in Bedir Khan's army and was in effective control of Kurdish armed forces. His return spelled out the end of Bedir Khan's rebellion. As a result, Bedir Khan surrendered and died in exile. His nephew, Yazdan, was rewarded the post of governorship of Hakkari region containing large federation of the Kurdish tribes. In the long run, Yazdan did not prove a reliable ally because in 1853, when the Sublime Porte again went to war with Russia, he led his own rebellion against the Ottomans. It was apparent that he tended to take advantage of the weak position of the Ottomans engaged in a fateful war with the Russians. By the end of 1855, he raised an army of 100,000 strong men which even threatened Baghdad. This time the Kurds sought the aid of outside powers, the Russians and the British. The Kurds were unaware that neither Russians nor the British had any interest in helping the emergence of an independent Kurdistan on the fringes of other empires. Yazdan Sher went to Constantinople with the promise that the British would mediate in the negotiations with the Sublime Porte. But he was arrested and imprisoned as soon as he arrived³⁸. In the aftermath of his imprisonment the Kurdish people became leaderless and in the process became directionless which resulted in the Ottoman's effective control of Kurdistan.

The rebellions of the first half of the nineteenth century represent the first signals of the stirrings of Kurdish nationalism. But based on their immediate achievements, they

³⁷ Ibid, p. 43

³⁸ Ibid, p. 53

were a disaster. Kurdish principalities were dismantled and put under direct control of the Ottoman rule. The Turkish troops pillaged the country and by means of skilful diplomacy Ottomans set tribe against tribe. Kurdistan entered an era of chaos, poverty, and lawlessness. The relationship of equality which existed between the Kurds and Seljuks had been totally destroyed and in general Kurdistan reduced to colonial status. Given the nationalist context that spans the tribal boundaries and loyalty as defined by Lemberge, the rebellions had been directed by the tribal nobility within Kurdish society rather than a nationalist movement with a broader nationalist cohesion capable of integrating tribes. The rebellions were mainly aimed at preserving the feudal rights of the Kurdish aristocracy against the Ottoman encroachment. Initially, the rationale behind these uprisings was the need for feudal tribal rulers to maintain their own authority. To accomplish this, the tribal lords needed to gain popular support without appearing to be seeking autonomous power or independence on an ethnic basis. It is nevertheless noteworthy to mention that the rebellions had a passive element of nationalist tinge which appealed to a wide spectrum of Kurds who shared suffering caused by warfare and Ottoman occupation³⁹

4.5.4 Last Major Rebellion of Nineteenth Century and the Emergence of Signals the National Awakening:

The last rebellion took place in 1880. Sheikh⁴⁰ Ubaidulla directed rebellion against the Shah of Persia. Kurds of Iran considered the Sheikh as their spiritual leader, and by agreement with the Shah they paid their taxes to the Sheikh rather than the Shah. The Shah reneged on the deal and dispatched his army to enforce his authority over the Kurds. The Sheikh appealed to the Ottomans for backing. Harvey Morris and John Buloch believe that unrest would have remained a purely Kurdish-Persian affair if there had been no outbreak of Russo-Turkish war in 1877 which prompted the dispatch of more Turkish troops into Kurdistan⁴¹. The Kurds turned to the Sheikh to

³⁹ Ibid, p. 57

⁴⁰ Sheikh is a title for the religious figure among Kurds. In the nineteenth and to large extent in the twentieth century, Sheikhs played a central role in the development of Kurdish national awakening and it is imperative that in such traditional and conservative societies in the absence of national leader Sheikhs were figures around whom masses rallied.

⁴¹ Gerarld Gharlinad, ed, A People without Country: Kurds and Kurdistan, London: Zed Pres, 1996s, pp. 13-15

help and the Sheikh called Britain for aid which they provided with guns and ammunitions .Sheikh Ubaidullah used the guns first against Persia and in effect had achieved some tangible success in regaining control of territory that they lost to the Shah of Iran in the previous wars. The conflict became broader, when the Ottomans were alarmed at the advance the Sheikh made against the Shah. This prompted Ottomans to send troops to besiege him in the west. In 1882, the Sheikh abandoned this uneven struggle. Despite the failure, the Sheikh was credited with intelligence to see guess how the Kurds had been used as pawns by their colonial masters. His followers urging him to order the massacre of Christians for their lack of support to the Kurdish cause, he retorted “We Kurds are only useful to the Turks as a counterweight to the Christians”⁴².

The distinction and significance between the rebellion led by Sheikh Ubaidullah and the preceding rebellions is remarkable. All the previous Kurdish uprisings in the nineteenth century had no manifestation of national awakening, while in the case of Sheikh Ubaidullah there were emerging signals of the national awakening that could have seen broad national boundaries. The letter the Sheikh sent to the British Council at Bashkal clearly outlined the motives of Kurdish uprising:

“The Kurdish nation is a nation a part. Its religion is different from that of others, also its laws and customs. The Chiefs of Kurdistan, whether they be Turkish or Persian subjects, the people of Kurdistan, whether they Muslims or Christians, are all united and agreed that things can not proceed as they are with two governments. It is imperative that the European governments should do something, once they understand the situation. We want to take matters into our own hands. We can no longer put up with the oppression which the Governments of Persia and Ottoman Empires impose on us”⁴³.

Sheikh Ubaidullah’s uprising was defeated. But his letter represents the first ever clear statement of the modern Kurdish nationalism. Buloch believes that the Kurdish national awakening emerged with the rebellion led by Sheikh Ubaidullah as for the first time national awakening was invoked by the leadership. Thus the last stage of decay of the Ottoman Empire (1876-1915) coupled with national awakening of other nationalities within the Ottoman rule corresponds to the first signal of national awakening of the Kurds. Although led by a religious figure, rebellion was the most important of all in the 19th century, for it included the Kurds under both empires

⁴² Ibid, p 54

⁴³ Martin Van Brunseen, “The Kurds In Turkey”, MERIP Reports, 14 Feb 1984: p .7

Persia and Ottomans and marked a beginning of the modern Kurdish nationalism. Most scholars agree that the Sheikh Ubaidulla's rebellion had marked a break from the past⁴⁴ as for the first time the Kurdish rebellious leader had a grasp of distinguishing his people from others, and for the first time, nationalism was invoked to bind tribes of Kurdistan, Kurdish Muslims and Christians, in a single national movement.

4.6 Religion in Action: The Kurdish-Ottoman Marriage of Convenience

Abdul Hamid II, who succeeded to the Sultanate, introduced numerous reforms which were aimed at modernising the Ottoman administration. In the preceding decades the Ottomans, aware of the need for centralised power had begun to concentrate power on the centre, while reducing the power of the periphery which included the curtailment powers of the Kurdish emirs. In doing that, the Ottomans put Kurdistan under their direct rule. Abdul Hamid now surrounded by many administrative problems proceeded to cultivate the Kurdish elite in order to use them against their internal and external enemies. When Abdul Hamid took over the Sultanate, the Empire had been in chaos due to the resurgence of nationalist minorities such as Armenians, Albanians, and Arabs in south. All those insurgent nationalists threatened the security of the empire. It is noteworthy to mention that Kurds loyal to the Empire were used against Kurds who rebelled against the Empire's centralisation scheme as happened in the preceding decades. Ottomans awarded titles and honours on the successors of the old Kurdish elite. They even made the son of Bedir Khan, Bahir Bey, and the Sultan's personal aided-de -camp. The Sultan, aware of chaos within the empire, ordered the formation of Kurdish cavalry modelled on Russian Cossack. The force was awarded the honour of bearing his name ' Hamidiya'⁴⁵.

⁴⁴ See Paul White, "Primitive Rebels or Revolutionary Modernizers? The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey", London, Zed Books, 1999: p. 21

⁴⁵ Pranger, Robert J. "The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State (review)" Mediterranean Quarterly - Volume 13, Number 3, Summer 2002, Duke University Press: pp. 135-138

Ottomans nevertheless utilised the Hamidiya against all their rival forces, but the chief reason for the Hamidiyas' formation was to confront the Tsarist offensive which was the most threatening physical force nearby the Empire. The ostensible duty of the Hamidiye was to guard the frontier against foreign (i.e., Russian) incursions and to keep the Armenian population of the Empire's eastern provinces in check. For the sultan they represented a parallel system of control of the East, independent of the regular bureaucracy and army, which he did not fully trust⁴⁶. The Hamidiya proved effective against the Armenians whose nationalist sentiment had been incited and fuelled by the Russians⁴⁷. The Hamidiya generally looked like a regular army force, and but its loyalty among the Kurds was mainly based on tribal connection. The members of the Hamidiya had a license from the Sublime Porte to raid other tribes disloyal to them and in effect widened the hostility among the Kurds. The Hamidiye enjoyed a high degree of legal immunity — neither the civilian administration nor even the regular military hierarchy had any authority over them, and no court had the competence to adjudicate crimes committed by members of the Hamidiye — and the regiments turned into virtually independent chiefdoms. Having full immunity from sublime Porte, the force suppressed the peasantry in exchange for absolute loyalty to the Sultanate. However, the force itself was under direct Ottoman command⁴⁸.

With the growing of Armenian nationalist sentiments, Hamidiya was more effective and useful. The force originally comprising of the Sunni Muslims was employed in crushing the Armenian revolt against the double taxation by Kurdish and Ottoman warlords in 1844-5. Tens of thousands of Armenians were slaughtered on direct orders of the Sublime Porte. It is argued that the mass slaughter was a foretaste of the massacre of 1915-16, in which Kurdish units played a part in the killings and mass deportations of Armenians⁴⁹. Though Kurdish historians vehemently counter the claim and assert that Kurds were simultaneously part of people being massacred and in the process 700,000 Kurds lost their lives⁵⁰. In the absence of historical records, it is uneasy to affirm either claim. Though, the fact that has been well-documented is

⁴⁶ See Bruinessen 1992, Ch. 2: "Tribes, chieftains and non-tribal groups" for a more detailed survey of the range of forms of tribal organisation in Kurdistan

⁴⁷ Ibid, P. 140

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 142

⁴⁹ G.S Gaber, "Caravans to Oblivion: The Armenian Genocide, 1915", Wiley, 1996, pp. 23-25

⁵⁰ Ibid, P. 54

that the Hamidiya in later engagements waged a ferocious fight against their fellow Kurds and Arabs on the southern fringes of the Empire⁵¹.

It is believed that the Kurdish-Christian antagonism grew more intensive and coherent in the late nineteenth century. Armenians and Jews dominated the manufacturing and craft industries of Kurdistan. In the preceding decades both peoples, Armenians and Kurds, enjoyed a symbiotic relationship as they shared a relatively common territory and traditions, a side from religion. In addition to that, they had decided by the same international frontiers. The introduction of the cash economy to Kurdistan boosted the importance of the Christians as money-lenders to the tribes. This led to ill-feeling on the part of the money debtors. In effect, the historic relationship they enjoyed as the peoples with common characteristics had become tenuous. The Ottomans this time around again employed religious impulses by appealing to the Muslim solidarity of the Kurds against what they called 'unbelievers'⁵². As a consequence, the Kurds looked towards the Ottoman Caliphate, while the Armenians leaned towards the Christian west as a model and for political support as well. Hence, this contributed to growing hostility between these two communities.

The Kurdish Hamidiya remained useful until and even after the emergence of the Young Turks, a group of Turkish Nationalists in early 1900s⁵³. The Hamidiya was officially disbanded in 1908, when the Young Turks took power in a military coup in 1908. This suggests that the emergence of Turkish Nationalism under the name the Young Turks, to a great extent, reduced the significance of the Kurdish-Hamidiya closely affiliated to the Sublime Porte. And in effect this led to their official disbandment. The Hamidiye regiments were disbanded by the Young Turk regime

⁵¹ Ibid, P.165

⁵² Ibid, pp .172-175

⁵³ The decay of the Ottoman Empire was already quite advanced in the nineteenth century. There had been a limited capitalist development since the beginning of the century, but industry was hardly established. On the one hand, the Sultans feared the growth of a working class, on the other; they relied on high tariff restrictions to prevent English and French industry from conquering the markets of the Ottoman Empire and ruining domestic craft production. The exploitation of the peasantry by the feudal lords and the moneylenders (not infrequently one and the same person) rose enormously. A 1858 law permitting private ownership of land meant they were able to acquire large land holdings and to strengthen their position against the Sultan. The money they squeezed out of the peasants was often "invested" in buying posts in the state apparatus, the army or clergy. There was practically no significant productive bourgeois layer opposed to the old feudal system. For this reason, the leadership of the first revolution in 1908 was composed of army officers, the so-called Young Turks--"Yeni Osmanlılar, Quoted in E.H. Carr's *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 3, Penguin, 1973, p. 296

that deposed Sultan Abdulhamid in 1909, but within a few years they were revived under another name. The revival of the Hamidya-style militia was used by the Turks against the allied troops in the early stage of the World War I. Kurdish tribal regiments took part in the World War and, along with the Ottoman Empire itself, disappeared once the war over.

The Young Turks were mainly a composite of the nationalist officers who had been upset by the Empire's dependence on the whims of European power. They represented the Turkish and Muslim bourgeoisie which felt suppressed by the Christian merchant class and their domination over the economy through its links with the affluent Christian Europe. Furthermore, the mismanagement of Ottoman administration and incompetence and corrupt officials of the Sublime Porte contributed to further frustration of Young Turks⁵⁴.

4.7 Conclusion

The modernisation and centralisation of the Ottoman Empire occurred at a time when it was too late to save the Empire from internal unrest and external threats. Already, the Empire loses its robust administrative cohesion to be able to maintain the integrity of empire. By the time the Empire took measures to centralise its political structure, the national movements made remarkable advance in rallying support behind their nationalist causes. Basically, lack of internal administrative cohesion and the staunch military defeats on the European front contributed to placing the empire in a vulnerable position in the face of internal disturbances.

The Ottomans heavily relied on the Kurds to help retain the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Kurds had major characteristics which proved useful for the Ottoman's

⁵⁴The main motivating factor in the ever-widening discontent, however, was an agony and concern over the independence of the Turkish State and how best to ensure its continuance. Added to this, and of equal concern, was the problem having to do with the welfare and perpetuation of the Muslim populations living among the many other ethnicities within the Empire. The conspiratorial leadership, who came to be known as the Young Turks, expressed their dissatisfaction with the status quo, throwing all of the blame on the Sultan, Abdul Hamid, who they proclaimed to be too dictatorial. They demanded his exile -- though not the abolishment of the Sultanate -- together with the restoration of the constitution of 1876. For better insight about the origins of the Young Turks, see Young Turks." Britannica Concise Encyclopaedia from Encyclopaedia Britannica Premium Service. <http://www.britannica.com/ebc/article-9383216>>.

survival: Their Sunni brand of Islam and their geographic position. In the course of nineteenth century, both characteristics were of paramount significance in terms of allying with the Ottoman Turks. The tribal structure of the Kurdish society, furthermore, undermined the emergence of a Kurdish national awakening. Aside from Ubaidullah's rebellion, the preceding rebellions were led by a feudal leadership with little national consciousness. This weakness played a central in the failure of Kurdish rebellions in the nineteenth century. Kurds were used as pawns in the strategic interest of major powers, and Ottomans and Persia skilfully took advantage of their positions in suppressing Kurdish rebellions. The tribal interests and heavy religious leanings towards the Ottomans undermined the emergence of an integrative national consciousness that could bind significant social groups within the Kurdish society.

Chapter Five

The Early Stage of the First World War and Beyond

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine the status of the Kurdish nationalist movement approaching the first World War . In order to gain a full grasp of the events leading to the first World War, it is important to analyse the Ottoman-Kurdish relationship in the pre-war and post-war era. In addition to that, this chapter is an attempt to explain the root causes that produced the Sever Treaty in which a vague promise was made to create a nation-state for the Kurds. Furthermore, this chapter will elaborate a fundamental reason behind the creation of Turkish national state in 1923, and the renegeing of the promises already made to the Kurds in the post-war treaty at Paris 1920.

5.2 Ottoman Nationalism

The doctrine of the Ottoman nationalism is composite and inclusive in the sense that it could encompass various ethnic and religious communities already co-existing within the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire, whether it be Kurds, Arabs, Armenians or Albanians. The doctrine meant that the mosaic would unite and create a modern state. Nevertheless this lofty concept seemed to have failed to gain attention at both levels practical and theoretical as the elements of Turkish nationalism dominated other ethnic groups hoping to be part of the Ottoman state in making. With further disintegration of the Empire, Albanian and Bulgarian nationalism became more assertive which later led to liberation of their countries in early stages of first World

War. With growing nationalist aspirations on the part of other people, the idea of Ottoman nationalism gave way to Turkish nationalism¹.

5.3 Conceptual Transition from Ottoman Doctrine of Nationalism To the Ethnic Turkish Nationalism

With Ottoman authority increasingly waning on the periphery of the Empire, the idea of Ottoman nationalism seemed to have lost its attraction and appeal. In early stages of the first World War, national awakening of the people living within Empire became more coherent and surfaced as a dynamic force which refused anything less than a national state of their own². Turkish nationalists came to realise that the Ottoman doctrine of nationalism would not hold the mosaic of the Empire together as a whole. This set the way for surging the Turkish nationalist doctrine- a doctrine that could embrace all Turkish speaking peoples from Anatolia to central Asia . Though the geographic location seemed to have been stumbling block in the face of the creation of such a Turkish empire³. The heartland of what would become the Turkish nationalist Empire was occupied with non-speaking Turkish peoples, Kurds and Armenians. Hagan believes that this idea may have prompted the Turks to join Germany and Austria in the First World War against allied forces.

The Kurdish nationalism at the time was an amalgamation of religious and nationalist elements. However, religious fervour traditionally overrode nationalist thought. Perhaps, this was the most effective tool in Ottoman diplomacy to galvanise Kurdish support against their non-Muslim rivals in Anatolia. Given the perspective of the Ottomans, with eradication of non-Muslims in Anatolia, they would create bi-national state with the Kurds. Assuming that the Kurds would lean more to religion than nationalism, Jihad was decreed by Ottomans against Armenians. Some Kurds positively responded to Jihad, while others under Ottoman domination leaned to side with Russia. It seems that in the early days of first World War, Kurdish nationalism

¹ Julie Marcus, "Islam, Kurds, and Turkish Nation State, *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, Vol 14, Sept 2003: pp. 4-7

² Hagan Ozuglu , 'Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman Stat: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries', New York, State University New York Press, 2004, p. 6

³ Ibid, p. 7

did still not constitute a dynamic force as religious instincts and tribal leanings surfaced to override other broader national consideration.

5.4 Divided Movement

Kurdish society approaching the First World War was divided, decapitated, without a collective plan for its future. In 1915, the Franco-British agreements known as the Sykes-Picot predicted the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. Unfortunately, the Kurds were in conflict over the destiny of their country.

Some elements in the Kurdish national movement, open to the "pan-Islamist ideology of the Sultan-Caliph, saw the salvation of the Kurdish people in a status of cultural and administrative autonomy within the framework of the Ottoman Empire. For its part, the traditional wing of the Kurdish movement, which was deeply rooted in Kurdish society and which was mainly dominated by religious leaders, tried to 'avoid Christian peril in the East and West' and to create 'a state of Turks and Kurds' in the Muslim territories liberated from foreign occupation. The idea was generous and fraternal. Thus, an alliance was concluded with the Turkish nationalist leader, Mustafa Kemal⁴. During the First World War, the Pan-Islamic movement was closely linked to the Ottoman state or more precisely to the Sultan or Caliph. It became influential in Kurdistan at least for three reasons: first the European powers and their perceived support of the Christians in Kurdistan excited Kurdish anxieties. The Christian threat made Muslim solidarity appear necessary for defensive reasons. Moreover, Pan-Islamism gave some of the Kurdish tribesmen a license to loot Christian property; second, it was in the interest of the Shyokes, the most influential leaders in Kurdistan, to strengthen the Islamic movement. They were its most fervent propagandists. Thirdly, the Sultan Abudllhamid II, the initiator of the movement, was perceived by the Kurdish chieftains as their protector against the state beaurucracy that desired to break their powers. The Pan-Islamic propaganda was so effective in Kurdistan that many Kurds including Kurds of Iran positively responded to the call for Jihad. For

⁴ Ibid, p .10

these reasons, one wing of Kurdish leadership did not support the idea of a Kurdish independent state⁵.

The more visionary and sophisticated Kurdish leadership of the time began to realise that they would gain more from the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. They claimed to take inspiration from the principle of nationalities, from the ideas of the French Revolution and from Wilson's vision, then president of the United States, and fought for the total independence of Kurdistan. This prompted them to actively seek the support of the Allies. In order to secure their support, Kamil Beg of Botton went to Tiflis in 1916 to persuade Grande Duke Nicholas, the Viceroy of the Caucasus and Russian commander of the Turkish front to aid the Kurdish cause⁶. Though, Beg's meeting with Russians did not seem to have produced a favourable outcome for the Kurds. It became clear that major powers in the region especially Russians and Britain did not take the Kurds seriously. In a more strict sense, the major powers tended to pursue their strategic interests which in effect lied with Arabs in South, Persians in the east and Russians further north.

5.5 Sykes-Picot Agreement: 1916

Assuming an overall collapse of the Ottoman Empire under the Allies' military and diplomatic pressure, Russians, British and French had begun secret meetings in the second year of the war. Their high-profiled secret diplomatic meetings were aimed at dividing the spoils of the Ottoman Empire as soon as the war was over. Sir Mark Sykes, the senior British representative, and Georges Picot, a seasoned French diplomat, were the principal protagonists of the idea of the division of the Ottoman territory. Following months of deliberations, they had a meeting at Petrograd with Russians to secure Russia's support for their plan. Their meeting with Russians produced an accord under terms of which Armenia and most of the Ottoman Empire were to become a sphere of Russian influence. Agreement was later expanded to include Italy which would get Aegean Islands and a sphere of influence around Izmir in Southwest Anatolia. The Ottoman villayat (province) of Musel in modern Iraqi

⁵ McDowall, David, *A modern history of the Kurds*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1996: pp. 23-25

⁶ *Ibid*, p .12

Kurdistan was assigned to France, while Arab territories of the Empire were divided between France and Britain⁷. See map 2. .

Subsequent events that had occurred following the Sykes-Picot accord tipped the balance of power in British favour. Albeny's forces took Damascus and Jerusalem and on the Mesopotamian front, the British forces defeated the Turks and captured Mussel, the stronghold of the Ottomans in southern Kurdistan. The following year, the Bolshevik revolution succeeded and Russian under the Bolshevik leadership became pro-occupied with domestic ills and in effect abandoned the grand imperial greediness. Nonetheless, it is widely believed that Russians, being in a weak position, had been denied to have influence in the Ottoman Empire which incited Lenin to release a copy of confidential Sykes-Picot agreement and other treaties causing embarrassment among allies and growing distrust among Arabs. Speaking broadly, these events placed Britain in a much more favourable position. Thus, the British which had almost no role in Kurdistan under the terms of Sykes-Picot accord emerged as the most powerful broker once the war was over⁸.

5.6 The Aftermath of Sykes-Picot Treaty

By the end of 1917 and early 1918, the Ottoman empire was in ruin and the allied forces occupied most of the Anatolia. The Indian Army Expeditionary was tasked to pacify southern Kurdistan. It is noteworthy to observe that when the British forces entered Mussel, the townspeople welcomed the arrival of the British, though the tribes in the city's outskirts were hostile to foreign troops as they assumed their personal or tribal interests would be in jeopardy. This prompted tribesmen to ambush British troops which had resulted in killing a number of British troops in the spring of 1918. This violent encounter placed Kurdish-British relationship on an uneasy footing. The British responded by occupying tribal areas and forcing the rebels into the mountains⁹.

⁷ See Text of Sykes-Picot Accord on www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Sykes_Picot-Agreement

⁸ Ibid, p. 2

⁹ Stephen.D. David, *The History of The First World War*, London: Allen Lane, 2004: pp 34-34

The Kurdish nationalist movement which had emerged from the First World War was divided on the issue whether they place their trust in the allies or in Ottomans. In other word, the Kurdish nationalist movement would not constitute a dynamic force with a single national mission¹⁰. Rather their ranks and files were critically depleted. On one hand, they assumed that Kurds and Turks would form a bi-national state on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, while on other hand they had a high stake to be part of the allies' platform which physically dominated Anatolia and most of the Southern Kurdistan¹¹. Once the war was over, the Kurdish organisations based in the Constantinople and in exile approached the British and French. A part of the Kurdish leadership sought the Allies support for an outright independence of Kurdistan. Two of three organisations involved in talks with the allies were dominated by members of Bedir Khan family while the third called ' Istikhlās i Kurdistan' or Kurdish Liberation was led by Shekh Abul Qader, son of Shekh Ubaidullah, was honoured by the Sultan ,and as a consequence he was vehemently opposing to the concept of a Kurdish National state¹².

The Kurds were also in contact with the King-Crane US Commission- a Commission US dispatched to assess the post-war situation in the Ottoman Empire. The King-Crane Commission reported that a Kurdish national state that covers a quarter of Kurdistan should be established, as well as an Armenian state in that area which was to have gone to Tsarist Russia¹³. The Commissioner further recommended that three states, Kurdish, Turkish, and Armenian, should be created in Anatolia and be placed under US mandate. The King-Crane's recommendations echoed US concern and interest in the region, and their concern about the future of that region has further been asserted in Woodrow Wilson's fourteen point's declaration to a joint session of Congress on Jan 8, 1918 in which he clearly presented his vision:

“ The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but other nationalities which are under Turkish rule should be an undoubted security of life and an absolute unmolested opportunity of autonomous development”¹⁴.

