

Northern Iraq and its Neighbors: The regional dimension of the Kurdish question

*Ole Frahm**

Northern Iraq has seen ethnic mobilization and violent political conflict since the creation of the current state system in the interwar period. Throughout this period, Iraq's Kurds have rejected attempts of various governments to assimilate and absorb them into their pan-Arab ideologies. The underlying fear on behalf of Turkey's government is that an independent Kurdistan would have an osmotic effect and automatically strengthen irredentist and pan-Kurdish segments and sentiments among Turkish Kurds and in a worst case scenario lead to a renewed intra-state conflict between separatists and the state on the scale of the early 1990s.

In 2002, President Bush launched the Wider Middle East Initiative, a grand foreign policy scheme that envisioned a democratizing Middle East that would no longer be hostile to either Israel or the United States and that was to prove the feasibility of Islam and democracy. The first domino that was to trigger the new wave of democratization was the fall of Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Yet, four years after the Baathist dictator was ousted, authoritarian leaders remain firmly in place across the region while sectarian violence threatens the livelihoods of most Iraqis. Unsurprisingly, recent discussions in Europe and the U.S. have focused on combating the insurgency and the role played by Iran and Syria. What has gotten lost in this debate, is the fact that developments in and around the only fairly stable part of Iraq today – the three Kurdish provinces in the North – make Northern Iraq a powder keg in its own right that arguably has the same potential to lead to a regional conflict as sectarian fighting and terrorism in Iraq's South and Centre.

The aim of this article is therefore to assess each neighbor's particular interests, positions and guiding motives vis-à-vis Iraqi Kurdistan and to derive cautious predictions for the

(*) Ole Frahm is a researcher with a Masters degree from the Humboldt University in Berlin.

region's future. In order to come to a better understanding beyond the realm of established clichés, all aspects that influence a state's foreign policy-formulation will be considered. Thus, starting from an overview of the current state of Northern Iraq, we will move on to the situation and politicization of ethnic Kurds in Turkey, Syria and Iran before considering each country's policies toward its Kurdish minority. Secondly, each state's policies and positions towards N-Iraq will be analyzed based on the past record of bilateral relations as well as on current events and (perceived) national interests. Following from there, we shall look at the three neighboring states' cooperation

Large numbers of Kurds from the North but also Turcomans and some Arabs were forcibly resettled by Saddam as they were deemed disloyal and hostile elements

with respect to Northern Iraq. And finally, we will highlight a number of crucial upcoming events and issues that are likely to have a major impact on the area's future and assess how different courses of action might lead to greater stability or an escalation of violent conflict.

In this article I will use *Northern Iraq*, *Kurdistan Iraq*, *KRG*, *Iraqi Kurdistan* interchangeably, all of them referring to the Kurdish-controlled areas in the North of Iraq. By using the term *Kurdistan*, in particular, I do not sustain any claim to statehood for Iraq's Kurds or those in the neighboring states. In fact, this being an analytical article and not a campaign speech or a white paper, I will try to write from a neutral perspective as best I can.

I. The Situation in Northern Iraq

a) Historical overview

Northern Iraq has seen ethnic mobilization and violent political conflict since the creation of the current state system in the interwar period. Throughout this period, Iraq's Kurds have rejected attempts of various governments to assimilate and absorb them into their pan-Arab ideologies.¹ The late Mustafa Mullah Barzani – a popular hero for many Kurds – led Iraq's Kurds in an uprising against Baghdad that ended in decisive defeat when the Shah withdrew his support in 1975. This event among other things led a break-away faction from the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) under Jalal Talabani to found the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in Damascus in the same year. While these factions struggled against the Baathist regime during the Iran-Iraq War – at times siding with the Iranians – large numbers of Kurds from the North but also Turcomans and some Arabs were forcibly resettled by Saddam as they were deemed disloyal and hostile elements. Their place was taken by Arab settlers coming mostly from the poorer South, which led to the current multiethnic population mix especially in the cities.

Iraqi Kurds were also the victims of Saddam's infamous Anfal campaign in 1987-88 using chemical weapons against Kurdish villagers, killing tens of thousands and mutilating many more.² Following the Gulf War in 1991 and the establishment of a Northern no-fly zone under British-American supervision that guaranteed Kurdish quasi-autonomous self-rule, both parties struggled for control over the area resulting in armed conflict between 1994 and 1998 when an American-brokered peace deal assisted by Turkey and Britain led to an informal division in two separate areas governed from Erbil (KDP) and Sulaymaniyah (PUK) respectively that exists until the present day.³

b) Northern Iraq today

Following the U.S. invasion that both parties actively assisted with their *peshmerga* militias, the PUK and the KDP formed a united electoral front in Baghdad – the Kurdistan Alliance that won 53 of the 275 seats in December 2005 – while very slowly trying to merge their separate areas of control into a single administrative entity run from Erbil. In the process of writing the Iraqi constitution approved by referendum in October 2005, the Kurdish participants wielded strong influence and (in the absence of Sunni representation) were able to receive the official blessing for a Kurdish region in a federal (rather than

unitary) Iraqi state where regions are responsible for their own internal security and regional law overrides federal legislation.⁴ In addition, Kurdish politicians are very well represented at the national level with the posts of President (Talabani), Foreign Minister (Zebari) and deputy Prime Minister (Salih) held by Kurds.

