

1. Introduction

This thesis is about the Kurdish parts of Iraq, herein referred to as Iraqi Kurdistan. My objective with this thesis is first and foremost to describe the contemporary situation in this part of Iraq and how this situation has come into being. Thereafter, on the basis of this, I will try to predict what the future will hold for the Iraqi Kurds. In order to accomplish this, it will require a historic, geographic, politic and economic view of the situation.

I intend to do this by looking at the history of the Kurds as it would be impossible to understand the current situation in Iraqi Kurdistan without knowing its history. Also, as the Kurds inhabit an area which today is divided between Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria, I will describe not only the historical development within the borders of what is today known as Iraq, but also events within these neighbouring countries that have had an influence on the situation for the Iraqi Kurds. Of particular importance in this historic context is the period around World War I with the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the arrival of Western powers with mandates from the League of Nations to control and effectively colonise parts of the Middle East, including today's Iraq. The following establishment of Iraq as a new state in the years after World War I, the division of the geographical areas, and the status of the people living in these areas are important in order to understand the situation today, including the current situation for the Kurds living within this newly created state.

Of importance are also the last decades when Iraq was ruled by Saddam Hussein, both from the Iraqi Kurds' point of view and with respect to the overall development of Iraq within the larger Middle East context. Also in this period, events that took place in neighbouring countries like Iran and Turkey influenced not only the situation of their own Kurdish population, but also the Kurds in Iraq, and I intend to describe these events briefly in connection with the developments in Iraq. This period was marked by major events in the Middle East such as the Iraq –Iran war as well as the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the following Gulf War. Iraq's Kurds suffered hard crackdowns by Saddam's regime during this period, with a general deterioration of their situation. However, in the period shortly after the Gulf War we find the first developments that would lead to a de facto autonomous status for the northern parts of Iraqi Kurdistan, namely the decision by outside powers to put pressure on Saddam Hussein not to use his army in these areas by enforcing a no-fly zone in northern Iraq. This condition imposed by outside powers greatly hampered Saddam's ability to control militarily and politically the northern parts of the Kurdish areas, effectively leading to a semi-autonomous status for this area that lasted more than ten years. Finally, the US led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent toppling of Saddam Hussein made it possible for the Kurds to consolidate and strengthen their military and political control of Iraqi Kurdistan, and also expand the area under their control, advancing southward towards disputed areas with a mixed population.

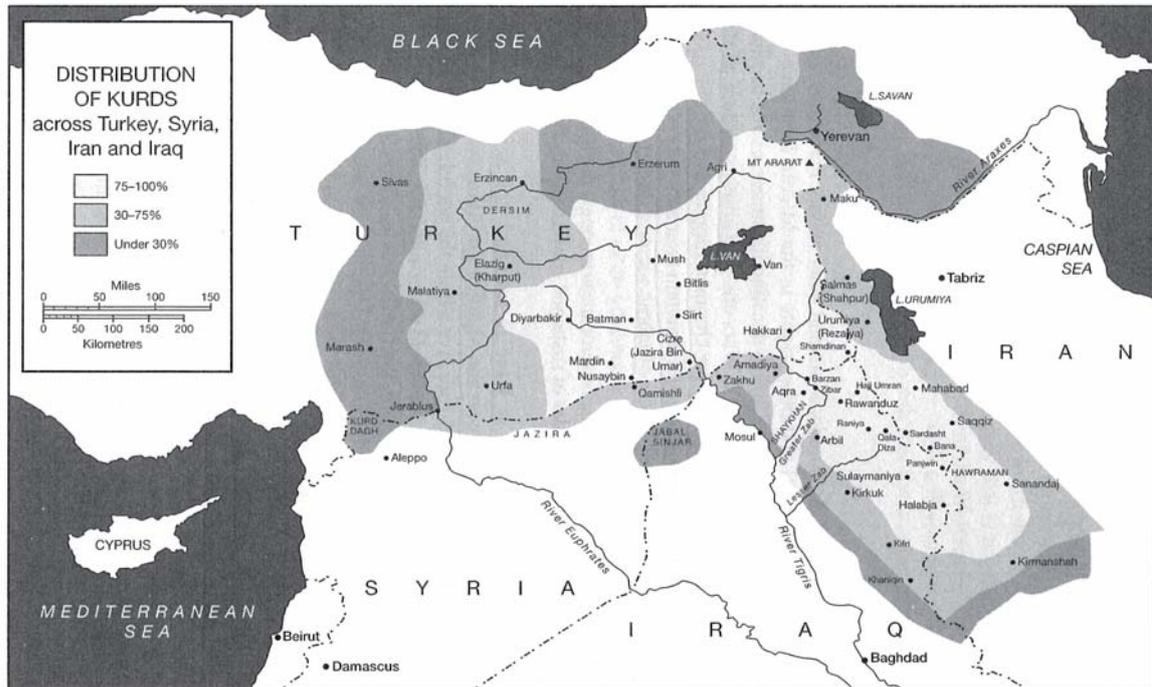
These recent events are therefore, for obvious reasons, of great importance to the situation in this area today. However, as we here take the step from history into the contemporary world, the situation becomes more diffuse and complicated as we here have to deal with persons, organisations, events and forces that have not yet stood the test of time and been evaluated by historians for their importance. Nevertheless, I intend to describe the factors I believe are the most important ones influencing the situation in Iraqi Kurdistan today. These are political, economic and military- and security-related in their origin, both within Iraqi Kurdistan itself, and within the nation we currently know as Iraq. I will here describe the relatively peaceful coexistence within the Kurdish areas today as opposed to the armed internal fighting between Kurdish political and military factions previously. I will also briefly try to describe the tumultuous and violent situation in the other parts of Iraq after the invasion in 2003 with its internal sectarian fighting and foreign influence, as