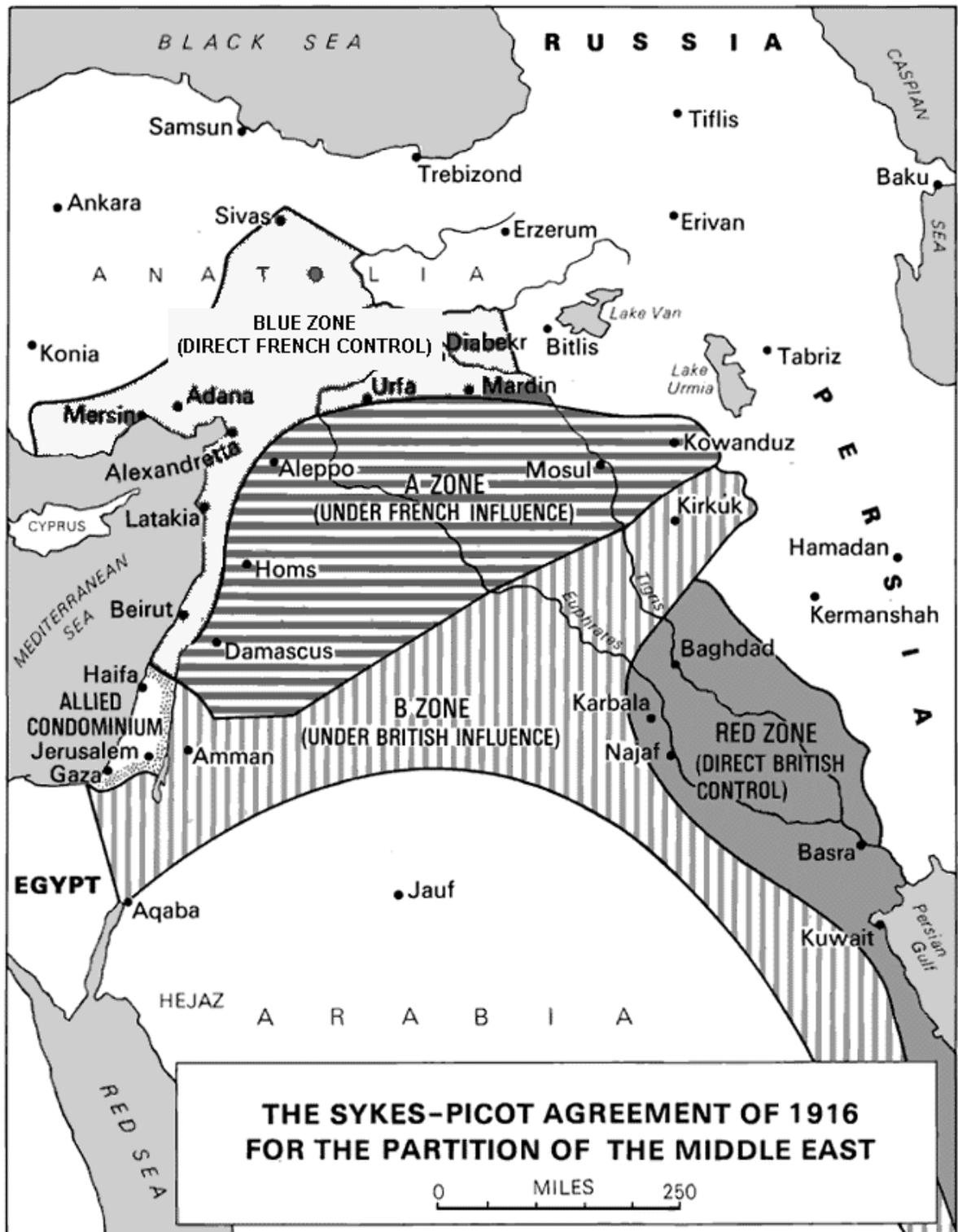
¹⁰ Ibid, p. 42

¹¹ David Mc Dowel, A Modern History of Kurds, London, I.B.Tauris, 1996: p. 13

¹² Ibid, p. 21

¹³ Ibid, p. 23

¹⁴ www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1918wilson.html



Map 2. Shows Skyes- Picot Plan¹⁵.

¹⁵ www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/firstworldwar/maps/maps

Despite Wilson's aspirations for creating a new international order, US interest in Kurdistan was not more high minded than that of French and the British. Meanwhile, all those three states were aware of the oil potential of Mussel Villayat and each was curious not to let oil resources fall into the hands of others¹⁶. The Turks, albeit defeated, had not been idle either. In order to counter the Allied' plans to dismember the Empire; they promised the Kurds autonomy- a promise Abul Qader Organisation actively supported¹⁷. The idea of autonomy by Ottomans further divided the Kurdish national movement and in effect diminished prospects of formulating a unified national strategy on the part of the Kurdish leadership.

In May 1919, the British committed an error of judgment by persuading the Sultan to send a representative to Kurdistan to counter the activities of the Bolshevik organisations in the region. The man chosen was an Ottoman hero Mustafa Kamal, who was later to be nicknamed Attaturk Mustafa Kamal seized the opportunity to launch his war of liberation by appealing Muslim solidarity to the cause of the Sultan-Caliph, who was imprisoned at Constantinople by the infidel allies¹⁸. He persuaded the Kurds that the Armenians were about to annex Kurdish lands for their own state. On the other hand, he skilfully capitalised on the division of the Kurdish national movement and in effect was able to get Kurdish support on his side, which was a significant factor in tipping the military balance of power in Turkish favour in Anatolia. Hence, Turkish war of independence that led to radical secularisation of Turkey and cultural and linguistic repression of Kurds was waged in Kurdistan under the banner of Islam.

5.7 Kurds from Paris Conference to Treaty of Sever (1919-1920)

The preliminaries of the Paris Conference began in Jan 1919 and it was Britain which held the most powerful cards. The British forces were in a possession of the disputed lands and British diplomats had tried to establish contacts with the Kurds. Sir Percy

¹⁶ William Stivers, *Supremacy and Oil: Iraq, Turkey, and the Anglo-American World Order, 1918–1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982, Also see Helmerich Paul.C, *From Paris to Severs: The Partition of the Ottoman Empire at the Peace Conference of 1919-1920*, Columbus, State Ohio University, 1974: pp .35-52

¹⁷ David Mc Dowel, *A Modern History of Kurds*, London, I.B.Tauris, 1996: p. 91

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 96

Cox, the architect of the modern Iraq, had been to Merssalies the previous year (1918) to discuss the future of the region with the man, who was to be the Kurdish representative at Paris, General Sharif Pasha¹⁹. In Paris, Sharif Pasha, a former ambassador of the Sublime Porte, had been chosen by pro-independence wing of the Kurdish nationalist movement to put the Kurdish case. He faced a complicated situation as he found himself representing a deeply divided movement across a mixture of tribal-religious-nationalist lines, and also he himself had little influence among the Kurdish inhabitants of Kurdistan. Lack of a cohesively unified movement under sophisticated leadership gravely placed Pasha in a complicated negotiating position. The negotiating brief was further complicated by the fact that he had no real mandate from the Kurdish nation.

What also contributed to the complexity of the issues at Paris was that the British and French made it clear from the outset that they were not willing to surrender those parts of Kurdistan which had been under the French and Britain mandates in Syria and Iraq. Thus, an independent Kurdish nation-state, if such entity were to be created, would have to be in what was still the territory under the Ottoman Empire²⁰. Despite these limitations, the Paris conference produced a formula that included provisions for a Kurdish national state, albeit in vague language. Historians believe that the inclusion of the provisions in relations to the Kurds was mainly related to the decaying weakness of the Sultanate.

One year after Paris conference, on August 10, 1920, the victorious allies, Turkey, and former subject nations of the Ottoman Empire attended a conference at Sevres. The conference was aimed at signing the Treaty of Peace between allied and Associated Powers and Turkey in Sevres (France). The treaty officially put an end to the Ottoman Empire and in effect abolished Turkish sovereignty. The Kurds had observer status in that part of talks involving Kurdistan and Armenia. Under the article 62 of the Treaty, a commission appointed by France, Britain and Italy was to oversee the introduction of the autonomy in an area bound in the west by the Euphrates, in the north by a future Armenian state, and in the south by Turkey, Syria

¹⁹ Ergil, Dogu "The Kurdish Question in Turkey", Journal of Democracy - Volume 11, Number 3, July 2000, p. 120

²⁰ Ibid p 123

and Mesopotamia²¹. Turkey agreed to British and French protectorate over Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Syria (Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan and Palestine), recognized the independence of Hejaz, Asir and Yemen, granted autonomy to Kurdistan (the province of Diyarbekir and southern part of Van province), ceded Smyrna (now Izmir) and Eastern Trace to Greece and Western Armenia (the provinces of Bitlis, Erzerum and northern part of Van province) to the Armenian Republic. Additionally, eastern half of the Trebizond province was to be partitioned between Armenia and Georgia thus providing the Armenian Republic full access to the sea. The Zone of the Straits formally remained Turkish but was to be neutralized and internationalized. Article 64 which is strictly related to final status of Kurdistan states:

“If, after one year has elapsed since the implementation of the present treaty, the kurdish population of the areas designed in Article 62 calls on the council of the league of Nations and demonstrates that a majority of the population in these areas wishes to become independent of Turkey, and if the council then estimates that the population in question is capable of such independence and recommends that it be granted, then Turkey agrees, as of now, to comply with this recommendation and to renounce all rights and titles to the area. The Details of this renunciation will be the subject of a special convention between Turkey and the main allied powers. If and when the said renunciation is made, no objection shall be raised by the main Allied powers should the Kurds living in that part of Kurdistan at present included in the Villyat of Musel seeks to become citizens of the newly independent Kurdish State”²²

The state that the treaty of Sever envisaged for the Kurds amounts to little more than a mountainous rump of Kurdistan. Naturally, the Kurds under the Shah of Persia were excluded as well as those who lived under the French mandate in Syria. In addition to that, much of the northern Kurdistan was assigned to what was to become future Armenian state (See Map.3). Furthermore, creation of an independent state was hedged around with qualifications. Eventually, it depended on the judgment of outside powers and to the Kurdish desire and capacity for independence. Meanwhile, the treaty excluded the Kurds of Musel villiyat under the British mandate until such time as Turkish Kurdistan had gained its independence. Even if such a state were to be

²¹ Ibid, p 125

²² Ibid, 132

created, it's viability in geographical and demographic terms would be called into question since the largest portion of Kurdistan, where Kurds had massively inhabited was not included in such a state. See map 4

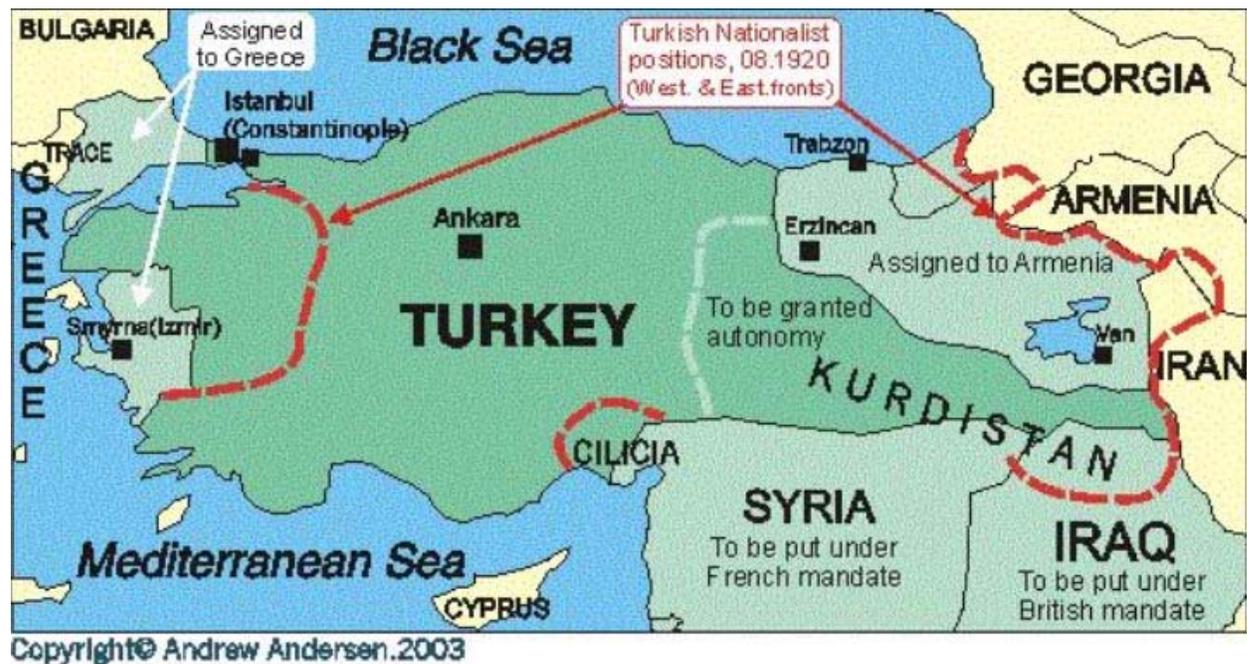


The above map shows Portion of Kurdistan in Turkey²³

- Effective Turkish control Oct. 1918 - Sept. 1920**
- Olti district of Georgia local musul. control Oct. 1918 - Sept. 1920**
- Assigned to Armenia and Georgia by the treaty of sevres, Aug 10, 1920**

²³ www.photius.com/countries/syria/glossary

Turkey According to Treaty of Sevres: 10.08.1920



Map. 4 Shows the boundaries of Kurdish Autonomy drawn in the Treaty of Sever²⁴

5.8 The Turkish Nationalist Backlash: 1919-1923

The Sultan was kept in the custody of the Allies to ensure the cooperation of the Ottoman administration, which had effective jurisdiction in Istanbul and part of northern Anatolia, while they disposed the rest of the empire. Meanwhile, the Turkish nationalist's movement was organised under the leadership of Attaturk. Nationalists employed every tool at their disposal to resist the dismemberment of the Turkish-speaking part of the empire. Assuming the vigorous opposition from Attaturk and other nationalists under his influence, the allies kept him away by dispatching him to eastern Anatolia. It turned out to benefit Attaturk, being away from Istanbul. Upon his arrival at Samsun in May 1919, he proceeded to rally support around

²⁴ www.answers.com/topic/treaty-of-sevres, p, 2

nationalist cause and to recruit²⁵. In order to secure Kurdish support, Attaturk played again the so-often repeated religious card on Kurds, assuming that the Sultan-Caliph was in the custody of infidels, and his second powerful card was that much of the northern Kurdistan were to be annexed to what was to be an Armenian state. In effect, these two-tracked messages got across well and gained immense support for Turkish nationalists against allied forces. Within span of short time, Kurdistan had become a strong centre for Turkish nationalists to wage their campaign against foreign troops²⁶. The Guerrilla warfare grew to full-fledged campaign against the Greek army that threatened to involve allied forces.

In July 1919, nationalists held a conference at Erzurum with Attaturk presiding to endorse a protocol calling for an independent Turkish state. In September of the same year, they again met at Sivas and pledged to maintain the integrity of Turkish nation. Although the delegates voiced their loyalty to the Sultan-Caliph, they pledged to maintain the integrity of the Turkish nation. The congress adopted the National Pact²⁷, which defined objectives of the nationalist movement that were not open to compromise. Among its provisions were the renunciation of claims to the Arab provinces, the principle of the absolute integrity of all remaining Ottoman territory inhabited by a Turkish Muslim majority, a guarantee of minority rights, the retention of Istanbul and the straits, and rejection of any restriction on the political, judicial, and financial rights of the nation²⁸. The Ottoman parliament which met in Jan 1920 approved the National Pact, albeit Nationalist-Ottoman relations were problematic.

In reaction to these developments, Allied forces seized public buildings and arrested and deported numerous nationalist leaders, and had a parliament dismissed. Allied actions brought a quick response from the nationalists. In April 1921 they convened the Grand National Assembly in Ankara, in defiance of the Ottoman regime, and elected Atatürk its president. The Law of Fundamental Organization (also known as the Organic Law) was adopted in January 1921. With this legislation, the nationalists proclaimed that sovereignty belonged to the nation

²⁵ Kinross, Patrick Balfour, Baron, *Attaturk : a Biography of Mustafa Kemal Attaturk, Father of Modern Turkey*, New York, Morrow, 1995: pp 12

²⁶ Sonyel, Salahi Ramsdan, *Turkish Diplomacy 1918-1923: Mustafa Kemal and the National Movement*, London, Sage Publication Ltd, 1995: p 45

²⁷ *Ibid*, p 54

²⁸ *Ibid*, p 86

and was exercised on its behalf by the Grand National Assembly²⁹. These developments, in essence, marked the start of re-visiting Allied strategy.

The Nationalist and Allies had a deep-seated hatred of each other. Speaking broadly, Turkish nationalists grew vigorously hostile to Allies when in the summer and fall of 1919, with the authorisation from the Supreme Allied War Council, the Greeks occupied Ardianpole, Bursa, and Izmir. The Greeks had soon moved as far as Usak, 175 kilometres inland from Izmir³⁰. In the early stages of war, the military action between Greeks and Turks was inconclusive, but the nationalist cause was strengthened next year by a series of victories on the part of Turkish nationalists. In Jan and April 1921, Ismet Pasha defeated the Greek army, and in effect blocked the advance of the Greeks into the interior of Anatolia. In July of the same year, in the face of a third offensive, the Turkish nationalists decisively defeated the Greeks in a twenty day battle³¹.

An improvement in Turkey's diplomatic front accompanied staunch military success. Impressed by the viability of the Nationalist forces, both French and Italy withdrew from Anatolia by October 1921. The same year the Soviet Union, the first European power, signed a treaty with the nationalists in which they established the boundaries between the two countries and recognised them. The war that broke out in 1919 between the newly proclaimed Armenian Republic had been concluded in the summer of 1921 with nationalists breaking the Armenian resistance, as a result Turks had occupied the Kars region. In 1922, the nationalists recognised the Soviet annexation of what remained of the Armenian state, and in the process the Armenian minority living in Turkey went back to Armenia³². As things progressed, the whole diplomatic and political equation had been shifted in Turkish favour.

Given the military front, the final drive began in August 1922, when Turks moved into Izmir and captured the city. Furthermore, the nationalist forces then concentrated on driving Greek forces out of eastern Thrace, though that campaign threatened to place Turks in direct confrontations with Allied forces defending access to the straits of Bosphorous and Dardanelles and in Constanipole, where they protected the Ottoman government. Avoiding engaging in military confrontation with nationalists, French troops withdrew from their

²⁹ Ibid, p 96

³⁰ Smith. M. Llewellyn, *Ionian Vision : Greece in Asia Minor, 1919-1922*, London, Allen Lane, 1983: p 21

³¹ Ibid, p 23

³² Ibid, p 32

position, while British troops seemed prepared to hold their ground against the advancing nationalist forces. A crisis was averted when Attaturk accepted a British-sponsored truce that in effect brought an end to the fighting between Turks and Greeks. The Truce itself clearly implied that the Allies were unwilling to fight on the side of the Greece³³. The tangible progress the Nationalists made against Greeks, who occupied the most strategic spots and unwillingness of the Allies to face the Turkish forces concluded the Armistice of Mudryan on October 1922. According to the Armistice, Greeks withdrew beyond the Marista River (See Map 4) and the Armistice accepted a continued Allied presence on the straits and in Istanbul until a comprehensive settlement could be reached³⁴. The developments that occurred within the span of the three years, had transformed the whole political deals the Allies previously imposed on the defeated Ottomans at Sever treaty in 1920.

5.9 Revisiting the Treaty of Sever: The Physical Division of Kurdistan

The treaty of Sever imposed on the defeated Ottomans virtually destroyed the viability of the Turkey as a national state. The treaty was not recognised by nationalists who rallied around their charismatic leader Kemal Mustafa Pasha, later to be known as Attaturk. As late as 1923, the nationalists achieved the two staunching victories: the overthrow of the Sultan and physical eviction of Greeks from a number of strategic spots they occupied in the heartland of Turkish-speaking Anatolia in the previous years. Given the scope of the success that nationalists made in the previous three years, the nationalists were clearly in a position to request a new treaty. Turkey was the only power defeated in first World War to negotiate with the Allies as an equal and to influence the provisions of the peace treaty. Ismat Pasha was the chief Turkish negotiator at the Lusan Conference that opened in November 1922. The National Pact of 1919 was the basis of the Turkish negotiating position, and its provisions were recognized in the treaty concluded by Turkey in July 1923 with the Allied powers. It is worthwhile to mention that the United States participated in the conference but, because it had never been at war with Turkey, it did not sign the treaty³⁵.

³³ Ibid, p 40

³⁴ Ibid, p 47

³⁵ Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001:pp 23-26

The Treaty of Lusan recognised Turkish sovereignty over all its territory with two exceptions: the Musel vilayet and Hatay province which included the port of Alexandretta. Foreign zones of influence and capitulations were abolished outside the zone of straits. No limitation was imposed on the Turkish military establishment. In return, Turkey renounced all claims on former Turkish territories outside its new boundaries. The treaty of Lusan did not mention the Kurds and spoke only of the right of non-Muslims, a category which naturally excluded most Kurds identifying themselves with Islam³⁶ (See Map. 4). As a save-facing measure for the European powers to show that they had not abandoned the Wilson's principles on the right of self-determination for ethnic nationalities, certain guarantees were included in articles 37/44 of the treaty. Nevertheless none of the minorities handed over to Turkey were mentioned by name in the treaty³⁷. Article 39 guarantees the language rights for all ethnic groups and states:

“No restrictions shall be imposed on the free use by any Turkish national of any language in private intercourse, in commerce, religion, in the press, or in publications of any kind or at public meetings, notwithstanding the existence of the official language, adequate facilities shall be given to the non-Turkish speech for the oral use of their own language before the court”.³⁸

To prevent any future state laws in Turkey to infringe upon these guarantees, article 37 of the Lusan treaty states:

“Turkey undertakes that the stipulations contained in Articles 38 to 44 shall be recognized as fundamental laws, and that no law, no regulations, nor official action shall conflict or interfere with these stipulations, nor shall any law, regulation, nor officials action prevail over them”³⁹

As an international mechanism of the checks and balance on enforcement of these provisions and others of the treaty, article 44 states:

“Turkey agrees that any member of the council of the League of Nations shall have right to bring to the attention of the council any infraction or danger of infraction of any of these obligations, and that the council may thereupon take such action and give such direction as it may deem proper and effective in circumstance”⁴⁰

On October 29, 1923, the Grand National Assembly proclaimed the Republic of Turkey. Attaturk was named as its president, Ankara as its capital, and the modern

³⁶ Ibid, p 63

³⁷ Ibid, p 34

³⁸ Ibid, p 45

³⁹ Ibid, p 53

⁴⁰ Ibid, p 75

state of Turkey was born. Thus, the birth of the Turkish national state recognised in the treaty of Lusan set the stage to divide Kurdistan among the newly created nation states in the region: Turkey, Iraq and Syria. Realising the inclination of the Allies not to press for enforcement of the article 38 and 39 which clearly call for respecting the rights of the minorities, on March 3, 1924 less than six months after creation of the Republic, a Turkish decree banned all Kurdish schools, organisations, publications, along with religious fraternities and seminaries⁴¹.see map 5



Map 5. Shows the division of Kurdistan at Lusan, July 1923⁴²

⁴¹ Ibid, 95

⁴² www.photius.com/countries/turkey/geography/turkey_geography_external_boundaries.html p 3

The exclusion of the Kurds and the newly created Turkish state's renouncement of claim over territories of the former Ottoman Empire at Lusan left open the future of Mussel Villayat and the question of who would control its vast oil revenues. Three years earlier at Sever, Britain had been appointed to exercise a League of Nations mandate over newly-created Iraq and Musel, but at the time of signing the treaty of Lusan, Turkey had yet to abandon its own claim to Musel. Britain galvanised allies support for its claim by sharing twenty five percent of the future oil revenues to French and twenty percent stake in the British-owned Turkish petroleum to the United States after US had complained about the colonial carve-up of the region⁴³. Lord Curzon, the British principal negotiator and Ismet Pasha⁴⁴ at Lusan expressed their concern for the Kurds of Mussel and used this to justify their claims to the territory⁴⁵. But Britain, which was acting nominally on behalf of the newly-created state of Iraq, already pledged of the Sharif of Mecca Ottoman provinces of Mesopotamia in return for the Arab cooperation in bringing down the Ottoman Empire. Hence, Britain prevailed in de-attaching Mussel from the Turkish state and annexed it to the state of Iraq along with provinces of Baghdad and Basra.

5.10 Conclusion: The Evolution of Turkish and Allied Strategic Interests

What is clear is the Kurdish national movement approaching the first World War was not cohesive for mainly two reasons: the division between religious and secular elements within the movement, and the lack of effective communication between the movement and the Kurdish masses. Thus, the movement was too fragile and depleted to come up with any well-presented project. The Turkish Ottomans in pre-world War stage and during the throughout years of the war used this weakness in their favour. When the Kurds came to realise that the Ottomans would be defeated at the hands of

⁴³ Lewis, p. 78

⁴⁴ Atatürk's right-hand man for years; prominent statesman; later Prime Minister and leader of the Republican Party. He died in early 1970's

⁴⁵ The conference was broke down on 4 February due to disagreement ,re- convened on 23 April 1923 for the second time and the Peace Treaty was signed on 24 July 1923. The Lusan Treaty was signed at the ceremony hall of the Lausanne University after tough and lengthy negotiations which lasted eight months. The documents signed in Lausanne included the main Peace Treaty, 16 covenants, protocols and declarations and a final document. With these documents signed in Lausanne, not only a Peace Treaty was made but also the political, legal, economic and social relations between Turkey and Western states were rearranged as well

the Allied powers, it was too late to change sides. Besides that, the movement could not attract necessary support among the Kurdish tribes of Anatolia which set their tribal interests above any thing else⁴⁶. Nonetheless, the defeat of the Ottomans in 1918 and the signing the treaty of Sever in 1920 provided a turning point for the Kurds. From Kurdish perspective, the treaty of Sever, albeit being vague in terms of a promise for the creation of a Kurdish national state, was equivalent to the Balfoure declaration promising a national home for Jews. In the first place, the victorious allies had militarily occupied large swaths of the Empire with the purpose of disintegrating it. The Treaty of Sever not only promised Armenians statehood out of the territories carved from the Ottoman empire but also envisaged interim autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas of Turkey with a view to full independence if the inhabitants of the area wanted this⁴⁷. That, however, never materialised because the Turkish national movement under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal known as Attaturk revolted against the Sultan and the occupying powers. In the process of the rebellion, Attaturk was successful in gaining Kurdish support in his quest. In the beginning of the war of independence, Attaturk skilfully invoked the concept of equality between the Turks and Kurds as the two Muslim brothers with an equal status in the state he would envisage. In his first speech to the newly gathered Parliament in 1920, Attaturk argued that the Parliament was not composed of the representatives of Turks, Kurds, Circassians and the Laz, but rather the representative of a strongly unified Islamic community. According to some accounts of his speeches and conversations with journalists, Attaturk even envisaged, that where the Kurds form majority, they would govern themselves autonomously⁴⁸. It is apparent that Kurdistan for Attaturk and his rebellions nationalists facing the shortage of manpower and material could not afford to alienate the Kurds. For Attaturk like his Ottoman predecessors, Kurdistan represented a source of manpower. From the Kurdish perspective, the Kurds supported Attaturk understanding that a common Muslim cause would exist against the Western interventions, and that a future common multi-ethnic state would emerge. This view was shared more by religious elements in Kurdistan. The more secular and

⁴⁶ David McDowall, "The Kurdish Question: A Historical Review," in *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, ed. Philip Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl (London: Routledge, 1992), P.17.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 20

⁴⁸ Cited in "A People without a Country: Kurds and Kurdistan," ed, Gerald Ghaliand, New York: Olive Branch Press, p .14

sophisticated section did not subscribe to the view assuming that all Attaturk's rhetoric in respect of a bi-national state and the equality between Kurds and Turks as the two Muslim brothers was simply tactical with no substance. For this reason, they started rebelling against the Turkish nationalists in 1920 in Kocgiri, but Attaturk with help of Kurdish tribes at the behest of the religious figures proved superior, as a result crushed their revolt. Within the span of three years between 1920 and 1923, the whole political, military and diplomatic balanced clearly shifted in Attaturk's favour. The Treaty of Sever (August 1920) in which a vague promise was made to the Kurds had now been replaced by the treaty of Lusan (April 1923) which basically recognised the Turkish national state⁴⁹. The irony is that major powers heavily pre-occupied with their geo-strategic interests turned to follow pragmatic course. In other word, their strategic expediency took precedence over their moral and idealistic principles.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 16

Chapter Six

IRAQ

6.1 Introduction

The historical plight of the Kurds living in Iraq provides a constant reminder of the artificial nature of the Iraqi state, and the most emotive indicator of the structural problems that have haunted Iraq since its formation. Liam Anderson and Garth Stansfield in their most recently published book believe that since the formation of Iraqi state, Kurds can be seen in two ways: victim both to the central government and neighbouring powers, and second almost opposing position is to see Kurds as proxy forces for states opposed to the Iraqi government. In both cases, it has been a fact within the last century that Kurds have been marginalised geographically and politically within the Iraqi state that has resulted in them being victim and provocateur¹. As explained in Chapter five, the province of Musel remained a topic of dispute between the Allied powers and the Turkish government during the heated discussions at Sever 1920 and even 1923 at Lusan. For most part, Britain and its allies had no willingness to cede the control of the province to the state of Turkey while Turkey staked claim on the province. Apparently, Turks understood the fact that if they do not make claim over Musel, they might be drawn into some bargaining regarding the Kurds in Anatolia.

In the light of the significance of the large population of the Kurds in Iraq (almost 25 percent), this chapter will examine the formation of Iraq and the status of Kurds in the new state of Iraq. Furthermore, this chapter will analyse the reaction of the Kurds to the newly-created state of Iraq. In the context of the disturbing history of Iraq in the 1920s, the status of the Kurdish national movement will also be analysed.

¹Liam Anderson and Garth Stansfield , ‘ The future of Iraq’, London, Palgrave Mcmilan, 2004, p 156

6.2 The Creation of Iraq and its Flawed National Identity

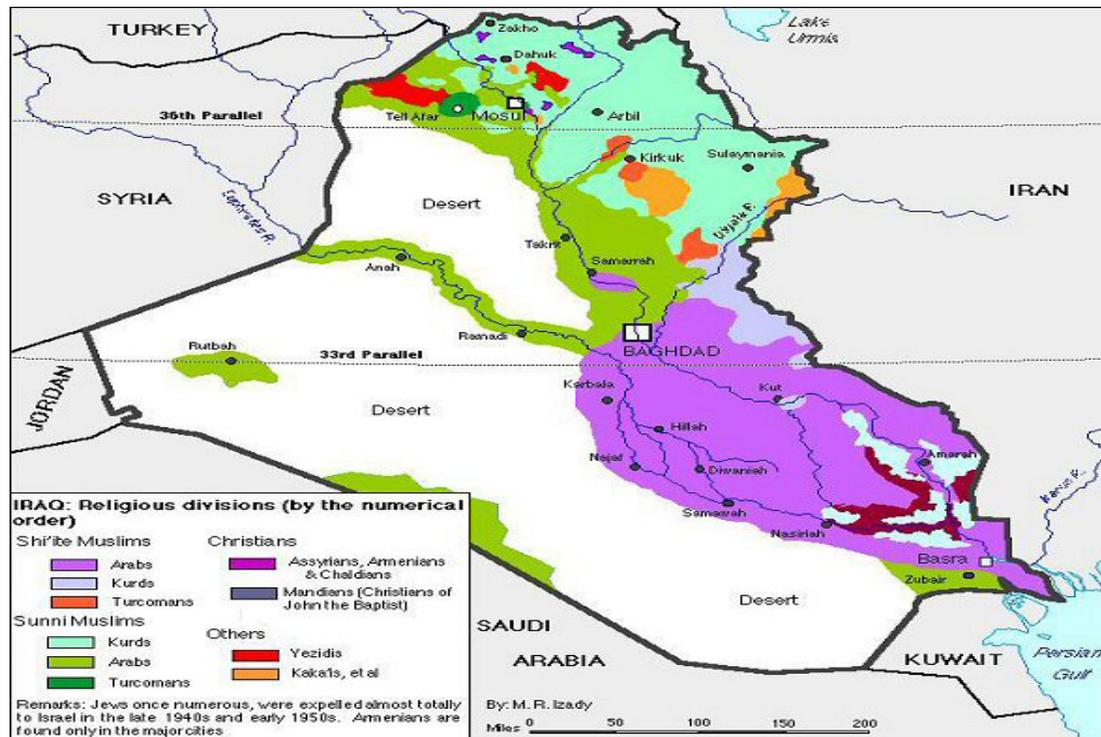
When modern Iraq was put together from three disparate Ottoman provinces, it lacked a common religion, language, or ethnicity (see ethno-religious map 1 of Iraq on next page). Both the religious split between Sunnis and Shiites² and the ethnic split between Arabs and Kurds had undermined a sense of shared Iraqi identity. Every Iraqi government had attempted with varying attempts to create a nation from the diverse elements within its boundaries. To that end, the regimes experimented with methods ranging from pluralism and assimilation to oppression and annihilation. It also periodically embarked on explicit campaigns to create a culture that would be both uniquely Iraqi and common to Kurds, Shiite Arabs, and Sunni Arabs. In the 1920s, British colonial office and new rulers of Iraq had tried to combine elements of Iraq's Mesopotamian elements such as Arab, Kurd, Islamic and tribal heritages. However, no single formula had been capable of rallying all parts of the population. To the contrary, such fluctuating and contradictory policies further undermined the creation of a clear Iraqi national identity³.

Despite these efforts, sectarianism, tribalism, and other forms of local communal solidarity have persisted in Iraq. Moreover, Iraq's circumstances in the 1920s and even onwards had forced Iraqis to revert increasingly to "pre-state" networks of religious sect or tribe or ethnicity. The regime's repression as well as the growing economic deprivation of both the Shiites and Kurdish regions has fed a sense of

² Shi'a Muslims conclude that Ali was appointed by Muhammad to be his successor and the subsequent leader of the Muslims. In effect, Shi'a Muslims believe that to follow the true Sunnah of Muhammad it is obligatory to support the successorship of Ali. Sunni Muslims, on the other hand, believe that Muhammad did not choose a successor before his death. Upon Muhammad's passing, two of his companions Umar and Abu Bakr had a meeting in saqifah wherein they decided on the successor's identity as being that of Abu Bakr, whom they then introduced to the rest of the Muslim community as the first caliph. This claim to the successorship was disputed by Ali himself, the Banu Hashim of whom he was head, as well as many other supporters. However, Sunni Muslims stand by Abu Bakr's caliphate and are of the opinion that he held his office legitimately. This difference between following the Ahlul Bayt (Muhammad's household/family) and Sahaba (Muhammad's companions) has shaped both parties' views on some of the Quranic text, the hadith, personalities in Islamic history, and more. Hadith accepted as authentic by Shi'a have a high proportion of narrators from the Ahl al-Bayt, while hadith accepted as authentic by Sunnis do not

³ *The Truth About Kurds in Iraq* (London: The Iraqi Press Office in London, July 1989)

Shiites and Kurdish identity. As a result, the contemporary Iraq has reinforced tribalism, factionalism and sectarianism⁴.



Map 6 shows Iraqis Ethnic Divisions⁵

The Shiites and Kurds in both the north and the south were brutally repressed by the Sunni-Arab ethnic-centric governments, and as a result they constituted the most serious challenge to the cohesion of the Iraqi state and the identity of Iraqi citizenship. Significant distrust continued to exist between the Shiites and the Kurdish community and the government. However, because of the absence of a clear and common goal for the community and the virtual disappearance of their religious and secular leadership with a democratic spirit, the Shiites and Kurds seriously challenged the Iraqi state and

⁴ Edmund Ghareeb, *The Kurdish Question in Iraq* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1981). pp 20-23

⁵ www.firstworldwar.com/battles/mf

to an extent expressed a desire for self-government⁶. The tremendous tension that existed between the Shiites and Kurds and the Sunni-dominated government was because of lack of Shiite desire to separate the state from religion or merge with secularism. This was one of the factors that the Shiites would not agree with the Sunnis and the core of the Shiite leadership was comprised of the clerics and other spiritual figures who pushed for introduction of the Sharia into the state institutions. The Shiite in large part wanted to emulate their brethren clerics who challenged Raza Shah's project of nation building in Iran after world war one⁷. The Shiite challenge to the state appeared when in 1920: a tribal revolt began against the British in the south of Iraq, incited largely by the Shiite clerics. Many of the Shiites clerics were Persian and felt threatened by British policies that endangered their influence among the local population and resented the occupation of Iraq by Christian infidels. The revolt was put down by the British, who saw the ability of the Shiite clerics to incite a far-reaching rebellion as a danger both to them and to the young Iraqi state.

In respect of the Kurds, at various times in the modern history of Iraq the Kurds had raised demands ranging from independence to federal union with Iraq to the liberation and unification of "Greater Kurdistan." Most Kurds advocate the idea of independence from Iraq but also support wide-range of autonomy in a federated Iraq as a middle ground.

Each of the three main groups that make up Iraq's population-Sunni Arabs, Shiite Arabs, and Kurds-was torn between two affiliations: as Iraqi and as a member of an ethnic or sectarian group. Because the Iraqi state is a relatively recent creation, the Iraqi identity is the least rooted. The ethnic and religious affiliations had deeper roots, greater historical weight, and a trans-national character in the days of Ottoman Empire. Historically, Arab identity has been based primarily on language and a collective memory of their place and role in history. Kurds, despite speaking different dialects, are bound together by their lack of a state and their history of experiencing repression by the Ottoman Sultanate and other nation states. This history of repression had rendered the Kurds sceptic towards the new creators and rulers of Iraq. These ethnic and religious ties had, to a large degree, impeded the emergence of an Iraqi

⁶ Ibid, p 30

⁷ Ibid, p 32

nationalism, created dilemmas of self-identification, and made relations among the three basic groups problematic⁸.

The Sunni Arabs, as the ruling elite, had tried to balance and reconcile 'Iraqiness' and a broader pan-Arabism. By its very nature, however, a pan-Arab ideology precluded a separate Shiites identity and by definition excluded the Kurds. These efforts were accompanied by a divide and rule strategy, discouraging contacts between the Shiites and the Kurds. On other hand, the geographic location of the Sunnis in the centre of the country facilitated this approach. In addition to benefiting from the current political hierarchy in Iraq, Sunni Arabs tend to support the regime if only because it represents a bulwark against possible Shiite or Kurdish power.

The establishment of modern Iraq posed a major dilemma for the Shiites, a significant majority in Iraq and sharpened the problem of their identity. Unlike the Kurds, who constitute a distinct ethnic group, the Shiites are Arab⁹. In coping with their identity crisis, the Shiites explicitly stressed their Arab culture as compared with their Iranian co-religionists. For the most part, Shiites had made attempts to accommodate their religious identity to the framework of the Iraqi state. Although Shiites resent the Sunni minority's repeated questioning of their loyalty and Arab bona fides, the Shiite community has never unified behind a Shiite cause. The Shiite political groupings that did occasionally emerge lacked a strong, leading personality, unified leadership, and a well-developed organization. In early days of modern Iraqi history in 1920s, there had been only one serious initiative by the Shiites aimed at effecting political change: the 'Great Iraqi Revolution' of 1920 and the intifada as mentioned above. This attempt failed because of lack of a cohesive leadership and broad support from external powers¹⁰.

The Kurds had consistently emphasized their separateness as an ethnic group, insisting, for example, on using the term 'Kurdistan', a distinct territory populated by a people with their own distinct characteristics from that of Arabs in the centre and south. Throughout 1920s, Kurdish nationalism had been in open conflict with Iraqi Arab nationalism disseminated from Baghdad. Overall, the collective memory that

⁸ Ibid , pp 32-34

⁹ Stephen C. Pelletiere, *The Kurds: An Unstable Element in the Gulf* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1984).pp 7-9

¹⁰ Ibid, p.12

Iraq had been made up of three separate provinces remained powerful. All attempts that British and central Sunni Arab authorities made failed to produce a cohesive national identity which could combine all social and political dynamics of Iraq over the twentieth century¹¹.

6.3 Kurds during the Period of the British Mandate,1920- 1932

6.3.1 Kurds and the Physical Presence of Britain

Four days after the end of the war with Turkey, on 3 November 1918, the town of Mosul was entered and occupied by British troops as mentioned above (see chapter five), and the area of British occupation was held to extend over the whole of the Mosul province. Kurdish nationalist groups in exile outside Turkey, and local leaders in Kurdistan had long been asking for some sort of separate status for the area, and saw the defeat of the Turks and the occupation of Mosul by Britain as a golden opportunity for pressing their claims. In Iraq, two British officers with long experience of Kurdish affairs, E.E. Soane and E.W.C. Noel were instructed immediately to begin negotiations with local leaders¹². The Civil Commissioner in Baghdad recommended to London on 30 October 1918 that a central council of chiefs for Southern Kurdistan should be set up under British auspices, and after three weeks in the area Noel recommended the establishment of a Kurdish state extending as far North as Van in Eastern Anatolia (some 90 miles north of the present Turkish-Iraq frontier)¹³. In mid-November, Sheikh Mahmud Barzinji, head of one of the leading families in the region was appointed qaimmaqam (governor) of Sulaimaniya¹⁴. It seemed that the British and other allies would not make their mind whether to merge the Kurds within new Iraqi state or allow them to have a separate national state. This uncertain status persisted until the Treaty of Lusan was signed in 1923. It would seem that the allies kept a close eye on the developments in Anatolia, where Turkish nationalist forces engaged in a heavy military confrontation with Greeks and other

¹¹ Ibid, p 14, also see, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder: Westview Press; and London: Longman, 1985:pp 3- 28

¹² Ali, Othman, British policy and the Kurdish question in 'Iraq 1918-1932, Ottawa, National Library of Canada, 1995: pp 12-13

¹³ Ibid, p 23

¹⁴ Ibid, p 24

allies force. Furthermore, allies tended to utilise the Kurdish card in Musel province in order to push the nationalist Turks to renounce their claims over the Province¹⁵.

6.3.2 Inter-rivalry and lack of a Unified leadership

With the defeat of the Turkey, a degree of unity had emerged among the Kurdish leadership which was comprised of the tribal and religious figures. Although, the unity which the Turkish defeat had produced among the Kurds of Turkey and Iraq was short-lived. Noel, the British commissioner, reported in the Spring of 1919 that Kurdish solidarity in central Anatolia had been based largely on fears that the Allies would exact retribution for the displacement and destruction of the Armenians and Assyrians, and now that this seemed no longer likely to materialize, disputes had broken out among rival tribes, none of whom would accept the over lordship of any single leader. In addition to that, the geography of the region, mountainous terrain with fertile valleys, together with traditional tribal rivalries, made the preservation of 'order' on British Indian lines virtually impossible. The complications of Kurdish politics seem almost endless, but the difficulties were increased by British predilections for the construction of tidy administrative units, governed by 'reliable' or subsidised local leaders¹⁶.

The chief difficulty was that the whole concept of self-determination required general agreement in the recognition of suitable representatives for the 'Kurdish people'. The Kurds of the central area of Northern Iraq, around Dohuk, 'Amadiya and Zakho, and those of Barzan and Arbil did not accept that Shaikh Mahmud's lordship of Sulaimaniya entitled him to be recognized by them as King of Kurdistan. Mahmud was in fact unable to exercise any authority over Halabja and Penjwin, both only twenty miles from his capital¹⁷, Selemenya (See map 7 on next page). Another group of claimants, the Badr-Khans, an ancient Kurdish family exiled to Constantinople since the mid-nineteenth century, may have had the ear of the British authorities there, but were no longer able to command support locally, and this was also true of the Baban family, a famous Kurdish family long resident in Baghdad.

¹⁵ Ibid, p 34

¹⁶ Ibid, p 35

¹⁷ Arfa, Hassan, *The Kurds: An Historical and Political Study*, London, Oxford University Press, 1986:p 12



The boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations or ReliefWeb. These maps may be freely distributed. If more current information is available, please update the maps and return them to ReliefWeb for posting.

The truth seems to have been that, had they been given the opportunity, the Kurds would probably have preferred to have been left to make their own administrative arrangements¹⁸. They welcomed their freedom which had been prepared to accept nominal British suzerainty; this can be explained more by their wishing to ensure that the Turks stayed away than by any active desire to be controlled by Britain. Further, the desire for Kurdish autonomy did not, because of traditional tribal and clan rivalries, at this stage produce any coherent movement towards Kurdish unity. By May 1919 the British authorities were forced to remove Sheikh Mahmud, who had succeeded in alienating almost all those upon whom he had relied to maintain his position in Sulaimaniya. It is noteworthy to point out that Sheikh Mahmud in principle believed in the idea of the Kurdish independent state but he also had a stronger leaning towards the Sunni Ottoman Sultanant than to make a clear cut deal with British¹⁹. A rival leader, Saiyid Taha of Neri, a descendant of Sheikh Ubaidullah of Shamdinan, the leader of the great Kurdish revolt of 1880, now appeared claiming to be able to head an independent Kurdish state under British protection. But it was clear that he also had too narrow a basis of support to ensure him any lasting success. The

¹⁸ Ibid, p 13

¹⁹ Ibid, 15

treaty of Sevres, which had vaguely included provision for an independent Kurdistan, was soon nullified by the revival of Turkish strength in the summer of 1920²⁰. Despite lack of certain promise from external powers, most of the indications suggest that lack of unity among the core Kurdish leadership had in part contributed to the undermining the emergence of the Kurdish state.

6.3.3 The Reaction to Britain and The Idea of Kurdish Autonomy

Throughout late 1919 and for most of 1920 British troops were kept busy on the Northern frontiers of Iraq. Revolts flared up everywhere; some were inspired by the Turks in an attempt to drive British troops out of the Mosul area, and some were simply the normal Kurdish expression of distaste at the imposition of yet another outside authority. Gertude Bell, a British Commander, with somewhat limited comprehension of guerrilla warfare, considered the answer was to beat aghawat (tribal chiefs), who were preventing the more generally desired cooperation with the Britain²¹. Soane, writing knowledgeably about actual conditions in Southern Kurdistan, shows a different insight:

“Generally the mass of people desire no change at all; above all they do not want a council for Kurdistan, they rejoice at being saved from Sheikh Mahmud, and clearly Sheikh Mahmud’s rebellion failed because they did not support it. They, after all, know that we could not do anything if they chose to rise against us”²²

According to Soane, the Kurds throughout the course of 1920 were totally directionless. On one hand, the tribes rose up against the British while on another hand the Kurdish leadership failed to present any nationally based project. Late in March 1920 the British Cabinet authorized a public statement about the Mesopotamian Mandate. Britain would accept it, and Mesopotamia would include Mosul. Late in March 1920 the British Cabinet authorized a public statement about the Mesopotamian Mandate. Britain would accept it, and Mesopotamia would include Mosul. This decision was welcome news in Baghdad, but its significance was not at all welcome in Kurdistan.. It is worth remarking that the decision antedates by some five months the statement in the Treaty of Sevres that a plebiscite would be held in the

²⁰ Ibid, p 21

²¹ Ibid, p 23

²² Ibid, p 23

area. From that time onwards it has always been clear that the Kurds in Iraq have never wanted to be governed from Baghdad, but it has nevertheless always been essential, in terms of first British, and later Iraq, policy that they should be. Safeguards could be introduced: guarantees that the Kurdish language would be maintained and Kurdish officials employed, even the direct administration of Sulaimaniya by the British High Commissioner; but these paper promises were not enough. Even the most minimal attempts by H.M. Government to secure some sort of special treatment for the Kurds were vigorously resisted by the King Faisal, the newly installed King of Iraq. Some historians believe Faisal had on his mind that without the unconditional incorporation of the Kurds, mostly Sunnis, it was almost impossible to counterbalance the Shiite's demographic strength²³. In this sense, the difference of opinion began emerging between the Britain and the King.

By the early 1920's the situation in the area presented more problems than before: it was reported from Sulaimaniya that public opinion that would oppose 'even a conditional unity with Iraq Government' while Dokuh, 'Amadiya and Zakho would not object to incorporation within Iraq²⁴. Rowanduz was still occupied by Turkish irregulars, while Arbil would accept a mutasarrif (mayor) from Baghdad if closely supervised by the British Political Officer. No uniform treatment of the whole area seemed possible.

It was not long before any serious consideration of separate treatment was abandoned, and the idea of wholesale incorporation of the area into the Iraqi state was generally adopted. In September, Cox telegraphed a summary of his own and Faisal's views. Faisal feared that if any sort of separate Kurdish state were to be encouraged, the Iraqi Kurds would join with their fellows in Turkey and Persia and thus constitute a permanent menace to Iraq²⁵. Furthermore, and this is the earliest specific statement to this effect, the King wanted the inclusion of Kurdistan within Iraq to secure a permanent preponderance of Sunni over Shia in the Constituent Assembly. Cox concluded:

“To my mind it seems that it would be a reasonable course to work for the inclusion

²³ Ibid, p 23

²⁴ David McDowall, A Modern History of the Kurds, pp 41–42.

²⁵ Ibid, 25

of Kurdish districts and their participation in National Assembly on conditions of local assent and special supervision by British Officers and if necessary by High Commissioner”²⁶

Churchill replied:

“Appreciate force of arguments in your 503 (above) – subject to proviso that Kurds are not to be put under Arabs if they do not wish to be”²⁷

Even this proviso was doomed to be relegated to the lumber room of broken diplomatic promises. It soon became clear that it would simply not be possible to allow free expression of opinion on the part of the Kurds who were not at all content at the prospect of being permanently joined to Iraq. It became essential to devise circumstances which would effectively rule out the possibility of the creation of an independent Kurdistan, or anything which might make the Kurds believe that this could be achieved. Cox wrote to Faisal in January 1922 that both Turkey and Iraq would profit from agreement on this issue:

“the effect of this will be that while having to abandon the contingent possibility of the Kurdish areas of Iraq joining a Kurdistan which would be definition be entirely independent of Turkey, the Turkish Government would also be free from the obligation of allowing the Kurdish areas of Turkey itself to opt for complete independence”²⁸.

It seems that an understanding had been established on the inclusion of the Musel province in Musel while Turkey would not be forced to any sort of autonomy for it’s own Kurds as long as it does not stake a claim over Musel. In the absence of any immediate agreement with Turkey, however, the security situation continued to deteriorate. Between July 1921 and December 1922 eight British officers were killed on the northern frontier; some were ambushed, and others killed on active military service. By the autumn of 1922, the British authorities were forced to bring Sheikh Mahmud back to Sulaimaniya in a second attempt to bring order out of chaos.

²⁶ Ibid, p 29

²⁷ Ibid, p 42

²⁸ Ibid, p 45

Predictably, he proved no more acceptable, either to those who had installed him or to those over whom he ruled, than he had been in 1919, since he was unwilling to confine his activities to Sulaimaniya. Noel reported the situation there in October:

‘I am up against the universal suspicion, in some cases almost amounting to a certainty, that we are determined to get the Kurds into Iraq by hook or by crook and that the election is all eyewash (i.e. the elections to the Constituent Assembly)...I would point out that to the Kurdish mind the assurances that no Kurds will be forced into Iraq cannot be squared with the principle of Kirkuk Iiwa as an electoral college.²⁹

Problems were caused by the delays over the ratification of the treaty by the Constituent Assembly, and these difficulties were compounded in the North by the lack of enthusiasm of a large proportion of the population for the whole idea of the Iraq State. Kirkuk had little enthusiasm for Iraq, and even less for Shaikh Mahmud. Furthermore, as the leading citizens of Kirkuk town pointed out, while they knew of and did not like the arrangements Britain had made for Iraq, they had no idea what Britain intended for Sulaimaniya and the rest of Kurdistan. C.J. Edmonds, the Political Officer in Kirkuk, suggested inviting representatives from Kirkuk and Arbil Iiwas (Province) to Baghdad to discuss a possible federation which might be arranged on the lines of an Indian Political Agency³⁰. It became widely apparent to the Kurds that there was no longer any hope for Kurdish independence, but merely a limited autonomy within Iraq; Kurdish disapproval of this arrangement explains the failure of the formal offer to the Kurds in December 1922:

‘H.B.M. Government and the Government of Iraq recognize the rights of the Kurd living within the boundaries of Iraq to set up a Kurdish government within those boundaries and hope that the different Kurdish elements will, as soon as possible, arrive at an

²⁹ Ibid, p 47

³⁰ Ghareeb, Edmund, *The Kurdish Question in Iraq*, Syracuse, NY, Syracuse University Press, 1981: p 98

agreement between themselves as to the form which they wish that the Government should take and the boundaries within which they wish to extend and will send responsible delegates to Baghdad to discuss their economic and political relations with H.B.M. Government and the Government of Iraq.³¹

The terms of this invitation seem to have encouraged Sheikh Mahmud to listen more attentively to the emissaries who had been visiting him with promises of co-operation from Turkey, although he was at the same time losing ground in his own bailiwick of Sulaimaniya. There is strong evidence of disagreement between Noel and Edmonds over whether to continue to support Mahmud; reports received in the Residency were both contradictory and acrimonious, and it is difficult to get a clear picture of events in the area. What does emerge is that by the end of December a band of Turkish irregulars under one Euz Demir had gained ascendancy over Sheikh Mahmud. Noel reported from Arbil that Mahmud was definitely opposed to any form of Iraqi suzerainty, that he was gaining more support in Arbil and Kirkuk and that he was financing himself by means of the tobacco excise³².

Early in 1923, with the failure of Lausanne to come to any immediate settlement of the boundary, it was decided that a major show of force was the only way of dealing with the situation. This development was the beginning of the 'Forward Policy' mentioned in Chapter II, which caused considerable alarm in Whitehall. Local Administrative Inspectors were informed:

“In the course of the operations it is hoped...to extend the influence of the Iraq Government among Kurds who are at present not subject to it, and any opportunity which presents itself...should be seized upon and reported at once”³³.