this difficult situation has an impact on the Kurdish parts of Iraq through the national politics carried out in Baghdad. This difficult situation also has bearings on the internal political situation in the Kurdish parts as it affects the Kurds' willingness to involve themselves and be a part of the non-Kurdish political environment in Baghdad that to such a degree is concerned with and hampered by disagreements between Arab politicians and a struggle between the Arab Sunnis and Shiites that has little or nothing to do with the Iraqi Kurds. Also, the chaos and lack of unity among the Arab politicians in Baghdad make the Kurdish politicians relatively stronger, giving them more power than they otherwise would have had.

I will also look at the situation for the Kurdish parts of Iraq and Iraq itself in a bigger international picture. I intend to do this by describing the external factors influencing the situation in Iraqi Kurdistan today that come from a larger Kurdistan that also includes the Kurdish areas in Iran, Turkey and Syria, from a larger Near East and Middle East context including countries like Iran and Turkey, and from the global context including countries like the United States and Russia, and international organisations like the European Union. The influence from and positions by some of these major players towards the status of Iraqi Kurdistan in the future will be crucial and to a large extent determine the development of this province as it by no means can determine its own future without taking into considerations these major external powers. Finally, I will in the conclusion of this thesis try to look into the future to see what it might bring for the people living in Iraqi Kurdistan in terms of rights to self determination, autonomy within some sort of a federal Iraqi state, or outright independence. This will depend on various factors such as local public opinion in the Kurdish population and the positions of their politicians, but above all on the position of the major international players. The position of these players will again depend on the development of security and politics within Iraq, the economic politics in terms of distribution of income from oil production, and the general development in the Near East and Middle East. These factors, whose development are all subject to uncertainties, make the future for Iraqi Kurdistan hard to predict. Nevertheless, I will try to describe the most likely developments and the subsequent positions and actions that will need to be undertaken by the Iraqi Kurds and their politicians in order to make the living conditions for the people in Iraqi Kurdistan as good as possible.

I have in this introduction already used the terms "Iraqi Kurdistan" and "Kurdistan". These notions are indeed controversial. They are disputed by some people for geographical and/or political reasons, and some people will even claim that there is no such thing as a Kurdistan, be it in Iraq or any of its neighbouring countries. However, others refer extensively to an area called Kurdistan in Iraq, Iran and Turkey, and also to a greater Kurdistan encompassing all the areas inhabited by Kurds in these three countries as well as a part of Syria. I will in this thesis not try to justify any of these views, but I will refer to Kurdistan out of convenience as the geographical areas inhabited by a majority of Kurds in the above mentioned countries, thus referring to Iraqi Kurdistan, Turkish Kurdistan, Iranian Kurdistan and Syrian Kurdistan, and simply Kurdistan as all these four areas together. But even from a purely geographical point of view, leaving the politics and polemics aside, it is difficult to define what Kurdistan and Kurdish areas are as many areas have a highly mixed population. This is particularly so in Iraq where the population mix has changed substantially over time not only due to natural reasons but also as a consequence of heavy-handed politics known as Arabisation by Saddam's regime, and a reversal of this after the 2003 invasion. I will deal with this subject in more detail in the chapter about the contemporary situation in Iraq, trying to define which areas are to be considered a part of Iraqi Kurdistan today. However, as a starting point the map below shows the geographical distribution of Kurds across Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq.¹ This map is also reprinted in Appendix A in a larger scale for better viewing.

¹ Milton-Edwards, B. and Hinchcliffe, P. "Conflicts in the Middle East", Routledge, New York 2001, p 68



The exact number of Kurds living in different countries is difficult to assess given the tendency of Kurdish nationalists to inflate the figures and for host governments to minimise the statistics or disallow the use of the label “Kurd” at all. Despite these difficulties, the table below should give a useful indication of the number of Kurds living in Kurdistan and in the wider Asia/Caucasus area.²

Kurdistan	
Turkey	12 – 15 million
Iran	4.8 – 6.6 million
Iraq	4 – 6 million
Syria	0.9 – 2.8 million
Asia/Caucasus	
Afghanistan	200,000
Azerbaijan	150,000
Israel	100,000
Lebanon	80,000
Georgia	34,000 – 60,000
Armenia	42,000
Turkmenistan	40,000

In addition, there is a wider Kurdish Diaspora estimated to range between 700,000 and 1.3 million, of which the majority are living in countries like Germany, France, Sweden, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Britain and the United States.

The fact that the Zagros Mountains is a remote area with little infrastructure and limited means of communications in earlier times, and the fact that the Kurds spread out over a vast area on the Anatolian

² “Kurdish people,” Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org>