Rowanduz was occupied by Imperial troops on 22 April, and Koi and Rania shortly afterwards (See map on next page). It was decided that the garrisons should stay in position until the arrival of the proposed frontier delimitation commission, since

³¹ *Ibid*, p 102

³² *Ibid*, p 104

³³ *Ibid*, p 15

evacuation would enable the Turks to reoccupy at once and proclaim a status quo in Turkey's favour. The turbulence which continued on the frontier throughout the remainder of the year was, according to the High Commissioner, due to lingering Turkish fears that the authorities in Iraq intended somehow to give independence to 'their Kurds, thus forcing Turkey into an embarrassing position vis a vis her own Kurdish population:

“It suggest that it might considerable ease the frontier negotiations if we could give preliminary official pledge to Turkey that in the changed circumstances we have abandon of Kurdish autonomy included in the Treaty of Sevres and that our aim is to incorporate in Iraq as far as may be feasible under normal Iraqi administration all the Kurdish areas which may fall on the Mosul side of the frontier as the result of the negotiations”³⁴

Attacks by combined Turkish and Kurdish forces continued through the autumn and winter of 1923 and into the spring of 1924. However, by the middle of the year it was apparent that British forces had the upper hand, especially after the re-occupation of Sulaimaniya in July 1924. In a final attempt to prove themselves a force to be reckoned with, Turkish troops crossed the Hazil Su in the autumn and attacked Assyrian settlements in the vicinity of 'Amadiya and Dohuk; on this occasion the Turks were not simply encouraging irregulars, but were employing Turkish army units. The Air Officer Commanding noted that had an attack on Zakho not been frustrated by prompt action, Mosul would have been seriously at risk. It seems that the Turks were determined to make the most of the delay between the appointment of the Frontier Commission and the plotting of the status quo frontier, which lasted from 30 September to 15 November 1924³⁵.

It has already been observed that both the British and Iraq Governments wanted the inclusion of Mosul within Iraqi State; it will be equally clear that the Kurdish inhabitants of the area were at best indifferent and at worst positively hostile to this aim. The Turks and the Kurds took advantage of the delay in the settlement of the

³⁴ Ibid, p 24

³⁵ Ibid, p 67

frontier to keep the area as turbulent as possible: the Kurds, to gain maximum advantage in terms of control, and the Turkish suzerainty³⁶. Neither the Turks nor the authorities in Baghdad could afford to allow independence or even autonomy to be granted in the area; the Turks were fearful of the consequences of an unruly Kurdish state on their borders, and the Iraqis did not want to single out areas for any form of special treatment which would limit authority of the Government.

6.3.4 Kurds and Drawing the Boundaries of the State of New Iraq

By June 1924, a few days after the ratification of the 1922 Treaty by the Constituent Assembly, direct negotiations over the frontier between Britain and Turkey broke down in Constantinople, and the dispute was referred to the arbitration of the League to investigate local conditions and generally to sound out local opinion, to discover whether the inhabitants wished to stay with Iraq or go over to Turkey. The activities of the commission were confined to the southern, or Iraqi, side of the status quo frontier, the so-called Brussels line³⁷.

The commissioners commenced their work with a series of meetings and interviews in London late November, and did not arrive in Iraq until early in January 1925. It is worthwhile to mention that Turkish pressure increased throughout the autumn of 1924; Sheikh Mahmud's activities in the vicinity of Sulaimaniya had occasioned the bombing of the town by the R.A.F. in November, a decision which occasioned some unease in London. The area was therefore still in a state of unrest at the time of the Commission's visit, though the coming of winter had forced an end to serious campaigning. In the course of a visit lasting from January to March, the Commission head evidence in Baghdad, and made extensive tours of the Mosul wilayet under close British supervision; at one point the members threatened to resign if facilities for snap visit to areas were not made available. They did in fact manage to travel to most of the more important centres³⁸.

It emerged fairly early in the Commission's visit that its members were likely to recommend, in some form or other, an extension of the British connection. Dobbs wrote to the Colonial Office at the end of February that he was convinced that Iraq

³⁶ Ibid, p 69

³⁷ Izady Mehrdad R., *The Kurds*, Washington, DC, Taylor&Francis, 1992:pp 23-25

³⁸ Ibid, p 27

would be awarded the Mosul wilayet (Province) if British tutelage could be extended ‘far beyond the Protocol period’³⁹, in other words beyond the previously stipulated four years after conclusion of peace with Turkey. However, the Commissioners continued their interviews and tours, causing local political officers to complain of ‘paralysis’ of administration and the ‘well-nigh impossible strain’ caused by their visits. The fact was that by early 1925 the more accessible parts of the Mosul wilayet had been under direct and effective government control for over six years, and integration of administration and services was almost total: six years under Anglo-Iraqi control had made the prospect of Turkish reoccupation seem remote, and on the whole unwelcome. Furthermore, the Commission seem to have considered that the welfare of the Christian minority population of the area, and, apparently, of the Kurds, would be better served by the Iraqi than by the Turkish Government. It is difficult to gauge the Commission’s attitude in the matter of the exploitation of the Mosul oilfields; Count Teleki’s intervention has already been mentioned, and it is a fact that the concession rights to the Turkish Petroleum Company were signed by the Cabinet at the very end of the Commission’s visit⁴⁰.

The Commission presented its full report to the League on 17 July 1925, very much on the lines anticipated by Dobbs. It laid down that Mosul was to be part of Iraq, subject to an extension of the connection with Britain and subject also to safeguards to preserve the character of the Kurdish areas in such matters as administrative personnel, education and language:

“The British Government is invited to submit to the Council of the League of Nations a new Treaty with Iraq, ensuring the continuance for 25 years of the mandatory regime defined by the Treaty of Alliance between Great Britain and Iraq and by the British Government’s undertaking, approved by the Council on 27 September 1924, unless Iraq is, in conformity with Article I of the Covenant, admitted as a member of the League before the expiration of this period... The British Government, as Mandatory Power is invited to lay before the Council the administrative measures

³⁹ Ibid, p 29

⁴⁰ Cited in John Bulloch and Harvey Morris, “No Friends But Mountains: The Tragic History of the Kurdish People”, Oxford University Press, London, 1996: p 23

which will be taken with a view to securing for the Kurdish populations mentioned in the Commission of Inquiry the guarantee regarding local administration recommended by the Commission in its final conclusions.”⁴¹

There was some delay in the acceptance of the Report: Turkish diplomacy succeeded in referring the matter for final settlement to the Permanent Court of International Justice at The Hague. However, the Commission’s Report was not to be reversed, and by 18 July 1926 it had been accepted by all parties concerned.

In spite of the prolongation of the period of mandatory control which it entailed, the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of January 1926, which embodied the League’s recommendations, was received without serious opposition in Iraqi political circles, except among the pro-Turkish groups in Kirkuk, Mosul and Sulaimaniya. The note of resignation is evident in a contemporary report of Baghdad public opinion:

“Thos in favour of the Treaty, on whatever grounds, use the argument that the Treaty is not only essential for the retention of the Mosul wilayet but is also essential for the actual existence of the independence of Iraq and its monarchy”⁴².

In the Chamber, the Treaty was passed unanimously on 18 January 1926; there were 58 votes in favour, and 19 abstentions, corresponding to Yasin al-Hashimi’s followers associated with his Hizb al Sha’b (People’s Party). A rumour reported from Hilla suggested that the British had arranged this token opposition to avoid criticism that they had created an artificial unanimity⁴³.

Apart from the stipulations on Kurdistan, which were underlined in the course of an impressive speech by the Prime Minister, ‘Abd ak-Muhsin al-Sa’dun, on 21 January, the new Treaty included provisions for reviewing the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of October 1922 every four years. On the occasion of each review, H.M. Government undertook to consider either recommending Iraq for admission to the League of Nations, or, if

⁴¹ Ibid, p 67

⁴² Ibid, p 68 , Also British Documents at www.fco.gov.uk/

⁴³ Ibid, p 73

this was not judged possible, to consider amending the Military and Financial Agreements attached to the 1922 Treaty. The first of these reviews would fall due, in accordance with the Protocol of 1923, in the spring of 1927. It is worth pointing out that the 1926 Treaty in no way contradicts the Frontier Commission's Report; both documents stipulate that the Mandate shall continue for 25 years, but equally, both contain clauses providing for the admission of Iraq to the League of Nations before that date. Naturally, King Faisal and the Baghdad politicians seized on the 'escape' clause, and began at once to work for the earliest possible entry of Iraq into the League. Hence, the Iraqi entry into the league of nations made Iraqi young state stronger diplomatically and thus prevent the prospects of the emerging Kurdish state which posed a great potential in terms of natural resources. Overall, what King Faisal wanted to achieve would correspond with the British wishes in Iraq⁴⁴. The Musel Vallayat was included within Iraq and the autonomy promise made to the Kurds remained unfulfilled in practical terms.

6.4 Conclusion

In the aftermath of the first World War, the precise territorial configuration of the new state had yet to be determined. There was no dispute that the provinces of Baghdad and Basra were components in the fledging Iraqi state. However, the northernmost of the three former Ottoman provinces, Musel, raised a number of strategic problems. Most notably, the initial assessments by the British government suggested that large oil reserves of oil were located in Mussel. Access to the oil reserves surfaced as a primary motivating factor behind the British decision to incorporate Musel into the new state of Iraq.

The inclusion of Kurds in the Iraqi state was not something the Kurds desired, yet it is unclear whether they would be able to administer their area because Kurdish society was critically divided across tribal, regional, urban and rural lines. Sheikh Mahmud, who raised the idea of Kurdish state for southern Kurdistan lacked necessary sources: the attributes of a sophisticated leader to gather support around his vision, and lack of acceptance from Erbil and Badinan, where the inhabitants favoured their own candidate, Sheikh Abudsalam Barzany. Furthermore, the deep rivalry

⁴⁴ Ibid, p 74

embedded among the Kurdish leading families over leadership complicated the emergence of consensus among the Kurdish elite over a national agenda for Kurdistan.

The British facing growing problems in the region failed to take Kurdish concerns seriously. When suited to their short terms interests, they raised the Kurdish issue. For the Britain, two things surfaced as the most important: persuading the Turkish state to revoke any claim over Mosul that posed oil potentials and other natural resources, and inclusion of the Kurds as a Sunni patronage to assist Faisal survive. Seen from this prism, the inclusion of the Kurds could help counterbalance the Shiite demographic strength. British proceeded with this policy without regarding the intrinsic fact that the Kurds constitute a totally distinct group with little affiliation to Iraq. It is this decision that had tragic and far-reaching repercussions for the unity and coherence of Iraq for the decades to come.

Chapter Seven

Turkey

7.1 Introduction

The following examines the concept of the new state of Turkey established on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire and the identity the new state shaped in the aftermath of the World War I. Furthermore, the Kurdish reaction to the new State will be thoroughly analysed. In order to understand the of Kurdish reaction and the motivating reasons behind the Kurdish reluctance to co-opt with the Turkish state, the rebellion led by Sheikh Said will be the central theme examining the Kurdish reaction. Because of the significance of the rebellion which shaped Kurdish-Turkish relationship in the aftermath of the creation of a Turkish national state, this chapter will place the main focus on how the uprising impacted domestic politics and the Turkish nationalism discourse promoted by the state in the later decades.

7.2 National Conception of the Turkish Republic and Kurdish Identity

The Turkish republic is the successor state of the Ottoman Empire, which dissolved during the First World War after more than a century of decay. However, the republic is a dramatically different construct from its predecessor. The Ottoman Empire was an authoritarian monarchy with a religious foundation derived from the Sultan's claim that he was also the Caliph, the spiritual head of all Muslims of the world. However, the Empire recognized minorities and accorded them extensive self-rule, but it defined minorities in religious terms. Hence, no Muslim people was ever accorded minority rights, while Jews and Christian Armenians, Serbs, Greeks, and others were living within the Ottoman jurisdiction. Before the twentieth century, this approach posed few problems, especially given that the Muslim peoples in the Empire developed national identities considerably later than the Empire's Christian subjects in the Balkans, and did so at least partly as a result of the latter's emerging national awareness. Collective identities were based primarily on religion--Islam at the

broadest level and various religious orders and sects at the local level--and regional or clan-based units¹.

The Turkish Republic, by contrast, was modeled upon the nation-states of Western Europe, particularly France. It was guided by six 'arrows' or principles enunciated by its founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk: republicanism, nationalism, secularism, populism, etatism, and reformism. Among these, the first three principles form the foundations of the Republic. Although Turkey was no democracy in Atatürk's lifetime, the principles of republicanism and populism suggest the goal of popular rule, that is, a democratic political system. In the speeches and writings of Atatürk, republicanism unmistakably meant a break with the monarchy of the past². The second pillar, secularism, entailed a break with the Islamic character of the state. Although religion was to be kept out of political life, however, this is not to imply that Kemalist Turkey was in any way atheistic. Indeed, as Dogu Ergil has noted, Atatürk's highest goal in the religious field was the translation of the Quran into Turkish. In fact, the aim of the new regime was twofold: to dissociate the state from religious principles, and to "teach religion in Turkish to a people who had been practicing Islam without understanding it for centuries."³ The regime's policies, most blatantly the abolition of the Caliphate, nevertheless enraged the more religious parts of the population. This included the Kurds, who have been described as being at that time "a feudal people . . . of extreme religious beliefs."⁴ Indeed, the Kurdish population was ruled by local hereditary chieftains whose power often stemmed from the backing of the Naqshbandi or Qadiri religious orders⁵.

¹ Ergil Dogu, "The Kurdish Question in Turkey", Journal of Democracy, Volume 11, Number 3, July 2000, pp 130-135

² Ibid, p 146

³ Ibid, p 147

⁴ Ibid, p1 50

⁵ Ibid, p1 52, Sufi orders have been prominently present in Kurdistan, and the Sufi shaykh is perhaps more representative of Kurdish Islam than the legal expert. Most of the best-known `ulama in Kurdish history were sufis, and many of these sufis acquired considerable political influence. Various sufi orders were present in Kurdistan at one time or another, but for the past few centuries the scene has been dominated by the Qadiriyya and the Naqshbandiyya. The orders have at certain moments played important social and political roles in Kurdistan, because they represent a pattern of social organisation independent of the tribes. At one level, a sufi order is like an informal school offering a standardised package of spiritual exercises and mystical techniques, which the novice practices under experienced guidance. These techniques have been developed by the founding fathers of the orders but are believed to be based on teachings handed down orally from the Prophet himself. Only the most accomplished mystics are allowed to teach these exercises; they are known as *murshid* ("guide") or, in Kurdistan, as shaykh. This is not an informal title: one only becomes a shaykh with a written certificate (*ijaza*)

It remains a fact, however, that the Kurds are the one ethnic group that to a large degree has retained a distinct identity. There are several reasons for this, of which a major one is demography. The Kurds are by far the largest non-Turkish-speaking group in the country. A second reason is geography: the Kurds were settled in a single area of the country that is distant from the administrative center and inaccessible because of its topography. Thirdly, the Kurds differed from other large groups such as Slavs or Caucasians in that they were an indigenous group and not comparatively recent migrants. Uprooted immigrant populations that have suffered severe upheavals and hardships were significantly more likely to embrace a new national identity than indigenous groups. Fourthly, the Kurds, unlike other populations, were organized according to a tribal and feudal social structure, a factor that remains crucial to this day. Attaturks concept of the new nation state would not include the integration of the mosaic of the peoples living within Ottoman Empire. Essentially, the Turkish nation-building project would have been successful if state policies had sought integration of territorially-based ethnic Kurds within a broadly-defined civic national framework rather than radical assimilation of the distinct group into Turkishness. As the Turkish identity has strengthened and become extreme and previous identities receded, Turkish identity itself has become more homogeneous; as such it carried the risk of growing less civic and more ethnic in nature⁶.

7.3 The Rebellion of Kurds against the Turkish State

7.3.1 How the Seeds of the Problem were planted?

After the treaty of Lusan was signed between allies and the Turkish nationalists, the central state in Turkey began a radical transformation of social fabrics of the society. In respect of the Kurds, Attaturks project excluded certain distinct characteristics of the Kurds from his project. His attempt, to an extent, had made some progress in other areas, where there were largely immigrants from Eastern Europe while in the Kurdish areas of South East confronted an enormous challenge. Kurdish religious and secular leadership seemed to have been unable absorbed the inconclusive Attaturk's platform for transforming the society in that it incorporated the main tenets of Kurdish culture

from his own teacher; a long period of training under the master's supervision is only one of the conditions, and an *ijaza* is not given automatically.

⁶ Ibid, p 163

into Turkishness⁷. If the Kurds expected equality in the management of the new state they were sorely disappointed, as the new regime quickly embraced everything it deemed modern from a centralising mission to a secular approach that was to bring it into line with contemporary values of the nation building projects process of the period. The state also assumed a Turkish character through a process by which Kemalist regime re-invented the Turkish ethnicity. Ismat Inonu, Attaturk's confident and successor succinctly summarised the official position in 1925: "We are frankly nationalists and nationalism is only factor of cohesion. In the face of a Turkish majority other elements have no kind of influence. We must Turkify the inhabitants of our land at any price, and we will annihilate those who oppose the Turks"⁸. In the 1924 constitution, the terms 'citizenship' and 'citizen' had been equated with Turkishness. Article 15 of the constitution also states that one had to be a Turk to become a member of parliament and the like. Certainly, the Kurds could qualify as Turks, but only at the expense of denying their own ethnic identity⁹. Here, the seeds of the eventual Kurdish dissatisfaction were planted: in a state now officially defined as 'Turkish' the Kurds were not Turks, and only by giving up their own ethnic identity could they be treated as Turks. It is obvious that the leaders of the Kemalist regime perceived unintegrated, unturkified Kurds as both a backward element and a potential threat to the integrity of the modern state they were intent on constructing. Compounding the problem was the fact that with the rise of Sheikhs and Islamic tariqatas (religious orders) in the nineteenth century, it was Islam that had assumed a major role in bringing the Turks and Kurds together. But the decision of the new regime to abandon religion as one of its unifying characteristics and with abolishing the Caliphate in 1924, another bond that united both communities appeared to have been severed. This also provided the Kurdish sheikhs in the east such as Sheikh Said, with a justification for rebelling against Ankara. With population exchanges with Greece that followed the establishment of the Republic in 1923, the Kurds became the single largest unrecognised minority with the potential to threaten the state¹⁰.

⁷ Gunter, Michael M., *The Kurds in Turkey: A Political Dilemma*, Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 1990, p 20

⁸ Ibid, p 23

⁹ Ibid, 25

¹⁰ Taha Parala and Andrew Davison, "Corporatism in Kemalist Turkey: Progress or Order? (Modern Intellectual and Political History in the Middle East)", Syracuse University Press, 2004, p 3

7.3.2 The Leadership Composition

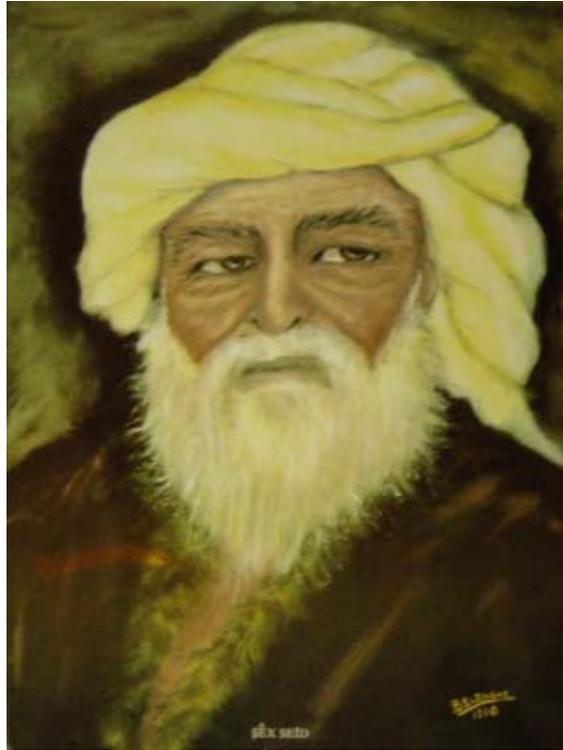
The Nicknamed Sheikh¹¹ (See his photo bellow) Said rebellion was the first large-scale nationalist rebellion by the Kurds against the Turkish state. The core of the leadership was comprised of religious figures in the Naqshabandi sect and seculars who mostly were members of the Azadi Congress (Liberation Congress). Finding themselves excluded from the identity that the state shaped, the religious and secular elements of the Kurdish society set a side their differences and unified together. It is worthwhile to note that the role of the Azadi was fundamental in its unfolding. Kurdish intellectuals and military officers were at the heart of the nationalist movement, in terms of organization and recruitment. The paramount influence of the more secular or non-cleric Kurdish nationalist organizations must be separated from the rebellion itself and its sheikhly leadership. The Sheikh Said rebellion was led largely by sheikhs, a deliberate determination by the leadership of Azadi from 1921 onward. These decisions were defined and given force in the Azadi congresses of 1924¹². The fact that the rebellion had a religious character was the result of Azadi's assessment of the strategy of pragmatism and tactics necessary for carrying out a successful revolution. While the Sheikh Said rebellion was a nationalist rebellion, the mobilization, propaganda, and symbols were those of a religious rebellion. From the Turkish perspective, the Kurdish rebellion against the central state was religious. Turkish scholars such as Behcet Cemal and Metin Toker assume that the character of the rebellion was religious rebellion, instigated by reactionaries, who happened to be Kurds, against the secularizing reforms of the Kemalist government from 1922 onward (especially the abolition of the caliphate on 3 March 1924 and the National Law Court Organization Regulation among others)¹³. Although, it must be noted that the rebellion itself started after the central state invaded the Kurdish schools and publications and destroyed their offices and school buildings¹⁴.

¹¹ Sheikh is a religious figure who could rally people around certain issues and the people of Kurdistan at the time listened to them and naturally followed up their decrees.

¹² Kirisci, K. and Winrow, G.W, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-State Ethnic Conflict*, London, Frank Cass, 1999: pp 34-37

¹³ *Ibid*, p 40

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p 41



Sheikh Saed Piran, the leader of the Kurdish rebellion (1925)

It is worthwhile to note that recently some scholars in the field of Kurdish nationalism have characterized the rebellion as "a nationalist rebellion in religious garb". The basis of this is the fact that Sheikh Saed was an ardent nationalist, as demonstrated by his earlier career. Martin van Bruinessen, the only scholar who has studied the rebellion in detail, has stated emphatically that "the primary aim of both [Sheikh Saed and the Azadi leaders] was the establishment of an independent Kurdistan¹⁵." Sheikh Saed was an example of a man who had been simultaneously an ardent nationalist and a committed believer. Many of the leaders of the rebellion with sympathy to the Ottoman Sultanat may have been genuinely upset by the abolition of the caliphate. But for the average Kurd who participated in the rebellion, the religious and nationalist motivations were doubtless mixed. Most of the Kurds thought that the sheikhs who led the rebellion were religious and, more importantly, Kurds. Although leadership was a mixture of nationalist and religious figures, yet the motivations

¹⁵ Ibid, p 42

behind rebellion were nationalistic against a stronger nationalism, Turkish intent on removing any Kurdish features or characteristics¹⁶.

7.3.3 The Factors behind the Rebellion

Many crucial events, factors, and developments played a role in the rebellion. Many of the leaders wanted to protect their land, their domination of the markets for their livestock, and their control of the legal system, all or some of which seemed to be threatened by the secularizing and centralizing reforms of the central government in Ankara. The Sheikh Said rebellion was a turning point in the history of the Kurds in that nationalism was the prime factor in its organization and development. This is indicated by the fact that the subsequent large rebellions by the Kurds were nationalist and religious, employing nationalist symbols and propaganda. The Sheikh Said rebellion clearly demonstrated the direction that Kurdish nationalism was to take. In the rebellion, nationalist slogans were extensively used to inspire and encourage the Kurds to rise to challenge the state¹⁷.

This is not to say that traditional motivations of banditry and tribal feuds, as well as personal vendettas, were not prominent casual factors in the rebellion. In this and in other senses, Amal Vinogradov believes that the rebellion could be described as "primitive,"¹⁸. The Sheikh Said rebellion, like the Iraqi Kurdish rebellion, was a genuine national response to fundamental dislocations in the Kurdish political and socioeconomic spheres. Like their Kurdish counterparts who had gained so much experience by their participation in the Hamidiye Regiments in the last days of the Ottoman Empire and in the first World War, the Iraqi tribesmen (some of whom were Kurdish) who fought in the Ottoman army benefited from the military experience they gained in World War I. One of the interesting developments concerning the Sheikh Said rebellion of 1925 was the supposed efficiency of arms and technology in supporting revolution and rebellion by dissident and nationalist minority groups. The participation of Kurdish, Arab, and Iranian tribesmen in the Ottoman, Qajar, and British armies and their familiarity with the substantial technological and military changes that had been occurring since the 1880s may have contributed to their

¹⁶ Ibid, p 43

¹⁷ Ibid, p 45

¹⁸ Ibid, p 47

conviction that these weapons and organizational methods could be used effectively in their own national movements. Their assessments may have been sound. It was misfortune of all three rebellions, however, that they were challenged and defeated by more powerful forces and stronger nationalisms. In the case of the Kurds in new Turkey it was the stronger state and more developed nationalism of the Turks. For the Kurdish rebellion in Iraq, the same was true. The Iraqi Kurds opponent, the newly created state of Iraq, backed and supported by the British, was able to defeat the rebels. Unlike the Sheikh Said rebellion, British forces played a major role in the suppression and defeat of the Iraqi Kurdish revolt in southern part of Kurdistan (Iraqi side). It is possible that exposure to modern weapons, but not to modern diplomacy, may have caused the leaders of both rebellions and/or revolts to act prematurely¹⁹.

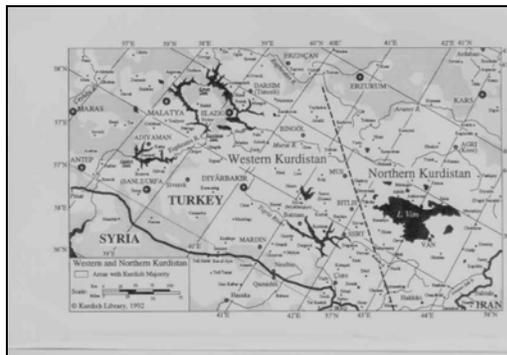
7.3.4 The Organisational Weakness

The Sheikh Said rebellion was tribal. The proportionate number of nomadic tribesmen who took part in the rebellion was much higher than in the Iraqi Kurdish rebellions. Few tribal or peasant cultivators participated in the rebellion as combatants. Indeed, as indicated above, the leaders of the rebellion did not even try to recruit the tribal and peasant cultivators, either because they thought that the peasants were simply too much under the thumb of the landlords through fear, coercion, or indifference. The role of the tribal and peasant cultivators was much greater in the Iraqi rebellions. It is difficult to know how much land was owned by *derebeys* or *agas* (Tribal chieftains) within the area of rebellion, although there were a number of large landowners in the extended area (e.g. Diyarbakir) of the rebellion. If tribal chiefs are classified as *derebeys* or *agas*, then it seems that most of them were engaged in animal husbandry²⁰. But the landlords of the Diyarbakir plains opposed the rebellion (See Map below). They played a principal role in assuring that Diyarbakir remained loyal to the Turkish government when it was attacked and besieged by Sheikh Said. The cooperation of these *agas* (Tribal chiefs) with the government is another indication of the strong ties that the Kemalists had already established with many Kurdish *agas* and

¹⁹ Ibid, p 50

²⁰ Olson Robert, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheik Said Rebellion, 1880-1925*, Austin, The University of Texas Press, 1989:pp 89

chiefs. It was a premonition of a future when they were to become one of the mainstays of the Ataturk coalition²¹.



Map 8 shows the heartland of Northern Kurdistan (Turkey)²².

According to Robert Olson, the rebellion did not demonstrate much tribal coordination with urban dweller. Diyarbakir, heavily Kurdish did not rise in support of the rebels. The populace of Elazig, large region populated by the Kurds, initially surrendered without fighting, only to turn against the rebels because of their excessive looting and pillage. Again urban participation in the Iraqi rebellions was greater than in the Sheikh Said rebellion. The coordination with urban groups was inhibited by the territorial isolation of the core area of the rebellion. Communication, except on horse or donkey, was impossible, especially after the telegraph lines were cut. Also, telegraph lines had not yet been extended to many towns. The establishment of Azadi in Erzurum after 1921, in addition to the split in Kurdish nationalist movement, resulted in less contact with the Kurdish nationalists based in Istanbul, although, as said above, contacts between Azadi and Istanbul were maintained. The ulama (scholars) and sheikhs played a large influential role in the Iraqi rebellions, as they did in the rebellion of Sheikh Said. Their input in the rebellion of Sheikh Said was significantly greater than in the Iraqi Kurdish rebellion²³. Thus, it suggests that the sectarian fault lines among the northern Kurds (Turkey) was wider than Southern Kurds (Iraqi side) and in more strict sense Kurds in Turkey were less homogenous than their Iraq counterparts.

²¹ Ibid, p 92

²² www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/kurdistan-maps

²³ Ibid, p 103

7.3.5 Weak Nationalist Cohesion

The Sheikh Said rebellion, then, was a prototype of a post- First World War nationalist rebellion. Its weaknesses were the usual ones: inter-tribal rivalry and Sunni-Shia differences, especially represented by the Hormek-Cibran²⁴ tribal conflict, contributed to the lack of success. These cleavages were exacerbated by the Naksibandi/non-Naksibandi differences as well. These and other differences between Zaza and non-Zaza speakers played a chief role in the weakening of the rebellion and in the growth and sustenance of Kurdish nationalism. In addition to that, Urban-rural cleavages, tribal-peasant and landowner-tribal hostilities, and antithetical secular-religious orientations among its leaders all contributed to its lack of success²⁵. Furthermore, the Sheikh Said rebellion represented an incipient nationalism that was also challenged by a strong nationalism that had mobilized in the course of the past thirty years, gathered strength during World War I, and further energized by the war of liberation with the power of an organized state behind it²⁶. Turkish nationalists claimed the territory on which the Kurdish nationalists wanted to create an independent Kurdistan. The Turks also proclaimed a nationalism that was based on ethnicity and was growing in coherence and dynamism especially after the Treaty of Lusan and militarily enjoyed supremacy over the Greeks²⁷.

Martin Van Bruinseen believes that the Kurdish rebellion demonstrated territorially, and politically, the increased vulnerability of the Kurds as a result of the displacement, deportation, and massacre of Armenians during World War I. The removal of the Armenians also removed the buffers of protection that their presence and nationalism offered the Kurds. The situation of the Kurds and the suppression of their nationalism was even more ironic in light of their eager participation in the deportation and massacre of the Armenians in 1915 and subsequently²⁸. The truly tragic meaning that the elimination of the Armenians held for the Kurds and Kurdish

²⁴ Hormek and Cibran are the large tribes in modern Turkish Kurdistan and occupy large areas with a population of more than a million and half. By the time Kurds challenged the central state, these tribes had been at loggers with one another and hence did not play any role in the rebellion. Some elements of those tribes sided with central state and in return the state rewarded them.

²⁵ Ibid, p 105

²⁶ Ibid, p 110

²⁷ Ibid, p 111

²⁸ Ibid, p 123

nationalism was recognized, as mentioned earlier, by some of the Kurdish nationalist leaders such as Halid Beg Cibran²⁹.

In assessing the effect of the rebellion of Turkey's history and politics, Erik Jan Zürcher and Metin Toker in their recent study indicate that the Sheikh Said rebellion and its aftermath represented a turning point in the history of the modern Turkish republic. They believe that one has to make a distinction between the event of the rebellion itself and its consequences. As an event, they assume, the rebellion was not much. As soon as the Turkish armed forces were able to mobilize, it was crushed. The tenor of their argument here is that the Sheikh Said rebellion had impacted the Kemalist project in the course of the later decades³⁰.

7.3.6 The Impact of the Kurdish rebellion on Turkish Politics

Metin Toker believes that the consequences of the rebellion for Turkey, especially the Kemalists, were far more important than the rebellion itself. The main reason for this is, as Toker notes, that military action by the Kurds -even if they had displayed much more unity, cooperation, and coordination than they did- would never have withstood a focused attack by the experienced Turkish forces³¹. However, the rebellion as an event was more important than what Toker asserts because he refuses to acknowledge that it represented a challenging nationalism in competition with Turkish nationalism and, hence, threatening to the Turkish state.

In terms of domestic Turkish politics, the rebellion was nearly as important as Toker suggests. According to him, the rebellion gave Kemalists, or "radicals" as he calls them, an opportunity to silence the criticism of the Istanbul press, which was aligned with oppositional groups and, shortly thereafter, regional newspapers as well. It also established the legal means via the Restoration of Order Law and the creation of independence tribunals to arrest the leading members of the opposition forces when the time was ripe, in June 1926 after the discovery of a plot in Izmir to assassinate Mustafa Kemal. Soon after the discovery of the alleged plot, twenty one members of the Progressive Republican Party and eleven of the most important members of the

²⁹ Ibid, 124

³⁰ Ibid, 126

³¹ Pelletiere, Stephen C., *The Kurds: An Unstable Element in the Gulf*, Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 1984: p 24

Committee of Union and Progress were arrested. Some escaped arrest only because they were abroad or went into hiding. Less than one month after the discovery of the plot, fifteen members of groups opposed to the Kemalists were condemned to death. Even the heroes of the revolution and of the war of liberation, such as Refet Bele, Rauf Orbay, and Kazim Karabekir, who managed to escape death, were never again to play significant roles in the politics of Turkey. The only exception was Fuad Cebesoy³².

The suppression of the opposition to the Kemalists in the wake of the discovery of the assassination plot in Izmir in June 1926 has been dealt with adequately elsewhere. The point here is that the machinery to facilitate the crushing of the opposition both politically and legally was put into place in the effort to suppress the Sheikh Said rebellion. Ironically, many of those sentenced to death in the Izmir plot had voted for the very independence tribunals to which they fell victim. While the Kemalists had to wait until the purges of June-July 1926, nearly a year after the suppression of the Kurdish rebellion, to rid themselves of remaining opposition, the formal and organized opposition as represented by the Progressive Republican party was eliminated when the party was banned on June 3, 1925³³.

It is widely believed that it was only after the Kurdish challenge to the state that three "revolutions" were able to occur: the Code of Civil Law (Medeni Kanunu Devrimi) of 4 October 1926; the Dress and Headgear Law (Kiyafet Kanunu Devrimi) of 25 November 1925; and the Alphabet Law (Harf Kanunu) of 1 November 1928³⁴. These kinds of reform would only have been possible in a Turkey under the Restoration of Order Law. Indeed, Toker sees similarities between the period of 1925 and that of 1957-60. In both instances, Ismet Inonu was able to assert his authority to restore order to the Kemalist program. Although, Kemalists did not have in 1957-60 the same power and legitimacy that Ismet Inonu and Mustafa Kemal possessed in 1925³⁵.

In short, the Sheikh Said rebellion remains a symbol of the impediments - conservatives, religious fanaticism, Muslim brotherhoods, and formal democratic opposition- that the "radical" Kemalists had to suppress or contain in order to proceed

³² Ibid, p 30

³³ Ibid, p 32

³⁴ Ibid, p 34

³⁵ Ibid, p 57

with their Western-oriented, capitalist directed, heavy industry-biased modernization program. The Sheikh Said rebellion emphasized to the Kemalists that this program might be delayed through continuing political infighting or might not be carried out at all. The decisions to pursue the Kemalist road to modernization were probably determined a few years earlier, but certainly there was a solid core that wished to pursue this course expeditiously by 1924. It was the Kurdish rebellion that created the atmosphere and the mechanisms to carry out the purges of 1926. The reason why the Sheikh Said rebellion is so important for Turkish history is that the laws and institutions created for its suppression were agreed to by those who opposed Kemalism. They agreed, no matter how reluctantly, because no patriotic Turkish official could tolerate a contending nationalism such as Kurdish within their new state. It was only after the rise of Kurdish nationalism to newly created state that laws and institutions had been created to suppress an "external" enemy that are later used by the Kemalists in power to quash "internal" opposition. The Kemalist opponents and Fethi Bey³⁶ realized this and therefore tried to depict the rebellion as a regional uprising, certainly one that was counterrevolutionary in their context. But the fact was that the rebellion was Kurdish and nationalist severely limited any objections that they could make. More strenuous opposition would have produced the charge that they were traitors. As it was, the members of the Progressive Republican party were charged with complicity in the rebellion, although such complicity was never proven³⁷. It seems that the state took advantage of the Kurdish challenge as a reasonable excuse to suppress every form of opposition to Attaturk's project.

7.3.7 The Reaction of the State

The Sheikh Said rebellion gave the Kemalist government a certain justification for categorizing serious opposition as being in league with the Kurds, having sympathy for Kurdish nationalism, or favouring ideologies that would strengthen Kurdish nationalism, or Kurdish ethnic power. If the red flag of the leftists was hoisted beside the green flag of Sheikh Said (representing Kurdish nationalism as well as Islam), the menace of the rebellion's legacy would be even more of a threat to Kemalism and,

³⁶ Fethi Bey was one of the close associates of the Attaturk during the years of the revolution but in 1930 he assigned Fethi Okyar Bey to organize an opposition party for the sake of what they called democracy.

³⁷ See Robert Oslon, p 61

possibly, in the future to the Kurdish state itself. The rebellion proved an opportunity to reduce the opposition to Kemalist modernization through the closing on 30 November 1925 of all *tarikats* (lodges), *zaviyes* (cells), and *turbes* (religious tombs). Religious titles were abolished and wearing of clerical garb was prohibited. The Dress Law was passed on 25 November 1926, aimed against religious centers of opposition for the purpose of enhancing its legitimacy against the Kemalists. It is important to note here that these laws were passed in an atmosphere of political consciousness on the part of Turkish public that their implementation and acceptance would reduce the threat of Kurdish nationalism³⁸.

The Sheikh Said rebellion in particular and in general the Kurdish opposition to the Kemalist programme created and provided a means whereby most serious subsequent opposition to government policies or comprehensive disagreement with its progress laid open the possibility that the disaffected groups would be labelled as traitors. For this reason, in the aftermath of the rebellion, it was relatively easy to colour opposition forces with a hostile ethnic tinge. The vehicles created and the laws passed for the suppression of the rebellion and the symbols of opposition to the Kemalist program that it generated meant that the consolidation of the Turkish state and of Turkish nationalism were greatly expedited by the suppression and perceived threat of Kurdish nationalism. From the Kemalists context, the nationalist aspirations of ten percent of population had to be denied if the nationalist goals of the other ninety percent were to be achieved. It is in this sense that the Sheikh Said rebellion, its suppression, and its aftermath were more important than the purges of 1926 within Republican Peoples Party, which simply eliminated the remaining opposition to the Kemalists' programs. Most of those who were purged or sentenced to death agreed or would have agreed with the position subsequently adopted by the Turkish government vis-à-vis the Kurds and their nationalism³⁹.

The suppression of the Sheikh Said rebellion contributed to the consolidation of the new Turkish republic, the evolution and domination of the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Firkasi) and the one-party state it represented up to 1950, and the greater articulation of Turkish nationalism on which the party and the state were

³⁸ Ibid, pp 69-71

³⁹ Ibid, p 81

based. The creation of a one-party state conditioned the lack of serious discussion of policy alternatives, which in turn meant that there was a mono-dimensionality to the possible ideological solutions to the problems and challenges that the young republic would confront. It is this one-dimensional approach that led to the great surprise of the Republican People's party at the strength of appeal of the Democrat party in 1946. The inability of the Republican People's party to learn from the lesson of 1946 led inexorably to its defeat in 1950. In this sense, one of the reasons for the defeat of the People's Party in 1950 was the legacy of the mono-dimensionality that the Sheikh Said rebellion and its consequences introduced into the Turkish polity. In fact, the entire post-World War II period, when the military was in power in 1960-61, 1973, and from 1980 onward, follows a pattern shaped by the political and ideological consequences of the rebellion and more specifically the Kurdish question which had emerged as a stumbling block to the Kemalist project in Turkey. Although, many factors contributed to the emergence of the modern Turkish polity- the Kurds and Kurdish nationalism may not be the single most important factor. But their influence on the development of modern Turkey can not be under-estimated⁴⁰.

In the course of six decades from 1920 to 1980s, seventeen of the eighteen military engagements in which Turkish military fought from 1924 to 1938 occurred in Kurdistan. Turkey's armed forces intervened in Hatay in 1938, in Korea in 1950-1953, and in Cyprus in 1974. The military engagements against the Kurds far exceeded the number of external interventions and engagements. By the 1980s, Turkey's military actions against the Kurds had assumed external as well as internal proportions. In 1983, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, Turkish forces entered Iraq in order to suppress and contain Kurdish nationalist and guerrilla groups. The point is that the struggle against Kurdish nationalism, in which certain patterns of policies were implemented and against which certain nationalist, ideological, and psychological premises and attitudes were initially adopted in 1925, continued to play an important role in Turkey's policy decisions more than fifty years after the Sheikh Said rebellion, the first potential challenge to Kemalism. These factors have continued to influence Turkish policy well into the twenty century. Hence, Kurdish nationalism articulated and symbolized by the Sheikh Said rebellion as a first challenge to the Kemalist-

⁴⁰ Cited in Mustafa Erdogan, 'The Quest of Democracy in Turkey Without Islam', *Foreign Affairs*, 2001, No. 8: p 37-43

oriented state had been part of anti-Kurdish official policies of the state for many decades⁴¹.

7.3.8 British Involvement

The objectives and policies of the third major party involved in the Sheikh Said rebellion, Great Britain, are important to be noted as Britain was the most influential player in the region at the time. Great Britain had consolidated its power in northern Iraq through its forward policy, adopted after the Air Ministry assumed control of military operations from the War Office in August, 1922. From 1922 to 1925, the RAF (Royal Air Force), under the command of Sir John Salmond, who replaced Sir Hugh Trenchard as chief of the Air Staff in 1929, pursued a vigorous bombing policy against the Kurds in northern Iraq⁴². The bombing forced Turkish forces led by Colonel Ozdemir to retreat from Rawanduz (border town of Iraqi Kurdistan) in June 1923. In many ways, the formal treaty between Turkey and Iraq on 5 June 1926 was shaped by the success of the British bombing policies. It seems that the new Turkish republic was quick to learn from the British. By the end of 1926, Turkey had acquired 106 aircraft. In the following years, air power was used extensively in military operations against the Kurds. Air power was an effective means by which the new Turkish republic consolidated its state power, especially against the Kurds, just as British air power was instrumental in consolidating Britain's imperial power in the post-World War I Middle East. The lessons learned regarding the use of air power in northern Iraq, especially during the period 1922-1925, were used to good advantage by the British in Sudan, the Northwest frontier, Palestine, and other places. These examples are illustrative of the relationship between established empires and new states when two are not in direct military conflict but both wish to subdue third parties following policies antagonistic to the empire or to the new state. It became easier for Britain and Turkey to bomb Kurds than to make political concessions to Kurdish nationalism⁴³.

⁴¹ Ibid, p 47

⁴² Gunter, Michael M., *The Kurds in Turkey: A Political Dilemma*, Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 1990:pp 57

⁴³ Ibid, p 61

In the period prior to Sheikh Said rebellion, the Kurds (and Turks, too) had to face the new technology of massive bombing, including incendiary bombing at night. In

the post-Sheikh Said period, the Kurds had to face the might of an experienced British air force, as well as the burgeoning and increasingly effective Turkish air force. It would be more than thirty-five years before the Kurds had adequate anti-aircraft guns. In the intervening years, the Turks and the British (Iraqi) forces were able to extend their control over areas of Turkey and Iraq that were predominantly Kurdish. Around the same time by 1926, the same bombing policies against the Kurds were followed by Reza Khan in Iran and it seems that Reza Khan followed the Turkish model to suppress the Kurds⁴⁴. The effective use of air power and its implied threat played an important role in the origins and consequences of the Sheikh Said rebellion. The psychological terror it induced in the peasant and nomadic peoples of Iraq and Turkey and Iran, especially through incendiary night bombing, proved to be especially effective. Iraq was, according to L. S. Amery, the British colonial secretary in 1925, "a splendid training ground for the Air Force"⁴⁵.

One of the results of this effective British use of air power between World War I and World War II largely against the peoples of British colonies was that it contributed to the unpreparedness of British air defences against the Germans at the outbreak of World War II, what A.J.P. Taylor has called RAF's "doctrine that overwhelming superiority was the only defence." Right up to the outbreak of the Second World War and even during it, "the policy Lord Hugh Trenchard, who was chief air marshal from 1919 to 1929, had established was followed: "Bombing," he held, "could win a war by itself; it was also the only means of not being bombed by others. Trenchard and his successors persistently neglected air defence"⁴⁶. Trenchard had first witnessed the great effectiveness of strategic air bombing, sometimes in coordination with infantry, in northern Iraq during the early 1920s. Taylor was of the opinion that the successful use of British air power in northern Iraq contributed to the deterioration of the British army, the lack of mechanized vehicles, and the failure to create a sufficient defence system in the 1920s and 1930s. British success against the Turks and then against the

⁴⁴ Ibid, pp 71-73

⁴⁵ Ibid, p 86

⁴⁶ Rasul Hawar, 'Kurds in Northern Kurdistan From The Beginning of History Till The Second World War', Khak, 2000, p 20

Kurds in northern Iraq in the early 1920s may have contributed subsequently to the RAF's lack of preparedness against the Germans on the eve of and during the early years of World War II. Turkish new state adopted the British model and air power used against the Kurds, to an extent, weakened the morale of the Kurdish troops who opposed the state.

7.4 Conclusion: Evolution of the Turkish Nationalist Discourse

Kurdish resistance to the extension of Ankara's political, economic, social, and cultural roles began. At times violent, this resistance has been continuous and has remained a major preoccupation of successive governments in Turkey. The rebellion started prematurely and rebels had no time to gather all of their assets. The rebellion was eventually suppressed by Turkish army with a great deal of force and violence. Its leaders and their supporters were tried and some of them summarily executed by the newly created tribunal called the Independence Tribunal⁴⁷. These became one of the main tools of repression in the Kurdistan for years to come. The rebellion had both a religious and nationalist character. It was as much a revolt against the secularists and anti-Islamic tendencies of the new regime as it was first stirrings, albeit regionally circumscribed, of Kurdish nationalism. It seems, for the first time these rival elements of Kurdish society, nationalists and Islamic oriented figure, came together against the state. The rebellion, according to Bernard Lewis, represents a turning point in two ways: on one hand it gave a greater impetus to the Kemalists efforts at secularisation and repressing religious orders whereas on other hand it marked the start of an era of uneasy relationship between Kurds and Turks⁴⁸. Almost from the beginning, the government decided on the eventual complete assimilation of Kurds by force if necessary whenever and wherever serious nationalist resistance was encountered. From the perspective of the time, the regime may not have been unrealistic in attempting to integrate the Kurds by assimilating them: There was no Kurdish cohesive leadership that could exert significant pressure, much less one that could mobilise against the Kemalists to pose an immediate threat. In other words, Kemal and his associates did not expect to encounter significant resistance to their project in the long run. In their quest to build a modern state, the Kemalists decided to emulate

⁴⁷ Bernard Lewis, 'Why Turkey is only Democratic Country in Middle East?', New York, Yale University Press, 1996, p 12

⁴⁸ *ibid*, p 13

the homogenous states of the west. They were intent on building the centre at the expense of the periphery. The Kurds, as a result, were relegated to the minor errant Turks or descendents of Turkish tribes. Expression of nationalist thought as well as language and culture were severely repressed. This was a long way from where the Kurds mentioned as coequal members of the new state, they had become nonentities. The new media ceased referring to them as Kurds. The government passed many laws that enable it to exile Kurds from their traditional areas to other parts of the country, where they would be in a minority. The attitude of the new regime towards the Kurds had undergone a subtle change as it tried to come to grips with the new Turkish identity it was constructing. As Taha Parlda demonstrates, Attaturk's conception of nationalism underwent a significant degree of change: It started off as anti-imperialist and Wilsonian in spirit, careful and peaceful in orientation⁴⁹. His conception of nationalism had many inherent contradictions. Not only did it discourage interest in Turks living in other parts of the world, but it also encouraged a dual understanding of Turkishness. The resulting Turkish nationalist discourse was both civic and ethno-cultural in nature. It's civic character made possible the rise of assimilated Kurds, while it's ethno-cultural aspect formed the basis of forced assimilation and repression of those Kurds who refused to accept Turkish identity. The regime's assimilation was too ambitious as it required that Kurds give up not only their political identity but also all forms of their cultural links and the language that bound them. The suppression of language, the unavailability of books and other materials in Kurdish, and the bans of the use of language meant that with time Turkish became primary language for many, and especially for those who left their traditional areas for economic reasons or because they had been exiled by the central government. Assimilation had it's limits; those limits were imposed by geography (remoteness of the region), economics (the backwardness of the region making it easy for it be economically ignored) or lack of resources (the Turkish government's resources were not sufficient for a massive task it confronted in educating the Kurdish inhabitants). The harsh assimilation policies of the state also had a reverse effect: they set in motion-albeit slowly, a process of constructing a new sense of Kurdish national identity. Although, the rebellion of Kurds was defeated by a more powerful Turkish

⁴⁹ Taha Paralada, 'The Kemalist Nationalist Idea and Minorities', London, Zed books, 1990s, p 5

army, yet the consequence of rebellion left its impact on the Turkish and Kurdish psyche in the subsequent decades.

Chapter Eight

Iran

8.1 Introduction

This chapter will begin by examining the background of Iran's history during the First World War. Since the external intervention increased greatly during the First World War period, particular attention is paid to analysis of the internal and external forces that wielded a tremendous influence on the political developments in the country. As Iran approached the First World War, the central government was fragile to an extent that it could hardly practise its authority over the peripheral territory. This stimulated a view among the Iranian that their country would disintegrate along ethnic lines. The weakening of the central state fuelled the rise of peripheral grievances on the part of Kurds and Baluches. In the context of the rise of the peripheral reactions to the fragile central state, the rebellion led by Simko in Kurdistan will be thoroughly analysed in this chapter.

8.2 Background: Internal Struggle

The most conspicuous feature of Persian history from 1900 to 1921 was a very complicated interplay between the Persian forces attempting to establish constitutional government and intervention of the Russian and Britain governments. Mohammad Ali, a new Shah, repeatedly swore to uphold the constitution signed in 1906, but was extremely irked by the Majlis (parliament) control of funds and soon showed that his real aim was to destroy the constitutional government. At the time, Russia viewing Iran as a sphere of influence aided the Shah in pursuing his course over developments in Persia. Britain, the other imperial power with special interest in Persia, adopted a dual-policy: one the one hand it encouraged constitutionalists and liberals to impose limitations on the exclusive powers of Shah, on other hand it took a more pragmatic line by projecting its monopoly over the Persia's oil industry¹.

¹ Joseph M. Upton, "Modern History of Iran", Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1995: pp 41-43

The Anglo-Russian agreement signed on August 31, 1907 was ostensibly to strengthen the military and economic position of the two powers in the face of a growing threat from Germany. Minimising the danger of Anglo-Russian conflict in Persia, the agreement was aimed at establishing a Russian zone on North, a British zone in Southeast, and a neutral zone in between. Russian zone included all of the large cities in Persia except Kerman which was in the British zone and Busher in a neutral zone. Hence, the two powers in effect could have played a central role in determining the course of events in Persia². Although the preamble included the usual engagement to respect the integrity and independence of Persia, but the agreement was concluded without any consultations with Persian officials.

The Anglo-Russian agreement dismayed the constitutionalists because they believed on the basis of the substantial encouragement rendered to them by British officials in Persia, they could count on the support of the British government. Following the Anglo-Russian treaty, British tilted toward the Shah and his supporters and encouraged them to destroy the constitution, while Russia not only established a military and economic position in Northern Persia but also supported the efforts of Shah to destroy the constitution. It was apparently a coincidence of mutual interests that had driven Anglo-Russian policy towards the Persia³. This prompted the Shah to launch a coup d' etate' in 1908 that ended a constitutional government and established a martial law in Tehran under the Russian commander of the Cossack Brigade and inaugurated a reign of terror in all cities. As a result, civil war broke out in various places, notably at Tabriz, where Russian armed forces wiped out the opposition to Shah. A year later, on July 16, 1909, a combination of constitutionalists and liberals succeeded in deposing the Shah. Although Russia attempted to regain his throne by force in 1911 but were unsuccessful. The new Shah, the deposed Shah's son, who took a throne after deposing his father, had a symbolic role. He did not wield the powers necessary to change government decisions.

The most disastrous effects of these events were: first, the appearance of deep rifts within social groups, second, the spread of opportunism as convictions weakened under mounting pressures and temptations domestically and internationally. These

² Ibid, p 56

³ Ibid, p 57

intra-factional struggles left the Persian state in complete disarray. It affected all populations including the far fringes of Persian territory. The authority of the central government weakened and the provincial governments were unable to maintain law and order in the provinces. In this Hobbesian situation, peripheral provinces populated by peoples identifying themselves with different ethnicities and nationalities from Persia began asserting their deep-seated grievances against the central government dominated by Persians⁴.

When the First World War began, Iran had announced its official policy of neutrality. Ahmad Shah, who announced the policy, had no significant forces to back up his policy. For this and other reasons, Russian and Turkish troops competed to take control of Northern sections of the country and Britain subsequently controlled South and East. Furthermore, Germans carried on successful efforts to harness the Russian and British until the end of the war, although they did not succeed in getting Persian government to abandon its policy of neutrality⁵. The fighting movements and maintenance of Turkish and Russian troops increased the chaos already prevalent in the peripheral provinces of Azerbaijan and contributed to the famine of 1918 that caused the death of a quarter of the agriculture population. It must be noted that the Kurdish populated area was not affected and almost remained unaffected.

Persian's most fundamental concern was that if the allies won the war, Persian independence and integrity would be lost. They, therefore, regarded Germans, regardless of the actual objective of German policy in Persia, as the most effective source of help to save Persia's independence and territorial integrity. For this main reason, not only Germans meet with favourable receptions in high government circles, but they succeeded in organising a separate national government in Kermanshah, mostly populated by the Kurds. From a Persian perspective, Russian and British rigorous influence in Persia could be counterbalanced by German's modest influence. On Northern front, Russia, now under a new leadership pre-occupied with domestic unrest, decided to withdraw its troops by the end of 1917. Furthermore, Turkish troop morale was low and the Nationalist forces on Northern and Southern fringes of the

⁴ Martin Van Bruinseen, "Iran's Kurds During Great War", New York, Yale University Press, 1989: p 21

⁵ Ibid, p 27

Empire made remarkable advances in liberating their nationalist-marked lands. The defeat of the Axis powers by the end of the war which was followed by the Russian domestic change had left Britain in a more favourable position that could hold the powerful cards to affect events in Persia⁶. These developments in the aftermath of the First World War I created a more physical space for the Kurdish-leaning nationalists in Eastern Kurdistan⁷. In other word, Persia was in decline and was exposed to come apart along ethnic lines. The weakness of the central government over the peripheral areas accompanied with withdrawal of Russian troops and weakness of the Ottoman's military position in Azerbaijan allowed to the Kurdish tribal chieftains to rise up against the against Persia. At this point, Kurds were intent to use the opportunity to liberate Eastern Kurdistan.

8.3 Rise of Peripheral Nationalism

Michael Hetches defines State-building nationalism as “the nationalism that is embodied in the attempt to assimilate or incorporate culturally distinctive territories in a given state. It is the result of the conscious efforts of central rulers to make a multicultural population culturally homogeneous”⁸. He furthermore believes that since the rationale for state-building nationalism is often geopolitical - to secure borders from real or potential rivals - this kind of nationalism tends to be culturally inclusive.

Given the Persian case, Persia throughout eighteenth century was not integrated and the Persian (Fars) nationalism was dominant to an extent that it practically failed to incorporate other ethnics in culturally distinctive territories within a state. Although in the first decade of the twentieth century an attempt was made to expand the effective authority of the state to all adjacent territories, but the kind of nationalism discourse the central state promoted at the policy level and to an extent at rhetorical level was exclusive, for Persian identity mainly reflected Fars-ethno centrism and the concept of Persia naturally gave a sense of exclusiveness in relation to other ethnic identities in

⁶ Ibid, p 28

⁷ Ibid, p 32

⁸ Micheal Hetcher, “Containing Nationalism”, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2000: p 16

Iran, including Kurds, Baluches, Arabs, Gilanis and Mazadaranis. The Persian rulers unlike the European rulers, who tried state-building nationalism to extend the state authority, were vehemently apprehensive of other ethnicities. This is not to say that Western European state-nationalism did not produce backlashes but speaking from a comparative context, Persian rulers did not leave the necessary space for other ethnics to practise their cultural and linguistic rights without aggressive government restrictions.

The government policies failed to create a harmony reflected in the reactions of ethnicities, notably Kurds. With further eroding of the central state authority over large swaths of periphery during and after the First World War, peripheral nationalism surfaced in a violent form as was the case in Baluchistan, Azerbaijan and Kurdistan. Peripheral nationalism, according to Micheal Hetcher, “occurs when a culturally distinctive territory resists incorporation into an expanding state, or attempts to secede and set up its own government”⁹. Very often this type of nationalism is spurred by efforts of state-building nationalism. It must be noted in the case of Persia, no serious attempt was made by the central government to homogenise a culturally heterogeneous Persia through an inclusive programme. As a consequence of the government failure, Persia had shaped an identity crisis that posed a potential prospect for the division of the country. It is at this point that the resentment against the central state became increasingly assertive in the second decade of the twentieth century. In the course of the two decades, the peripheral nationalist tendencies constantly emerged and surfaced in a way that posed a challenge to the integrity of Persia dominated by Farses.

8.4 Geo- Politics and Ethnic Make Up

The Kurds who make up around 11 percent in Iran unlike the Kurds in the neighbouring countries have had to cope with the two special geo-political conditions: they have the Soviet Union as a neighbour, and they are part of a state made up of minorities. The central state is so determined to prevent any of the ethnic minorities achieving an autonomy which would set a precedent for others and which could lead

⁹ Ibid, p 23

to the break up of the state. In Iran, historically the aspirations of the Kurds for autonomy or independence are matched by the separatist tendencies in Azerbaijan (23-24 percent)¹⁰, Baluchistan (4-5 percent)¹¹, Bakhtiari (2-3 percent)¹², the Georgians (1 - 2 percent)¹³, and the Arabs of Khuzestan (4 percent)¹⁴. It must be noted that Farsis are the majority of the population (45-46 percent). Thus, the policy of the successive governments in Iran has always been to centralise, to allow developed government in the provinces as long as long they remain loyal to Tehran and to crack down on the ethnic movements wanting autonomy within the state or outright independence¹⁵.

From a historic perspective, from the time of the Czars to the present day, Iran has always had to regard the wishes and actions of its northern neighbour, and to step carefully in its own dealings with its people on the border zone. From the nineteenth

¹⁰ The Azerbaijanis (also known as Azeris) compose about a quarter of Iran's population, and are the largest minority in Iran. They are Shi'i Muslims by faith), and in many respects are similar to the rest of the Iranian population, Many prominent Iranian Shi'i clerics have been and are Azeris. The main factors that differentiate them from the rest of the Iranian population are their Azerbaijani ethnicity), and their native language of Azeri Turkish). The Azeris live principally in the northwestern Iranian provinces of East/West Azerbaijan as well as in urban centers such as Tehran

¹¹ The Baluchis--who constitute the majority of the population in Baluchestan and Sistan. They are part of a larger group that forms the majority of the population of Baluchistan Province in Pakistan and of some areas in southern Afghanistan. In Iran the Baluchis are concentrated in the Makran highlands, an area that stretches eastward along the Gulf of Oman coast to the Pakistan border and includes some of the most desolate country in the world. The Baluchis speak an Indo-Iranian language that is distantly related to Persian and more closely related to Pashtu, one of the major languages of Afghanistan and Pakistan

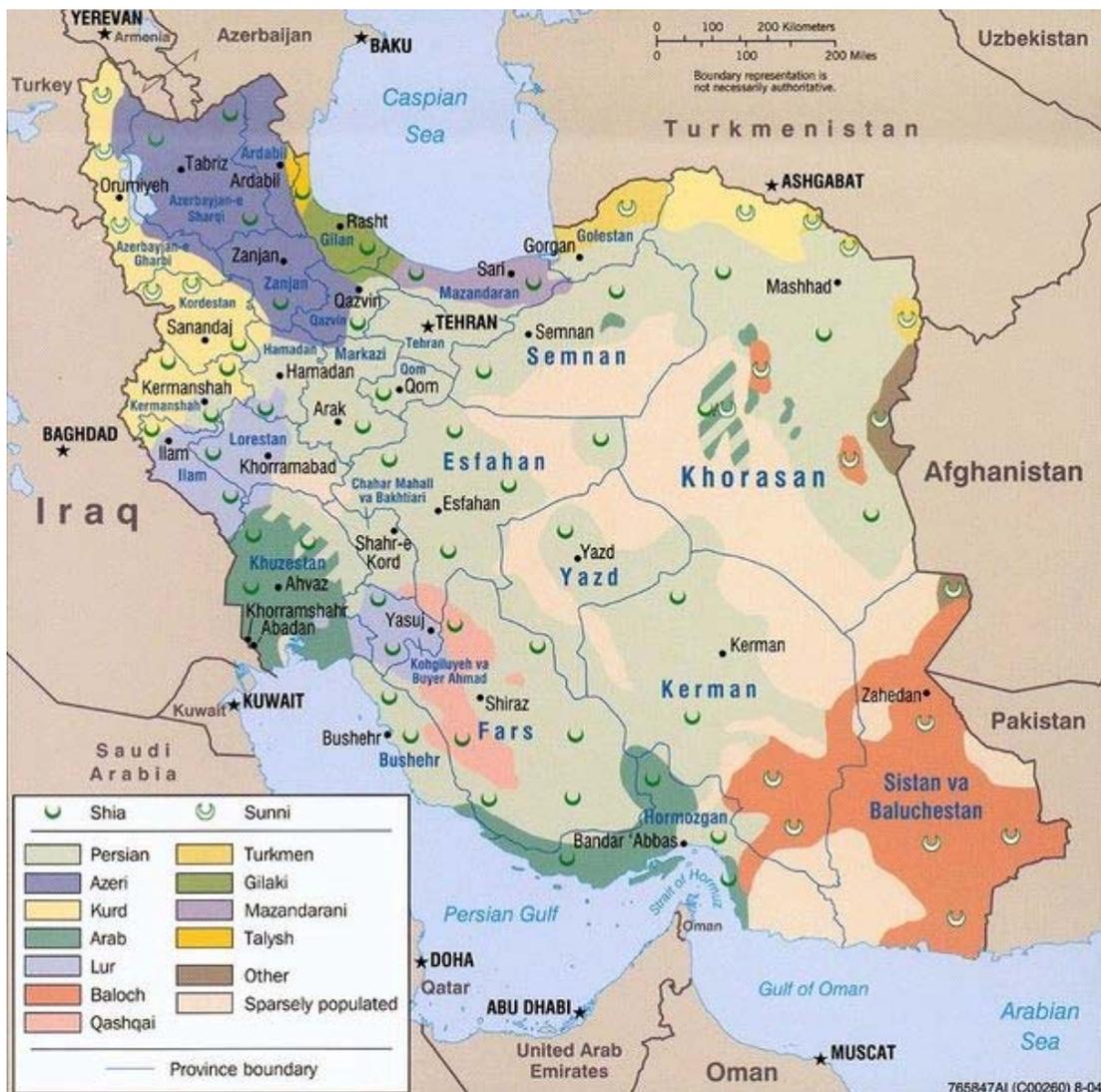
¹² The Bakhtiari tribe inhabits an area of approximately 67,000 sq. km (25,000 sq. mi) that straddles the central Zagros Mountains in Iran. Although only about a third of the tribe is nomadic (the rest are settled agriculturists), the nomads embody the Bakhtiari cultural ideals. They specialize in producing meat and dairy products and migrate seasonally with their sheep, cattle, or goat herds from high plateau pastures, where they spend the summer, west of the city of Esfahan, to lowland plains in the province of Khuzistan for winter herd grazing. Their migration is among the most spectacular known among nomadic pastoralists anywhere. They are obliged to cross mountain passes at about 3,050 m (10,000 ft) and therefore have to time their movement with extreme care in order to minimize the danger of early snowfall, flooding mountain rivers, and lack of grazing. Traditionally these dangers took a heavy toll, but in recent years the government has helped the migration by building bridges, improving the route, and setting up fodder supplies en route

¹³ The center of Georgians in Iran is a small city to the west of Isfahan, Iran's second largest city, named Fereydoon Shahr. In many other places such as Najaf Abad, Rahmat Abad (near Isfahan) and Orji Mahalle in northern Iran, there are ethnic Georgians

¹⁴ The province of Khuzestan is situated in the southwest of Iran, and covers an area of 63,238 sq. km. The various townships of the said province are as follows: Abadan, Andimeshk, Omidiyeh, Ahvaz Eazeh, Baq-e-Malek, Mah Shahr, Behbahan, Khoram Shahr, Dezful, Dasht-e-Azadegan, Ramhormoz, Shadegan, Shoosh, Shooshtar and Masjed Soleiman.

¹⁵ Pelletiere, Stephen C., *The Kurds: An Unstable Element in the Gulf*, Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 1984: p 178

century onwards, Russia had retained a sphere of influence in the northern half of the country, while European powers vied for control of the south. That state status quo remained effective until the US and Britain took over by invading the country in World War Two. In Iran, the Kurdish question, given the historic context, has always been part of the above said geo-political conditions. In other word, the question of the Kurds in Iran is more complex than in the neighbouring countries as the Iranian social and political make up is more heterogeneous than Iraq and Turkey ¹⁶(See Map 9 of Iran below).



Map 9 shows ethnographic of Iran¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid, 180

¹⁷ www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/iran

8.5 The Kurdish Rebellion: A Potential Challenge to the State of Persia

8.5.1 Kurds between Ottomans and Persia

In order to put the events into a proper context a few short remarks on political developments in the area during Simko's time should be made. In 1906 Ottoman troops invaded Iranian Azerbaijan and occupied a significant part of the Kurdish-inhabited districts of that province. They remained present, though not in full control, until 1911, when they were expelled by the Russians. The latter had in 1909 invaded the province and occupied Tabriz which was then, together with Rasht, the last bastion of Iran's Constitutional movement. They stationed infantry and Cossacks in Tabriz, Khoy, Dilman and Urmiyeh, all belonging to the province of Azerbaija. Until the outbreak of the First World War they managed to keep a measure of law and order. During the war, Azerbaijan was occupied by the Turks in turn (January 1915), the Russians (1916-17) and the Turks again (1918). In late 1914 the Nestorians of Hakkari, fearing genocide under the Ottomans, fled to Urmiyeh and Salmas, the two Kurdish cities, seeking Russian protection¹⁸. Many of them were to help the Russians as advance scouts when they invaded central Kurdistan and often took private revenge on the Muslim population. Around this time, Christian-Muslim relations deteriorated badly during the war.

After the 1918 Britain was in control of present Iraq with the exception of its mountainous north-east. The Kemalists were soon active all over Turkey. They had important centres at Rowanduz, a strategic town located on border where borders of Iran, modern Turkey, and Iraq meet (which the British considered theirs) and at Van, and they attempted to mobilise the Kurds against the British. The latter did the same: they made many promises with respect to the establishment of an independent Kurdistan, which was to serve as a buffer zone between Turkey and Iraq¹⁹.

¹⁸ Cited in Bruinseen, "Kurds During the Great War", P 56

¹⁹ Ibid, p 58

Meanwhile Iran's post-war government was weak and torn by internal struggles among the political elite and by secessionist movements in Gilan and Azerbaijan, and Baluchistan. The Anglo-Iranian treaty signed by the Tehran government in 1919 provoked a wave of popular protest that further weakened the central government. In 1920 the middle classes of Tabriz revolted against the central government in Tehran. Some other Azerbaijani towns followed suit, and for several months an independent republic (named Azadistan) existed there. It was Riza Khan who, after his *coup d'état* of 1921, succeeded in eliminating all centrifugal tendencies that emerged in the periphery of Persia (including that of the Kurds). Raza Khan's main attempt was aimed at integrating Iran received large blows from international and internal forces. In other word, the Kemalist movement in Turkey made a significant impact on Raza Khan in order to proceed with the process of national integration. By 1923, Kemalist Turkey was internationally accepted. The recognition of Turkey at Lusan further encouraged Raza Khan to integrate peripheral ethnicities into the central structure. Thus, the possibility of an independent Kurdistan seemed lost, or at least receded into an unclear and probably distant future²⁰. See 10 map below



Map 10 Shows Kurdistan surrounded by hostile neighbouring nations²¹.

²⁰ Ibid, p 68

²¹ www.princeton.edu/~humcomp/modiran

8.5.2 The Factors That Contributed to the Rise of Smko

Around the turn of the century at least three chieftains were competing for paramount leadership of the Shikak²². The strongest was probably Ali Agha of the Avdovi Pishaqas; his sons Jafar Agha and Ismail Agha, nicknamed Simko, earned themselves a good reputation as daring warriors. The second chieftain was Umar Agha, who led the Mamedi tribe (according to some sources he was an uncle of Simko, but there is much confusion), and the third was Mustafa Agha (later succeeded by his brother Ismail) of the Kardar Pishaqas who had also some other tribes and sub-tribes under his control. There was a high turnover of chieftains during those years. Another section of Avdovi Pishaqas, led by Ali's brother Yusuf, living further south, was dispersed when Ali rose to power at Yusuf's expense, and many of them were subsequently killed by the rival Kardars. Umar Agha of the Mamedi was killed by Iranian officials in 1902, and Mustafa Agha by his Avdovi rivals in 1906. Around the same time Jafar Agha, who had held official titles but continued to irritate the government of Azerbaijan by his raids on Urmieh, Salmas and Khoy, was invited to Tabriz by the Iranian heir apparent and treacherously killed²³.

It must be noted that it was disappearance of most other experienced chieftains that made Simko's rapid rise possible. However, he was a clever and an opportunist politician who knew with whom to ally himself and when. As a young man he had assisted his brother Jafar in his raids, and he was to continue raiding throughout his career, thus attracting many roughs into his retinue. In the Constitutional Revolution of Persia, Simko turned against the Constitutionals (urban Azaris) and, without being invited, took 300 horsemen to join the forces of Iqbal al-Saltaneh, the governor of Maku, against the *anjuman* of Khoy or the constitutionalists. As a reward Simko was made sub-governor of Qotur district. In order to take advantage of him against the constitutional movement, the central government confirmed the appointment²⁴.

²² Shkak is the name of the large Kurdish tribe in north of Iranian Kurdistan bordering modern Turkey and it is made up of many small tribes around the Urumeya, Salmas and Khoy. The area remained intact during the First World War. They were more well-organised and well-disciplined than other Kurdish Tribes further South Iranian Kurdistan.

²³ See Martin Van Bruinseen, *Agha, shakh and state: the social and political structures of Kurdistan*. London: Zed Books, 1992: p 32

²⁴ *Ibid*, p 34

Neither the Turks nor the Russians occupied the Shikak lands before the First World War; Simko's contacts with both were mainly indirect. Prior to 1913 he appears to have co-operated with pro-Ottoman, anti-Russian Azerbaijanis, but in 1913 he delivered one of these, who had sought refuge with him, to the Russians in an attempt to gain their goodwill. He was apparently successful, for in that same year a Russian observer noticed that two chieftains who had previously been clients of Ismail Agha of the Kardar Pasaqas (Simko's main rival) swore, under Russian pressure, fidelity to him. By that time Simko was in regular contact with Kurdish nationalist circles. Nationalist and private ambitions went together in him and cannot be separated. He had married a sister of Sheikh Sayyid Taha, grandson and successor of the famous Sheikh Ubeydullah. This was a convenient marriage, for the sayyid was the most influential man across the border, besides being a leading nationalist. Simko and Sayyid Taha were to co-operate much in the following decade. Another of Simko's contacts was Abd al-Razzaq Bedirkhan of the famous nationalist family descending from the emirs of Botan. Sayyid Taha, Abd al-Razzaq and Simko's brother Jafar had previously been invited to Russia, whence they had returned with 'generous gifts and encouraging messages that stimulated their imaginations and ambitions. Abd al-Razzaq started publishing a monthly Kurdish newspaper in Urmiyeh in 1912. After some time, however, the Russians banished him from Urmiyeh, and according to one historians, it was Simko who took over the responsibility for the paper until it stopped publication in 1914²⁵. By 1914, Smko, the chief of leading Shikak tribe, emerged as the most powerful figure that could command respect and authority among almost other Kurdish tribes in North and South part of Iranian Kurdistan. His prominence posed a challenge to the central government.

8.5.3 Simke's Pragmatism during the First World War

During the war Simko stood aloof from the real fighting, trying to keep all doors open, while expanding his control of the frontier districts. The Russians once arrested him and sent him to prison in Tiflis but, expecting to achieve more with the carrot than the stick, they let him return to Azerbaijan on the condition that he lived in the town of Khoy and remained loyal. When the troops of the Russian general Baratoff were called back from central Kurdistan after the Bolshevik revolution, Simko

²⁵ Ibid, p 45

managed to capture many of their arms, including field-guns. From other parts of Kurdistan too arms started flowing towards Simko, who had by then already a wide reputation as a nationalist leader. These arms were either left behind by departing Russians or had belonged to the Kurdish militias that had fought on the Turkish side²⁶.

Simko was not the only one to arm himself, however. The Nestorian Assyrians (the local ones, but especially the refugees from Hakkari, who were more militant) were quite well-armed too, and they were reinforced by equally well-armed Armenians from Anatolia. The departing Russians, unable to protect them any longer, left many arms behind and stimulated them to organise in fighting units. According to Arfa, a French military mission had also brought arms for the Assyrians to defend themselves against the Turks. The Assyrians had desires similar to Simko's: the establishment of an independent state, in Urmiyeh and Salmas. The local Muslim population (Azaris in the plains and Kurds in the mountains) were hardly pleased, and the Iranian government even less so. Famine and mutual depredations, in which the departing Russians had no small share, led to increased bitterness between Christians and Muslims. It was especially the Azaris and the 'non-tribal' Kurds that suffered, for the Christians were better armed. During riots in Urmiyeh in February 1918, the Christians got the upper hand and took control of the entire town. The Iranian government was incapable of restoring order. The governor of Tabriz, Mukht-i Shams, then approached Simko. At his instigation Simko invited Mar Shimun, the religious and secular leader of the Nestorians, for talks on a proposed alliance, and had him treacherously killed in March 1918²⁷.

Simko's men took no part, however, in the subsequent fighting between the invading Turkish armies and the Armenians and Nestorians, whom the British then attempted to mould into a force capable of stopping the Turkish advance. Only when most of the Nestorians, lacking strong leadership after the death of their leader, Shimun, fled in panic from Urmiyeh did his men join Turkish soldiers in their pursuit, killing many in

²⁶ Ibid, p 47

²⁷ Ibid, p 59

June and July 1918. Turkish soldiers and irregular bands of Kurds entered the town and brought the town under their control²⁸.

The Armistice brought an end to the Turkish presence in Azerbaijan, and no strong government was left. The Iranian government appointed new governors at Tabriz and Urmieh, but they did not succeed in establishing control of western Azerbaijan. The only authority with a strong power base was Simon, whose private retinue had been reinforced with several hundred Ottoman soldiers, many of them Kurds, either simply deserters or people with nationalist motivations; others were mercenaries attracted by the high pay and the fact that Simko gave them wives. With their field-guns (some of them taken from the Russians) and machine-guns, they were to prove more than a match for the ill-trained government troops of Azerbaijan²⁹.

The government had for some time no way of subjecting Simko who continued more boldly than ever to raid the plains. The governor of Urmieh, Sardar-i Fatih, visited Simko in his stronghold at Chahriq (south-west of Dilman) and attempted to win him over by peaceful means, but Simko apparently saw this as further proof of weakness, and even expanded the areas where he took the tribute ('loot' in the Iranian perception, 'taxation' in his own) that was necessary to maintain his army. Some time later the governor of Tabriz, Mukarram al-Mulk, had recourse to modern technology and sent Simko a bomb-parcel that had been made to look like a box of sweets. Its explosion killed a younger brother of Simko and several of his retainers but failed to hurt Smko³⁰. The rise of Smko was clearly a challenge to the central government that hardly could control other peripheral nationalist movements in Khuzistan, Baluchistan, Gilan and Mazandaran.

8.5.4 Simko's Rebellion Against the central government

While the central government struggled to survive in the face of internal crisis and international pressure, Simko was busily preparing for the establishment of independence. In February 1919 there was a meeting of most important chieftains of Iranian Kurdistan, at which the proposal for an open insurrection against the Iranian

²⁸ Ibid, p 61

²⁹ See Bruinseen Thesis on "Agha, shaikh and state: on the social and political organization of Kurdistan". Ph.D. thesis, Utrecht University, 1978: pp 100-122

³⁰ Ibid, p 124

government was discussed. It was decided to postpone the rising until it had become clear what the attitude of the world powers in the region was going to be. The Kurds made an attempt to galvanise international support and for this reason Sayyid Taha, who had joined Simko and closely co-operated with him visited Baghdad in May 1919 in order to obtain British support for an independent Kurdish state. On other hand, Simko himself addressed the Civil Commissioner, A.T. Wilson, by letter with similar requests. Neither received a definite commitment. According to Armenian sources, "Simko and Sayyid Taha were at the same time in touch with the Turkish nationalists at Van, the modern Kurdish city on the Turkish side, who wished to employ them for resisting the proposed repatriation of Armenians to eastern Anatolia and therefore promised help"³¹. In the following years the two Kurdish chieftains were to remain in contact with both the British and the Turkish nationalists³². Furthermore, according to Bruinseen, a notable scholar on Kurdish nationalism, the Kurdish-Turkish diplomatic contact achieved a degree of success in that Turkey restrained the Kurds of Iran from supporting the elements of the Kurds who were hostile to Attatuk, and Iranian Kurds restrained the Turks to stop supporting their Turkish cousins in Azerbaijan, who were hostile to Simko³³.

Prematurely, without waiting for the other chieftains to declare themselves in open rebellion, Simko took the town of Dilman and laid siege to Urmieh and occupied part of the Azari population of the Lakistan district (north-west of Dilman) that refused to recognise his authority and pay taxes. Those who escaped were pursued as far as Sharafkhaneh on the northern shore of Lake Urmieh. Bruinseen assumes that the Kurdish tribes had been critically divided along their tribal interests and it may have been a chief factor behind the Simke's decision to act without waiting them. Smko was cognizant of the fact the division among other Kurdish tribes were too wide to be narrowed down or bridged. In addition to that, at the time central government was weak in and around Urumya and Azaris were not well-organised to stop Simko's forces. Thus, during the autumn of 1919 Simko's Kurds kept these districts north of the lake under occupation . Perceiving the danger from the Kurdish nationalist forces, the rural Azaris who experienced a looting from Simko's forces

³¹ Ibid, p 134

³² Also see Bruinseen on " Kurdish tribes and the state in Iran: the case of Simko's revolt", in: Richard Tapper (ed.), *The conflict of tribe and state in Iran and Afghanistan*. London: Croom Helm, 1987: p 12

³³ Ibid, p 13

offered their full support behind the central government. Tabriz had a new military commander, Intisar, who efficiently mobilised and co-ordinated whatever troops he could find (gendarmerie, Cossacks, irregular Azari cavalry). Led by Filipov, a Russian Cossack officer who had just arrived from Tehran, these troops managed to repel Simko's Kurds and to inflict heavy losses upon them. As a result, Simko was forced to take refuge in his mountain stronghold at Chahriq; many of his partisans deserted him (including several of the former Ottoman soldiers). For reasons which are unclear, however, instead of following up their initial success and forcing Simko to surrender unconditionally, Filipov and Intisar entered negotiations with him. As a result of the negotiations, Simko promised to compensate damage done in Lakistan and to send off his Turkish soldiers and to surrender all his arms to the state³⁴.

None of these promises was fully executed by Simko, and the whole affair ultimately strengthened Simko's standing among the Kurds: he could apparently act against the state with impunity. During 1920 he re-established his control of the plains of Urmiyeh and Salmas and the southern parts of Khoy district. In Urmiyeh, he appointed men of his own choice as governors: at first Arshad al-Mulk, a local man, later Teymur Agha, a Kurdish chieftain from Kuhnehshahr. His men raided a vast area, mainly to acquire firearms and finance his future exploits. The areas under their control were 'taxed', and the central state preoccupied to contain other insurgent elements in the country was too weak to contain Simko's forces. This status quo remained until 1921. Gendarmerie troops sent from Tabriz to relieve the area were defeated by the Kurds and pushed back behind Sharafkhaneh (March 1921). Simko proved the strongest again, and thereby attracted many new followers³⁵. Other victories over government troops during that year resulted in further increases of support from other Kurdish tribes. In March 1921 his forces were still described as 1000 horses and 500 foot, with a Kurdish flag; in a summer campaign they were already estimated at 4000, in the autumn of 1921 at 7000, while in his last great campaign, in the summer of 1922, 10,000 men are said to have participated. Each of the advances Simko's forces made against the central government, the more Kurds

³⁴ Ibid, p 15

³⁵ Ibid, p 23

paid allegiances to him. Simko's authority was recognised by a growing number of tribes³⁶.

Knowing that the nationalist forces need wider support to control all over Kurdistan, Smko had made contacts with almost all tribes further down in the South of Iranian Kurdistan. Early in 1920 there had been several meetings of a 'Council of Kurdish chiefs' presided over by Simko, which were attended not only by chieftains of some of the biggest tribes of Azerbaijan (Herki, Begzadeh, Haydaran, Shikak), but also by chieftains of the Artushi confederacy and other tribes of Hakkari in modern Turkey. It was said that in 1921 Simko appointed Ahmad Khan as the paramount chieftain of the Herki, and that this was generally accepted by this powerful tribe. It seems again as usual that the nationalist aspiration was arguably the most effective factors behind the unification of Kurdish tribes against the central state³⁷. In this sense, Bruninseen believes motivations were of a mixture: nationalist and private.

By the middle of 1921 the area under Simko's authority included all Iranian territory west of Lake Urmiyeh and from there south as far as Baneh and Sardasht (southern part Iranian Kurdistan), as well as the north-western districts of Iraq, where the British and the Kemalists were still competing for control. Besides the entire Shikak confederacy and the Herki tribe, also the Mamash, Mangur, Dehbokri, Piran, Zarza, Gewrik, Feyzullahbegi, Pizhdar and the minor tribes around Baneh had joined Simko. In October 1921 Simko's troops entered the town of Souj Bulagh (Mahabad), which had until that date been held by government troops. 200 of the gendarmerie garrison were killed, another 150 were injured. It is worthwhile to note that forces of Simko pillaged the whole city which created immense resentment from the town's people³⁸.

Souj Bulagh was strategic and the last bastion of the central government troops and naturally became the capital. Simko did not take residence there himself, however, but appointed a loyal chieftain, Hamzeh Agha of the Mamash, as governor. The Azari towns of Mianduab, Maragheh and Binab sent letters of submission to Souj Bulagh³⁹. It is worthwhile to note that a chief factor behind the non-Kurdish tribes for Smko

³⁶ Ibid, p 24

³⁷ Ibid, 27

³⁸ cited in John Joseph, *Muslim-Christian relations and inter-Christian rivalries in the Middle East: the case of the Jacobites in an age of transition* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983), p 23

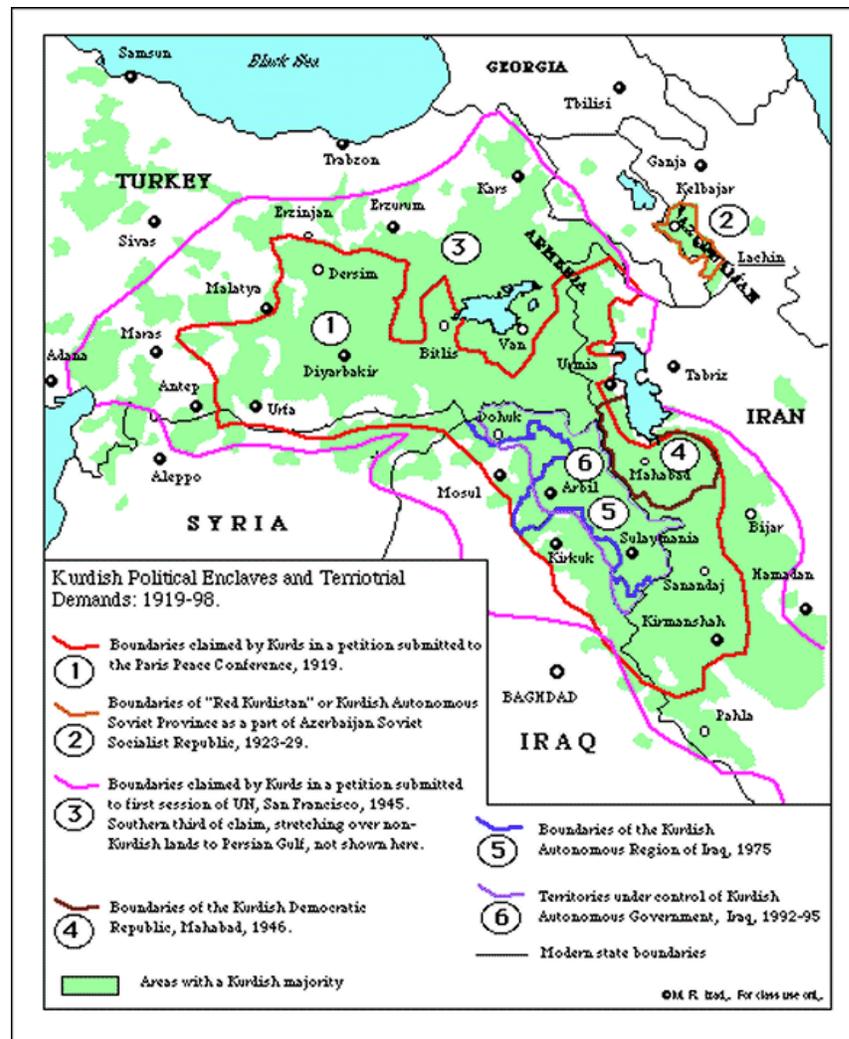
³⁹ Ibid, p 41

was not only their hostility towards Raza Khan Government but also the fear and intimidation Simko forces created in the area. According to some sources, his forces had bad reputation through looting and plundering⁴⁰.

Further military successes against government troops that year added to Simko's standing among the Kurds, and swelled the number of his followers. By July 1922 his territory reached its greatest extension: it stretched as far east and south as Sain Qaleh (Shahin Dezh) and Saqqiz. Moreover, Simko was in permanent communication with tribes further south: he had influence in Mariwan and Awroman, and even tribes as far south as Luristan were to rise in support of his revolt. Similarly, many Kurdish chieftains in Turkey and Iraq had established friendly relations with him (See map 10 of Iranian Kurdistan below). Although, there were no concrete plans for united action, but it could never harm to have relations with a successful social climber such as Simko Rumours started to circulate that the Iranian government was going to grant the Kurds autonomy because it could not subdue them. Those rumours were to prove unfounded, however⁴¹.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 42

⁴¹ Ibid, 45



Map 10 shows Eastern Kurdistan and the area under the control of Kurds during 1920s

Since the coup d'état of February 1921 Riza Khan had devoted his energies to the building of a modern, disciplined, coherent national army. His efforts were soon to bear fruit. During 1921 and even in early 1922 Simko had been able to inflict repeated defeats on the government troops (irregulars, Cossacks, gendarmerie) sent against him, capturing many of their arms. In August 1922 however, a well-coordinated campaign by the reorganised army brought him to heel. The success of the central government over Simko, however, had more to do with international support for the Raza Khan than with the Iranian army. Around the same time, the British preferred to put their support behind Raza Khan and the Turks did not want to drag their legs into a conflict on their sensitive borders. In addition to that, fearing and assuming the unfair treatment from Simko's force, the Shiite Kurds of the Southern Iran around the

city of Kermshān switched their allegiance to Tehran. Again, religion proved to be more effective factor than nationalism in the determining the Kurdish allegiance. With advances of Raza Khan Troops towards the heart of Kurdish-lands, Simko's followers dispersed, leaving him nothing but a small band of loyal men. He had to escape into Turkey and from there to Iraq. Edmonds, who interviewed him on his arrival in Iraq, observed that he was especially bitter against the Turks and the British. The former had always promised him assistance but they too had now turned their armies against him, and the latter had passively allowed him to be crushed in spite of his usefulness to them⁴².

As a refugee in Iraq, Simko did not remain idle but immediately started attempting to strengthen old ties and establish new ones with Kurdish chieftains there, in preparation for a return to Iran. He approached his old ally Sayyid Taha who was now used by the British to get the Turks out of Rowanduz and had lost interest in further adventures in Iran, and also Sheykh Mahmud of Suleymānīyeh, the most influential nationalist leader of southern Kurdistan who showed equally little interest in Simko's problems. He even tried to appease the Assyrian refugees, who had been brought to Iraq by the British, and who still thought of return to Urmīyeh and Salmas. In 1923 he went to Turkey, to solicit Turkish support, but equally in vain. In 1924 Riza Khan pardoned him, and he returned to Iran. In 1926 he made a last abortive attempt to regain the virtual independence he had once held, and besieged the town of Dilman, assisted by sections of the Herki and Begzadeh tribes. This time, in the face of a more powerful and well-armed armies of Raza Khan, Smko's attempts did not produce any outcome, and his army was crushed. Again he had to flee to Iraq. In 1929 the Iranian government invited him back again, offering him the governorate of Ushnuvīyeh. A few days after his arrival he was killed in an ambush set up by the same government⁴³

8.5.5 The Organisational Weakness

The most serious weakness of Simko's movement was the absence of any kind of formal organisation. There was just the network of Simko's private relations, no party to organise the followers, no formal government or war council. The major towns, Urmīyeh and Souj Bulagh, were administered by governors appointed by Simko who

⁴² Ibid, 46

⁴³ Ibid, p 49

were tribal chieftains unrelated to the inhabitants of the towns and simply took over the offices of the previous Tabriz-appointed governors, and to large degree the inhabitants of the towns despised them for their authoritarian attitude. There was no systematic and equitable taxation; Simko's treasury was filled by indiscriminate looting, although, most were inimical to him⁴⁴.

The Kurdish armed force constantly fluctuated in size, as tribal loyalty stood at its core and those loyalties shifted according to the circumstances. The more or less permanent nucleus consisted of the chieftains' retinues, more precisely those of Simko himself and of Amr Khan, head of the Kardar section of the Shikak. In 1918 Simko's retinue included several hundred former soldiers of the Ottoman army, well-armed and trained by German instructors. In 1921-22 Simko was said to have a large Turkish contingent which, the Iranians and British suspected, had been put at his disposal by the Ankara government. Suspicions were never confirmed. It is worthwhile to mention that there were Kurdish nationalists from Turkish Kurdistan among his retinue too. Even this central core, however, was not really permanent. Many of the Ottoman soldiers who had joined Simko surrendered when they were promised amnesty during the 1919 campaign by Intisar and Filipov and their surrender indicates that ethnicity among the Azaris and their Turkish brethren was more effective than private interests. Furthermore, retainers from Kurdish tribes also came and went according to Simko's fortunes, motivated more by pay and booty than by nationalist sentiment. Whereas by July 1922 consistent success had swollen his forces to some 10, 000, but after the first reverses they dwindled, and within a few days no more than a thousand loyal followers remained⁴⁵.

A strong retinue appeared to be a necessary condition for any chieftain who had embarked upon an expansive political career. Once his strength was perceived, many others may have joined who were not, and would not become retainers. In Simko's raids and battles against government troops not only his retainers but many other tribesmen took part. These were primarily Shikak, and especially from the Avdovi, Mamedi and Kardar component tribes. At times of Simko's good fortune, chieftains of other tribes also joined, with their retainers and with common tribesmen. It was

⁴⁴ Olson Robert, *The Kurdish Question and Turkish-Iranian Relations: From World War I to 1998* (Kurdish Studies Series, No. 1, California, Mazda Publishers, 1998: pp 24-27

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 34

especially the Herki tribe that contributed many men: the Herki and the Mamash proved to be Simko's most loyal allies. Others joined later and deserted earlier. At times of adversity even the closest allies left Simko. Thus Amr Khan, the head of the Kardar Pisaqas and therefore Simko's main potential rival among the Shikak, who had on many occasions acted as Simko's plenipotentiary in 1922 attempted to desert him. He contacted the government through a local sheykh as intermediary and demanded amnesty, in exchange for which he promised obedience to the government and willingness to fight against Simko. Amr Khans allegiance towards Raza Khan government seemed to have considerably weakened conviction and commitment among nationalist forces in general and in particular among the other components of the Shkak's tribe⁴⁶.

Simko not only sought support among the tribes; he also attempted to ally himself with foreign powers. Repeatedly he tried to elicit British support, usually through chieftains who had better relations with the British than he had himself: for example, Sayyid Taha, or Babakr Agha of the Pizhdar. In this regard, he had little if any success. At the same time he was in communication with the Soviet authorities in the Caucasus and with the Kemalists at Van. Some of his letters to the former were apparently intercepted; British and Iranian authorities were convinced that the Kemalists had put troops at his disposal, as already mentioned. But the fact is that none of these foreign powers came to his support when he most needed them. In the early phases of his career, however, his association with state authorities (the Iranians, who made him a governor of Qotur; the Russians and Ottomans who recognised him during the occupation) had strengthened his position among the Kurds. Such relations with neighbouring states have — it has been said before — always been present in the politics of Kurdistan, and they continued to influence Kurdish nationalism in its later phases as well. They may well be considered part and parcel of Kurdish tribal politics⁴⁷.

The large confederacy of tribes that was Simko's movement continued to exist as long as the tribes were kept mobilised. Although, one of the factors that did mobilise them

⁴⁶Cited in Martin Van Bruinseen, *Kurdish tribes and the state in Iran: the case of Simko's revolt*, in: Richard Tapper (ed.), *The conflict of tribe and state in Iran and Afghanistan*. London: Croom Helm, 1983, pp. 36-44

⁴⁷Ibid, 56

was nationalism, yet the rapidity with which Simko's support dwindled in times of adversity, suggests that for the majority of his followers nationalism was at best an additional motive. As usual among tribes, mobilisation should have some more practical and immediate object, and there should be reasonable chances of attaining it, be it a military victory or over a rival tribe or government troops or simply plunder. The frequent raiding associated with Simko's rebellion, which many contemporary and later nationalists held against him, was not simply accidental to it: it probably was a necessary condition for keeping the tribes mobilised and thus together. When mobilisation ended — in this case because most tribesmen judged the chances of further success very small and therefore gave up — the unity immediately broke down. The same happened to many large confederacies in the past: a combination of internal and external factors mobilised the tribes and made them confederate themselves. When these stimuli disappeared or when the costs of confederating became too high, the confederacy fell apart, and little remained beyond its name and sometimes a respected but not obeyed chiefly lineage. In the case of Simko's rebellion against the central government, mobilisation was not sustained indefinitely. Maintaining the unity once achieved requires some definite form of organisation, which is, however, beyond tribal politics. Simko did not provide an organisational structure to institutionalise a measure of mobilisation of the tribes through their division into rival confederacies⁴⁸. In initial phases of the rebellion, the tribal chieftains dominated the core leadership and the primary motive for them was their narrowly-defined tribal interests. In addition to that, the Sunni Muslim Kurds rigorously dominated the nationalist movement, which rendered the large component of the Shittes Kurds in southern part of Kurdistan increasingly disinterested in the rebellion. These sectarian fault lines between the Kurdish Shittes and Sunnis continued to be a main factor of the division of the nationalist movement. Furthermore, the domination of the leadership by Sunni tribal chieftains, in effect, made the rebellion into an extension of tribo-sect politics. This was a serious weakness that contributed to the rapid collapse of the Kurdish nationalist in Iran from 1919-1929 in the spite of the initial success they achieved in liberating Kurdish lands⁴⁹.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 58

⁴⁹ Ibid, p 67

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter indicated that the Kurds of Iran during the First World War, were intent on taking the advantage of the weakness of the central state in Persia during and after the Great War. Persia was too fragile to be able to hold the country together. Despite the weakness of the central state, Persia mainly banked on diplomacy to use the country's ethnics against one another: Azaris against the Kurds and Gilanis against the Baluchis and Rushidis. This diplomatic approach persisted during the whole course of the Great War and even after.

The Kurds who are densely populated in large swaths of the country bordering Turkey and Iraq tended to establish their own independent state, but their weak organisation and the lack of a cohesive nationalist sentiment among the dominant Kurdish tribes resulted in undermining their endeavours. By the time Simko commenced his rebellion against Persia in 1919, the Great War had ended, and the Kurds almost lost their leverage over the allied powers which they had during the war years. In another word, the Kurdish rebellion started when the great powers lost their interest in the Kurds.

The other factor that clearly contributed to the Kurdish failure is the fact that the Kurdish confronted the Azaris bordering the Kurdistan in Azerbaijan area, and opening this front the Azaris were prompted to lean on the Kemalists in Turkey for support. Furthermore, the Kurdish confrontation with Azaris also created sympathy for Azaris on the part of their Shiite brothers in Persia⁵⁰. It was obvious that for Persia the Kurds that are mostly Sunnis posed a greater danger for Persia than Azari nationalists sharing their Shiite beliefs with Persians. In addition to that, the Kurdish forces lacked a central structure to organise them. Their brute reputation as bandits and robbers more or less reduced support among the Kurds. The final factor diminishing the Kurdish prospects of success was the religious differences between the Sunni and the Shiite Kurds. During the entire course of the rebellion, the Kurdish Shiites that were predominantly inhabitants of the Southern of Iranian Kurdistan remained apprehensive of offering any support to the rebellion, the core of which was made up of the Sunni Kurds. In a more strict sense, they were more willing to lean to

⁵⁰ *ibid*, 68

the central government than to the Kurdish movement. All factors explained above were among the chief reasons dooming the Kurdish rebellion against Persia to a complete failure.

Chapter Nine

Syria

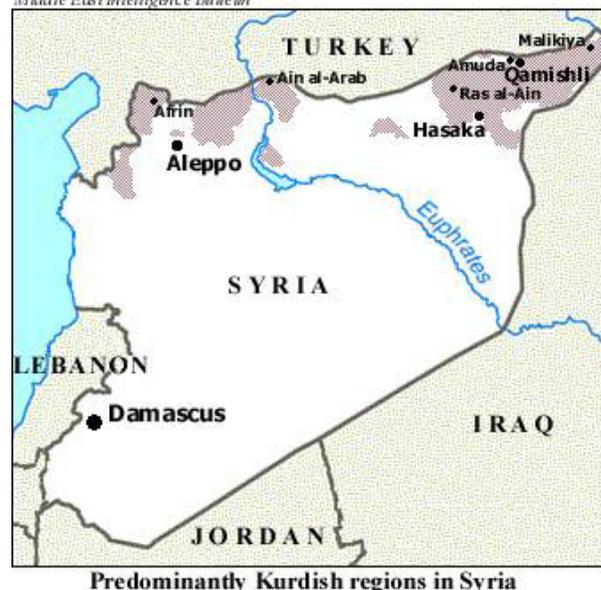
9.1. Introduction

After the treaty of Lusan was signed at between the Allies and Turkey in 1923 which in effect divided Kurdistan among the newly created nation states in the region, a comparatively small number of the Kurds became Syrians under the French mandate. It is noteworthy to mention that the Kurds under the French mandate were able to practice some of their cultural rights. The Kurds of the Syria speak Kurmanji language (Badini) and the majority are Sunnis Muslims. They adhere to distinctive Kurdish cultural practices and a shared national story, and they are greatly influenced by the Kurds in other neighbouring countries. They live in large numbers along the borders of Turkey and Iraq with large concentrations Jazira in the northeast, Kubani in the north and the Kurd Dagh in the northeast. Living in large numbers may have been a helpful factor in maintaining their distinctive character from that of the mainstream Arabs¹.

Syria's Kurds mostly live in a geocultural region located in present-day north-eastern Syria. This region covers greater part of the province of Al Hasakah. The main cities in this region are Al-Qamishli (or "Qamişlû" in Kurdish) and Al Hasakah (or "Hesaka" in Kurdish) and Ra al Aynn. Another region with a significant Kurdish population is in the northern part of Syria. Many Kurds live in metropolitan areas and large cities of the country (see Map 10 below). Estimates of the number of Kurds in Syria vary widely, but they are believed to compose about 9 percent of the population. Although some Kurdish tribal groups have lived in the country for generations, many arrived from Turkey between 1924 and 1938, when Mustapha Kemal attempted to force his reform programs on the Kurds there². Those Kurds who left Turkey which found Syria more tolerant to their social conservative outlook than Turkey engaged in an aggressive transformation of society.

¹ Entessar, Nader, *Kurdish Ethno nationalism*, Boulder, CO, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992:p 12

² *The Silenced Kurds*, Human Rights Watch, Vol.8, No. 4, October 1996, Available at www.hrw.org/reports/1996/syria



Map 10 shows the Kurdish inhabitant area in Syria³

The Kurds are fiercely independent tribal formations speaking their own language, Kirmanji. The Kurds in Syria like their ethnic brethren in Turkey, Iran and Iraq are a cohesive people with intricate inter-tribal ties and a deep pride in their own history and traditions. Most Kurds in Syria are farmers; some are city dwellers; and others are nomads who drive their flocks far into the mountains in the summer and graze them on the lowlands in the winter. Roughly 35 to 40 percent of the Kurds live in the foothills of the Taurus Mountains north of Aleppo. An equal number live in the Jazirah; about 10 percent in the vicinity of Jarabulus northeast of Aleppo; and from 10 to 15 percent in the Hayy al Akrad (Quarter of the Kurds) on the outskirts of Damascus⁴.

This chapter will examine the policies of Damascus towards the Kurds. Because the Kurds in Syria under the French mandate enjoyed certain aspects of their cultural rights, this chapter will attempt to explain the post-French mandate which marked a remarkable shift in government policy towards Kurds. In the context of the Arab nationalist-oriented policy practised without reservations in the Kurdish area, this chapter will analyse the Arabisation policy initiated by the Asad regime.

³ www.geographic.org/maps/new2/syria_maps

⁴ Interview with Marwan Othman, International Viewpoint, autumn 2004.

9.2 Kurds During the French Mandate

During the French mandate period in Syria (1920-1946), Kurds were allowed to organize politically and permitted to publish books and periodicals in their own language. Distrustful of the majority Arab Sunni population, the French authorities recruited disproportionate numbers of Kurds (as well as Christians and heterodox Muslims) into the police and military⁵. A Kurdish nationalist movement, *Khoybun(Freedom Party)*, emerged in the 1920s and vigorously lobbied for greater cultural and political autonomy, but most of its demands (e.g. the establishment of Kurdish language schools, recognition of Kurdish as an official language, and the appointment of Kurdish administrators in Kurdish areas) were rejected by the French and one of its leading figures, the poet Osman Sabri, was sent into exile to Madagascar. While French relations with the Kurds soured, Arab and Kurdish Syrians maintained relatively peaceful relations during this period and the two communities joined together in agitating for Syrian independence. Beginning in 1956, however, a succession of Arab nationalist regimes came to power in Damascus and began suppressing the Kurdish minority. Teaching of the Kurdish language was outlawed and Kurdish media outlets were closed. The discovery of major oil fields in the Kurdish heartland (Qarah Shuk, 1956; Suwaydiyah, 1959) contributed to government paranoia about Kurdish separatism⁶. Tensions worsened after Syria joined Egypt in forming the United Arab Republic (UAR) in 1958. The UAR regime fired hundreds of Kurdish military officers, including the army chief of staff, Gen. Tawfiq Nizamaddin, and closed police and military academies to Kurdish applicants. The end of the French mandate clearly marked the start of suppressing the Kurds⁷.

9.3 The Syrian Arab Nationalism: An Exclusive Identity

From the beginning of its independence years, the question of the Syrian national identity was a contentious issue. Like other neighbouring countries, where the Kurds live, the Syrian multi-ethnic and religious composition made identity a complicated dilemma. Robert Lowe believes that the struggle for Syrian independence from

⁵ Salah Badradin, *The Kurdish National Movement in Syria* (Beirut: The Kurdish Kawa Cultural Society, 2003), p 6

⁶ *Ibid*, p 7

⁷ *Ibid*, p 8

France was primarily fought in terms of not a Syrian Nationalist discourse, but of Arab nationalism. This made the question of identity more complex after the proclamation of the United Arab Republic between Egypt and Syrian in 1958. In addition to that, in 1961 the official name of the country was called the 'Syrian Arab Republic'. Pan-Arab Nationalism continued to be the official ideology of the state and placed Syria at the broader Arab nation. This exclusive nationalist discourse the State promoted had severe implications for the non-Arab minorities of the Syria, and the Kurds in particular who make up the largest minority group in the country⁸. Since the Kurds together with Arabs struggled for independence, they tended to shape an identity that could encompass all minorities in the country. The Arab nationalists enjoying the support from other nationalists in Egypt and Iraqi mainly place Pan-Arabism at the heart of the state ideology.

Syrian Arab attitudes towards the Syrian Kurds can be clearly seen within the context of the perceived threat posed by all Kurds to the Arab nation. This is the case especially given the bloody struggle between the Kurds and consecutive Arab governments in Iraq, a majority Arab speaking country. The state perceived the Kurds a far greater threat than that of other Syrian minorities. This was demonstrated in the implementation of special restrictions on the Kurds which had not been applied to other groups such as Armenians or Assyrians⁹. From the Syrian government perspective, the Kurds had little cause to complain and comfortably identify with the notion of the Syrian nation because they had been included as full Syrian citizens with equal rights and opportunities to other ethnic and religious groups. The state argument was true of a tiny fraction of the Kurds who became Arabicised but most Kurds refused to identify themselves with the notion of state nationalism dominated by ethnic Arabism. In the post-independence period, the state nationalism excluded the Kurds from the state ideology and also from individual social and economic advancement unless they became effectively Arabs in all but ethnic origin. This required abandoning Kurmanji in favour of Arabic and accepting cultural and political values and goals of Pan-Arab nationalism¹⁰. Although there had been many Kurds in positions of power or influence in Syria and the state often cited them as evidence of

⁸ Ibid, p 14

⁹ Ibid, p 20

¹⁰ Kreyenbroek, Philip G. and Allison C., *Kurdish Culture and Identity*, London, Zed Books, 1996: p 56

Kurdish equality and immersion in the state. These Kurds tended to be urban and affluent, and they spoke Arabic rather than Kurmanji and had been reconciled to the Arabness of their identity. Those Arabicised Kurds commanded little influence and respect among the Kurds in the north who were largely resisting the official ideology of the state. Hence, the national identity of Syria became problematic and less cohesive in relation to the Kurds whose main ethnic features are largely distinct and distinguishable from that of Arabs. Syrian national identity with the balk of ethno-centric Arab nationalism has remained an obstacle in the eyes of the average Kurds identifying themselves with Syrian nationalism¹¹.

9.4 Policy of Arabisation of the Kurds

Official discrimination against the Kurds in Syria dates back to the 1930s and increased greatly in 1950s and 1960s during the height of Arab nationalism. The Kurds suffered from a lack of political representation, poor economic development and excessive restrictions on social and cultural expression. Kurdish customs and symbols were attacked, the Kurmanji (Kurdish dialectic spoken by Syrian Kurds) was banned from public use and the Kurdish music publications were forbidden. Any opposition activity has been always difficult and the nascent Kurdish political movement was shattered as Kurdish Parties were banned and its leaders and members arrested and imprisoned. The state conducted a campaign of Arabisation in the late 1960s and 1970s under the government of Hafiz Al Asad, whose Bathist party came to power in 1963¹². The Arab Belt was a plan for a cordon sanitaire between Syrian and neighbouring Kurds around the Northern and North eastern rim of Jazira along the borders with Turkey and Iraq. The Kurdish land was confiscated and Kurds were forced out to resettle in the Syria interior to make way for Arabs. In effect, the Syrian state tended to de-territorialize the Kurds and dismantle their ethnic markings in Kurdistan. To back up the policy of Arabisation, the state deployed a strong military presence in this cordon and Arab settlements were provided with superior facilities and state benefits to encourage greater economic prosperity¹³. The Syrian

¹¹ Kerim Yaldiz, 'The Kurds in Syria: Forgotten People', Michigan, Michigan University Press, 2001, p 20

¹² Middle East Watch, Syria Unmasked: The Suppression of Human Rights by the Asad Regime, (New Haven and London: Human Rights Watch Books/Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 96-97

¹³ Ibid, p 98

government, furthermore, has changed Kurdish place names to Arabic, banned shop signs in Kurdish and prevented parents from registering their children with Kurdish names. In addition to that, the celebration of the Kurdish New Year, New Roz, was curtailed as the Kurds used their Kurdish new year to express their nationalist grievances¹⁴. Despite the minority Allawi status of the Asad regime, the state has pursued an aggressive policy of Arabisation throughout 1960s and 1970s in order to create a pure Arab nation in Syria. Although Arabisation was no longer vigorously pursued 1980s and 1990s, the regime remained inseparable from the old Arab nationalist rhetoric which expects aggressive cultural assimilation. Kurdish still remain banned from use in education, the public sector or business, in marked contrast to other minorities or foreign languages.

9.5 Denial of Nationality

The most pressing issue is the plight of the Kurds denied citizenship as a result of an extraordinary census carried out in 1962 in Al-Hasaka province in the north east of Syria, the most densely Kurdish-populated area of the century. The census arbitrarily stripped 120,000-150,000 citizens of Syrian citizenship, leaving them, and subsequently their children, denied of basic civil rights and condemned to poverty and discrimination¹⁵. The official justification was that these Kurds were alien infiltrators from Turkey who had recently crossed into Syria and hence had no entitlement to citizenship. These stateless people became known as the ajanib (foreigners). It is certain that a considerable number of Kurds did cross from Turkey in the 1920s and 1930s but others were long present in the area. Those who failed to take part in the 1962 census or who were born of unions between Ajanib and Syrians citizens could not have been officially registered. These unregistered persons (who are called 'maktomeen' or muted) do not exist in official records. These muted persons suffer even greater hardship and discrimination than the ajanibs. In Syria, there are approximately 200,000 registered ajanibs and 80,000-100,000 maktomeen. These Kurds whether ajanibis or maktomeen, are not allowed passports, can not vote or own property and are forbidden as foreigners from working in the public sector and in

¹⁴ Amnesty International Report, 1981, p 7-9

¹⁵ Syria:for many Kurds, statelessness remains away of life, IRIN, 20 November 2005, www.irinnews.org/ME.asp

many professions. Their lack of the standard Syrian identity means they can not receive state benefits, travel internally or stay in a hotel. In brief, their freedom of movement was denied and this policy has been in place since the 1960s and has continued until today¹⁶.

9.6 The Difficulties of the Kurdish Political Movement

The Kurdish community initially responded to steadily growing government repression with a show of political unity. In 1957, the Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria (KDPS) was founded by a broad coalition of prominent Kurdish intellectuals calling for recognition of Kurdish national rights and an end to the marginalization of Kurds in the administration. Over the next few years, the KDPS recruited thousands of members and began developing a sophisticated political organization. In 1960, however, the government launched a massive crackdown, arresting KDPS Secretary-General Nurreddin Zaza and other key leaders of the group. Under the weight of severe government repression, the party quickly fragmented. The situation worsened after a 1963 coup brought to power the Baath Party, which had been militantly anti-Kurdish since its inception in Syria in the mid-1940s¹⁷. The Baathist regime's paranoia about the Kurds was inflated by events next door in Iraq, where Mustafa Barzani's Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) was rebelling against the central government. Because of Barzani's close ties with many KDPS leaders, Syria's new government feared that the Iraqi insurrection would spread¹⁸. Baathist land reform programs in the 1960s were designed to politically weaken the Kurdish community by destroying the economic power of its traditional elite. According to one source, 43% of all land seized under Syria's agrarian reform laws was in the governorate of Jazeera. In the early 1970s, the government began replacing Kurdish place names with Arabic names (e.g., the town of Kobani became "Ain al-Arab") and resettled thousands of Arabs in Kurdish areas bordering Turkey and Iraq. Although Syrian President Hafez Assad officially ended the so-called "Arab Belt" (*al-hizam al-arabi*) project in 1976, he allowed Arab settlers to remain on confiscated land and provided them with top-notch clinics, schools, and other facilities, fuelling resentment among their Kurdish neighbours. While the

¹⁶ Flynt Leverent, *Inheriting Syria: Bashar's Trial*, Brookings, Washington D.C, 2005: p 54

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p 55

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 57

construction of hydroelectric dams on the Euphrates brought electricity to most Kurdish villages during the 1970s, Kurdish areas remained woefully underdeveloped in comparison to the rest of Syria¹⁹.

Compared to the Kurdish political movement in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq, the Kurdish political movement in Syria has been remarkable ineffective and weak. Generally speaking, the opposition in Syria has been very weak since the Muslim Brotherhood was crushed in Homma in 1982. The government has cowed, controlled and tempted figures from opposition groups through patron-client system that made the individual's place within the system very valuable but insecure²⁰. The government of Assad after coming to power in the early 1960s established a cohesive intelligence apparatus which was highly adept at buying off, infiltrating and coercing opposition groups, making sustained and meaningful political opposition extremely difficult and hazardous. The suppression of Kurdish political activity was part of the government effort to crush the opposition and civil society groups²¹.

Like political movement in Iraq, Iran and Turkey, there has been disunity among the Syrian Kurds as the traditional ties of loyalty and tribe have interplayed with political and ethnic affiliations. Main Kurdish political parties advocated a careful and modest approach, focusing on cultural and educational issues and carefully avoiding radical approaches. One of the main divisions among the Syrian Kurds is a complex sense of identity. Most Kurds are proud of their Kurdishness and a considerable number fought in the Kurdish uprisings in Iraq and Turkey²². But significant number of the Syrian Kurds also see themselves as part of the broad multi-ethnic Syrian nation. Many live in, study in and rely on incomes from the major cities. This interaction has, to an extent, produced some of the Kurdish attachment to the wider Syrian community²³. While some Kurds are wholly wedded to Syria, others are wholly disaffected. The political parties have been attempting to balance the competing identities of being

¹⁹ Gary C. Gamill, "The Kurdish Awakening in Syria", *The Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol.6, No. 4, April 2004, p 5

²⁰ Cited in ²⁰ Kerim Yaldiz, 'The Kurds in Syria', p 7

²¹ *Ibid*, P 8

²² *Ibid*, P 67

²³ *Ibid*, P 68

‘Syrian’ and ‘Kurdish’ or specifically ‘Syrian Kurdish’²⁴. The Kurdish movement in Syria has been hindered by the activities of the Kurds from neighbouring countries- a dynamic common to the all Kurdish movement. The Iraqi Kurdish parties and the Kurdistan Workers Party known as PKK in Turkey have distracted Syrian Kurds from the struggle in Syria. These better organised, stronger, and more numerous have attracted the Syrian Kurds in their respective causes with tacit consent of Syria. Neither movement (Turkey’s Kurds and Iraqi Kurds) has supported the Kurds in Syria and both have avoided the issue for fear of damaging good relations with Syrian government²⁵.

The Kurdish movement in Syria has been plagued by divisions since soon after the founding of the first party, the Kurdistan Democratic Party- Syria in 1957. Despite efforts at unification, there are thirteen Kurdish parties active in Syria. The Kurdish parties command considerable support in the Kurdish predominantly populated Kurdish cities in the Jazira around Qamishli regarded as hotbed of Kurdish nationalism in Syria. But their illegality means they can not stand for election²⁶. Provided the parties remain quiet, do not mention any form of self-government or regime change, confine themselves to cultural matters and offer no unified threat, the Syrian government tolerates their existence²⁷. As a result of the government harsh measures in the Kurdish areas, no party has been calling for independence or even dares make mention of a common cause among all Kurds. It is worthwhile to mention that none of the parties used the sensitive name ‘Kurdistan’ in their title for fear of official reaction to any suggestion of suggestion. Instead, the term used since 1960s has been ‘Kurdish’.

²⁴ Ibid, p 69

²⁵ Ibid, p 70

²⁶ Political program submitted to the third convention of the Yakiti Party in Syria, Article 4, and November 1999. English translation available online at

<http://www.users.skynet.be/Yakiti/ingilizi/aboutYakiti.htm>, p 1

²⁷ Ibid, p 2

9.7 The Raising the Voice

Since the country's independence from France, there have been periodic confrontations. There were physical confrontations and arrests in the 1980s and the 1990s, often on significant days such as New Ruz, or the anniversary of Al-Hasaka. The restrictions on the celebration of New Ruz, led to a bloody confrontation in 1986 when crowds gathered in Damascus and Afrin demanding the freedom to observe the festival and were fired on by police in which a number of protestors were killed and injured²⁸. In 1990, a demonstration by 'Ajanib' and 'Makhtumeen' was violently repressed after protestors attempted to present their complaints to the President. These incidents have increased in frequency and scale in recent years with notably large and bold human rights demonstrations in Damascus and Aleppo in 2002 and 2003. The death of Hafez Al asad gave further impetus to Kurdish activity. Kurdish political organisations were able to meet more openly and increase their activity and support. With Asad's son, Bashar, in power, the regime relaxed its attitude towards the Kurdish publications and music and the burgeoning number of illegal private 'Kurmanji' language classes²⁹. Despite the slight softening of the Government in 2000, it has also maintained and even increased its repression of the Kurdish political movement. Kurdish activists have been repeatedly intimidated while anti-Kurdish rhetoric and restrictions on Kurdish activity remain firmly in place. It seems the regime makes some conciliatory statements in an attempt to subdue the Kurds and ease international pressure while in practise it is unwillingness to countenance any real change. For example, two leaders of the Kurdish Union Party in Syria Marwan Othman and Hasan Salih became prominent political prisoners after being arrested in 2002. They were detained for 15 months for organising a human rights demonstration in Damascus³⁰.

The official expulsion of the Kurdistan Workers Party, PKK, from Syrian territory in 1998, to a large degree, freed the Syrian Kurds from the complication of the PKK presence. The PKK's presence in Syria since the early 1980s complicated political

²⁸ Washington urges tolerance on Damascus," Agence France Presse, 15 March 2004.

²⁹ Amnesty International, Press Release, 6 April 2004

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/print/ENGMDE240292004>

³⁰ Syrian Arab TV (Damascus), 15 March 2004. Translation by BBC World Service

activities of the Syrian Kurds. International intervention in the war of 1991 (Gulf War) and the subsequent autonomy gained by the Iraqi Kurds were closely watched by the Syrian Kurds, who felt more emboldened to articulate their demands. Furthermore, the fall of the Baathist regime in Iraq and gains made by the Iraqi Kurds at both regional and national level have provided massive encouragement. Also, international pressure increased on the isolated Syrian regime on issues of terrorism, the Iraqi border and interference in Lebanon, left the Syrian Government weakened and aware that internal repression of dissent would attract further international condemnation³¹.

9.8 Conclusion

Kurdish official exclusion from Syria's definition in shaping its national identity dates back to 1940s and became more apparent in 1950s and 1960s. Syria's Kurds are well aware of Syria's current isolation and are less fearful of the regime than in the past. According to Machal Tammo, a Kurdish leader: 'We have exceeded the culture of fear that the regime planted in us in the last over half a century'³². There can be no doubting the depth of exasperation felt by many at the continued failure to end years of discrimination and hardship, and Kurdish nationalism is strengthening. The increased pressure on Syria during the UN investigation has further encouraged Kurdish activism and the continuing development of the autonomous government of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq will remain an inspiring influence. Despite this, the Syrian government retains tight control over internal dissent, and no relaxation of the restrictions on all opposition parties is in prospect³³. From the state perspective, government harsh policies against the Kurds in the Kurdish areas might decrease Kurdish activism and in the process tame their nationalist aspirations, but the reaction to the official policies of government ranging from Arabisation of 1960s and 1970s to intimidation and harassing Kurdish political movement at the hands of the formidable Syrian intelligence agencies shows that the Kurds have not been cowed.

³¹ Al-Hayat (London), 16 March 2004, www.alhayat.com

³² Interview with Kurdish media available at www.kurdishmedia.com, archive, March 21, 2004

³³ Cited in Badrandin's Book on 'The Kurdish National Movement in Syria', 2003, p 9

The Kurdish issue is crucial to Syrian domestic stability and reforms are required; otherwise this increased level of Kurdish unrest is likely to continue. The Syrian government is in no position to make substantial economic improvements, but there are some signs of willingness to be slightly more conciliatory on cultural issues and to grant citizenship to at least some of the stateless Kurds. However, any real mood for change seems unlikely within a regime whose entire legitimacy is based upon Arab nationalist rhetoric. To grant meaningful concessions to the Kurds would be to endanger the foundations of the state ideology. It is likely, therefore, that Kurdish national sentiment in Syria will continue to increase in depth and expression. Granting citizenship will not satisfy all Kurdish demands, which include a wish to be recognized as a second nationality and cultural and linguistic freedom. There's a kind of anxiety and restlessness now. We are disappointed with all the unfulfilled promises,' according to Hasan Salih, secretary general of the Kurdish Union Party in Syria. The great unknown is how far the Syrian Kurds will be prepared to press their demands. Currently there is no open discussion, nor perhaps even desire, for independence or Kurdish unification, regardless of whether either would be feasible. Circumstances may change in Syria and in neighbouring countries, but the full extent of Kurdish aims is at present for some measure of autonomy similar to that gained in Iraq. This stands a long way behind more pressing goals – citizenship for the stateless, the lifting of restrictions on Kurmanji and Kurdish culture, and, common to all Syrians, improved economic opportunities. How far the Kurds are willing to fight will to a great extent depend on the nebulous question of how Kurdish they actually feel and whether a natural urge to maintain identity, language and culture develops into a more political nationalist struggle.

Chapter Ten

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the chief factors and reasons behind the delayed national consciousness of the Kurds and their failure in creating a nation-state of their own like so many other national movements during and after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The Kurds constituting the largest ethnic bloc after Arabs, Persians, and Turks in the Middle East have been relatively late in developing a modern nationalist movement. Different peoples, of course, experience differing patterns of nationalist growth, consistent with their geography and historical circumstances. Overall, the Kurdish failure in developing a cohesive national consciousness which by definition span all other social loyalties results from several factors. The geography of Kurdistan heads the list. As a people inhabiting a primary mountainous region, the Kurds have been scattered and isolated from each other. This as a pre-requisite to link the people of various social backgrounds prevented the immense communication among the Kurds of the different regions to develop a sustained communication network. This was the case during all nineteenth century Kurdish uprisings against the Ottoman encroachment. With no strong central structure like those developed in the great plains of the Tigris and Euphrates or in the Nile valley. Geography and a nomadic way of life over the past centuries have strengthened the divergence of the various Kurdish dialects, many of them not mutually comprehensible today. In political terms, for at least the past five centuries the Kurds have been divided between Persian and Ottoman empires. The divisions of the Kurds between these two powerful empires was first a major blow to the Kurds, and these political divisions seriously constrained the opportunities to develop a more cohesive national vision. At the same time, after the first world war, those political divisions widened following the division of the Kurds among the newly created national states in the region. The states involved in the division of the Kurds have been clearly intent upon inhibiting Kurdish nationalism within their borders.

Nationalism as defined by Arnold must be integrative and coherent to help succeed the national movement¹. Kurdish nationalism due to its tribal social structure and lack of clear political awareness among Kurdish people would not become a dynamic force which could bind all social groups together under one framework. The fault lines which divide a nation along religion, sects and dialectics can be overcome by a coherent nationalism. In this sense, Kurdish nationalism failed to overcome those fault lines which divide the members of nation. Obviously, Kurdish national movement emerged at a time when other national movements within the Ottoman Empire emerged and sought more autonomy from Constantinople. The only thing which made other national movements succeed, aside from support of the major powers, was their nationalism were more integrative which bound all social groups together against the authority of the Ottoman Empire. In the case of the Kurds, the Kurdish clerics remained loyal to the Sultanate until the final stage of collapse of the Empire. The Kurdish masses leaned more to the clergy than to secular figures, whose loyalty to their nation was paramount.

Geography of Kurdistan was a fundamental obstacle which undermined the Kurdish national movement during the First World War period. The Kurds have generally lived in the more isolated regions of the two Empires: Ottomans and Persia. Isolation and an often pastoral way of life in many areas contributed to the development of a strong clan and tribal structures that perpetuated political and regional divisions. During the time of the Ottoman Empire, the Kurds along with other Muslims were part of a broader Sunni Muslim population within a multi-ethnic Empire. The empire was fully cognizant of its minorities, but it defined them in religious, not ethnic terms. This proved to be a cornerstone in helping the integrity of the Empire for centuries. The existence of the Christian and Jewish minorities was legally recognized. For the Muslim groups, however, the concept of minority status in legal sense did not really exist. The Muslim social and religious core of the Empire was made up of Turks, Arabs, and Kurds. Even if their language and culture differed, their religion basically did not. Sunnis were all equally Muslims and believers; ethnic and linguistic differences among them were of no legal consequence. As the research indicates, Kurds as part of the Sunni community of the

¹ Edward Arnold, *Nationalisms*, Contemporary History Series, London, 1994, p 5

Ottoman Empire were already treated as a distinct group by the Sultan in the sixteen century, when a number of independent principalities or emirates were established. Used by the Sultan to ensure the stability of the borders, these emirates, to large degree, were autonomous in their internal affairs. In exchange for their autonomy, they provided Sultan taxes and soldiers. Although, the relationship between these Kurdish emirs and the Sultan was not always free of trouble, the system survived into nineteen century. Certainly Kurdish tribes and clans were well aware of their cultural and linguistic distinctiveness, but this was not an age in which national concepts were formed. The autonomous Kurdish leaders were not particularly kind to their own population either. Overall, Kurds identified with the larger group Ottoman society but far more important at the local level they identified with various religious orders or tribal groupings. These tribal groupings were often in conflict with each other, shifting patterns of alliance. Indeed, the primary social cleavage was between the tribal fighter and sedentary cultivator.

By the nineteenth century, new factors induced gradual political change in the relationship between the Kurds and the Ottoman administration. Increased imperial intervention in the Kurdish regions, levies for troops, and warfare between Russia, Iran and the Ottoman Empire that touched Kurdish areas, increased the challenges to the privileges of Kurdish emirs and a broader of rebellion against Turkish rule throughout the empire. The empire's attempt at centralization was met with increased unrest in the Kurdish areas, some of which was the result of recklessness by Kurdish chieftain's intent on pursuing their own aggrandizement. Among these rebellious emirs, Baban, Mir Mohammad of Rawanduz, and emir of Bottan are the most famous. The revolts were suppressed at the cost of many lives. There were, in total, fifty various Kurdish rebellions against the Ottoman state. These revolts, however, were not nationalistic in character and their suppression led to strengthening of Sheikhs and 'Tariqats' (religious orders) leaders, who would play later a significant role in fomenting new rebellions. By and large, the traditional feudal Kurdish lords in the areas perceived themselves as the 'Sunni Muslim' subjects of a fundamentally Muslim empire and had no interest in an unpredictable Kurdish entity in which their own status may change for the worse. Ottomans throughout

the course of nineteenth century rebellions skillfully maneuvered between emirs who encouraged the rebellions only when their feudal interest were in jeopardy and the religious section of people who by and large happy with the Ottoman's Sunni core make up.

Changing fortunes of the empire at the end of nineteenth century together with nationalist stirrings of Armenians in the regions also inhabited by Kurds provided some of the other reasons for Kurdish disenchantment. With his ascension to the throne in 1876, Sultan Abul Hamid II sought to solidify the base of the Ottoman state by emphasizing the Islamic character of the empire. Among those to be co-opted were Kurdish leaders and elites. Yet, at the same time the seeds of differentiation were also sown by the state. Among the first instances of direct intervention and differentiation in the Kurdish region by the imperial state is Constantinople was the creation in 1891 of Kurdish officered and soldiered Hamidiya regiments. Designed to maintain order in eastern provinces, these battalions were eventually used by the Ottoman state in its campaign against the Armenians and also Kurds who were not obedient to the Ottomans. In the interim, the armed and tribally organized battalions became the source of a state-sponsored division within the Kurdish community as those benefiting from state patronage and arms would antagonize and oppress those who did not.

The Hamidiya just like the village guard system a century later, further strengthened tribal links among the Kurds. While there is a debate over the degree of the Kurdish political consciousness exhibited by the Kurds during the later part of century, from increased political activities in Istanbul and elsewhere, it is evident that something was afoot. The empire was experiencing turmoil at the centre. The Committee of Union and Progress had begun to agitate and conspire for a return to constitutional rule that the Sultan had abrogated. According to some experts, Young Turks Committee intentionally established a close relationship with the Kurdish intellectual elite and encouraged them to pressure Sultan to return to constitutional rule. It is obvious that the Young Turks were fully cognizant of the fact that Kurdish support is essential to pressure Sultanate. That is why, when Attaturk came to Kurdistan, his first statement was to confirm the formation

of bi-national state. In addition to that, in order to earn Kurdish support, he largely played a religious card which was effective in gaining Kurdish support. To those Kurds who were loyal to the Sunni Sultanat of the Empire, religion came before nationalism. In this regard, Attaturk got it well.

With the Young Turks Revolution in 1908, two contradictory tendencies appeared. On one hand emphasis on Islam was replaced with secularism and constitutionalism. In the ensuing atmosphere of liberalism, the Kurdish national activities increased when many intellectuals who abandoned hope in the efficacy of nationalist revolt looked to Ottoman liberal movements and constitutional reform as the best means to achieve greater national rights. With the growing of liberal and constitutional movement in coherence, Kurdish political and cultural activities burgeoned in the large towns of Kurdistan. The first Nationalist organization, the Kurdish society for the Rise and Progress was formed in 1908. The irony was that while return to constitutionalism served the more modern elements of the Kurdish elite, it did lead to a negative reaction among the Sheikhs (religious figures). Some of them engaged in open rebellion against the both Young Turks and the nationalist elements of Kurdish national movement. The Young Turks movement, finding itself besieged domestically and internationally, increasingly turned to pan-Turkism as a means of consolidating its power. In the end, when the Young Turks were dragged into the First World War, the Kurds proved to be loyal subjects. They fought in and alongside the Ottoman armies. It is obvious that the national element of the Kurdish movement found itself isolated in the face of an alliance between Young Turks, who also supported the Sultanate against the allies, and the Kurdish religious element which was made up of a Sunni core leaning towards to the Sultanate. This division within the Kurdish movement, furthermore, hindered any effort to articulate a national agenda during and the years of the war and after.

The defeat of the Ottomans in 1918 and the signing of the 1920 Treaty of Sevres provided a turning point for the Kurds. The Ottomans found themselves in a weak position and agreed to the Sevres articles in which a promise was vaguely made in support of the creation of a national state for the Kurds. That did not materialize because

the nationalist movement under the leadership of charismatic leader, Kemal Attaturk, was fully cognizant of the dividing line within the Kurdish National Movement across religious and nationalist elements. Attaturk's strategy contained two contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, he and his movement largely tended to transform Turkish Islamic characteristics whereas on other hand he invoked Islamism in Kurdistan which attracted the more popular religious elements among the Kurdish society. The centrality of Attaturk's rhetorics focused on the creation of a bi-national state with equal Turkish and Kurdish status in it. The Young Turks did not recognize the treaty of Sevres signed by the Sultan in 1920, and that nationalists after achieving staunch victories in the military field placed allies in a shaky position. It was not a surprise in 1923 when nationalists Turks asked for revision of Sevres. Indeed, the developments taking place between 1920 and 1923 worked in Turkey's favor. These developments naturally placed Turkey in a position to negotiate the terms of Sevres, and in the process of heated give and take Turkey removed the phrases of Sevres dealing with a possible Kurdish national state.

The international and regional order that had been established in the aftermath of Lusan which in effect resulted in the creation and recognition of the new states in the region, furthermore divided the already divided Kurdish society. As a result, the Kurdish question became more complex. The Shitte and Sunni fault lines that had been used by the Empires to divide the Kurds between themselves weakened Kurdish nationalism. Hence, Kurdish nationalism did not emerge as an integrative ideology capable of integrating the significant social and sectarian groups within the Kurdish society. This factor played a pivotal role in dividing the Kurdish rebellions that emerged in Iran, Turkey, and Iraq in the post-Ottoman political environment. In the case of Simko's rebellion against Persia, the core rebellion was made up of the Sunni Kurds that alienated the Shittes in Iranian Kurdistan. This undermined the cohesion of rebellion and as a result the Shittes leaned on the central Government in Tehran. This was also true of Shiekh Said rebellion which was not supported by the Kurdish Zazaz, an offshoot of the Shiite Islam, in Northern Kurdistan. Likewise, the Kurdish Shiites in Iraq did not support the rebellion of Shiekh Mahmud who was a Sunni Shiekh. As Arnold says any national movement is

deemed to failure without a coherent national consciousness that could transcend tribal, sectarian and regional loyalties. It has been argued that for the course of a hundred years, the lack of a coherent national consciousness is the chief factor in failing Kurdish nationalism for the creation of a national state. The Other factor that failed the Kurdish national movement in establishing a nation-state in post-First World War is the lack of external support when needed. Despite the poor coherence of nationalism within Kurdish society, the Kurdish national movement in the initial phases made remarkable success in liberating Kurdish land, and the central states has been vulnerable in the face of the Kurdish rebellions. This was the case in Turkey, Iraq and Iran. When Kurdish revolts reached a decisive stage, the external powers simply withdrew their support. It must be noted that the nation-states that had been created in the post-Ottoman era in the Middle Eastern region were not the outcome of their national movements. Rather, those states were created simply to retain the strategic interests of the major powers dominating the international relations in post-Ottoman regional and international order. It is obvious that despite the poor coherence of the Kurdish nationalist movement, it would been possible to establish a state for the Kurds had external powers supported them.

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