While the two dominant parties exert near-total control over their territories and hamper and occasionally attack opposition movements, there are reports of growing popular dissent and frustration with the leadership. For one, the massive influx of funds into Northern Iraq in recent years – e.g. U.S. authorities unconditionally transferred USD1.4 billion to Kurdish leaders in June 2004

– has only reached a very limited segment of the population and has allegedly been distributed chiefly among members of clientelist and tribal networks.⁵ And the young generation of urbanized Kurds, many having lived in Western European countries, does no longer unconditionally follow the tribal elders still in charge.⁶ One interesting development has been the emergence of an Islamic challenger to the secular parties, the Kurdistan Islamic Union under Saladdin Muhammed Bahaddin that won five seats in the December 2005 elections and is said to have close ties with the Muslim Brotherhood and a particularly strong following in the East of the country around Halabja.⁷

Aside from this slight intra-Kurdish discord, popular support for independence is very strong across the board. In an unofficial referendum accompanying the January 2005

There are reports of forced displacement of Arabs and members of other ethnicities like Turcomans and Chaldeans from Kurdish-controlled areas in the North

elections that was deemed largely fair by international observers, 95% of voters opted for an independent Kurdish state. In a highly symbolic move, Massoud Barzani ordered all Iraqi flags in the KRG to be replaced by Kurdish ones in September 2006 and he recently uttered that “for now, remaining within the borders of a federal, democratic Iraq fructifies the Kurdish interest. Presumably the dream and desire of an independent Kurdistan for the next generation or even in our time will be realized.”⁸ Especially the generation growing up in the post-1991 period only has tenuous links to the Iraqi nation as a whole and the majority of them do not speak Arabic. Hence, it is highly questionable whether the official proclamation of redeveloping and strengthening a sense of Iraqi-Kurdish identity as opposed to separatist Kurdish nationalism will bear any fruits.

While by no means a safe haven as sometimes misleadingly called, Northern Iraq has so far been largely exempt from the terror of the Iraqi insurgency, with only one major insurgent group – Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna – assumed to operate in the area.⁹ Though not on the scale of ethnic cleansing in other parts of the country, there are reports of forced displacement of Arabs and members of other ethnicities like Turcomans and Chaldeans from Kurdish-controlled areas in the North.¹⁰

II. Ethnic Kurds in the Middle East

The Kurds are an ethnic group who have lived in the Middle East for several millennia but whose exact origins are unknown. While the Kurdish language is akin to Persian, some Kurdish dialects differ strongly from each other and are mutually unintelligible. Some commentators casually refer to the Kurds of the Middle East as the world’s largest nation without a state counting between 20 and 25 million people, with Michael Gunter likening the situation of today’s Kurds to the fate of the Polish people between 1795 and 1919.¹¹ However, without further argument as to why and how the Kurds of Syria, Turkey, Iraq and Iran should be considered a distinct and cohesive nation and – above all – whether ethnic Kurds in all these countries actually see themselves foremost as members of a cross-border pan-Kurdish realm, such a claim rests on frail shoulders. Without catering to nationalists that deny the existence of a separate Kurdish identity, we should be much more careful when asserting common group characteristics or a collective will to a group as diverse as Kurds in the Middle East.

Nonetheless, the main lens through which many Western analysts look at the Kurds and their significance in the great confusing game of Middle Eastern politics, is as a given entity that constitutes a single actor. This conception is indeed of great significance since the governments of Iraq’s neighbors seem to operate from a similar premise. Thus, Robert Olson’s assertion that even without the declaration of independence by the Kurdish regional government, developments there are having repercussions on the strengthening of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey, Syria and Iran is crucial not so much because of its indubitable veracity but because it represents the key fear of Northern Iraq’s neighbors.¹² And it also

goes to explain the carefulness with which Iraqi Kurdish politicians stress their non-interference in their neighboring states' affairs and their disavowal of connections to other Kurdish movements.

III. Turkey

a) Kurds in Turkey

Since asking about one's ethnicity has not been part of the national census since the 1960s, it is very difficult if not impossible to come up with reliable figures of the number of Kurds in Turkey. The most scientific estimate can be gathered from Servet Mutlu's work that based on the 1965 census – the last where mother tongue formed part of the questionnaire – and computation of average birth rates came to a figure of about 7 million Kurds in 1990¹³. Other studies focusing on mother tongue and/or self-identification arrive at estimates of 8% to 20% of the present population of about 70 million. Of much greater importance to this analysis, however, are the degree of self-identification as *exclusively* Kurdish (as opposed to Kurdish-Turkish) and the share of Turkish Kurds that advocate separatism and pan-Kurdish designs.

Prior to the 1980s, most Kurds had lived in rural communities in the Southeast of Turkey. As a consequence of the violence from 1984 to 1999 unleashed by the Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (PKK) an estimated 37,000 people were killed with the overall dire economic situation in the Southeast, tens of thousands of Kurds migrated to the main regional cities or to the metropolises of Western Anatolia.¹⁴ Thus, today the majority of Kurds are urban and live in western Turkey. Since Kurds have chosen to either assimilate or alienate themselves from mainstream Turkish society to varying degrees across the country and across time, they are far from forming the homogeneous group that they are sometimes referred to.¹⁵ In terms of political alignment, Kurds in the West tend to vote according to class interests rather than ethnicity whereas Kurds in the Southeast roughly divide among three groups: (1) followers of the Democratic Society Party (DTP), which has close links to the PKK, and strives for Kurdish autonomy; (2) religious voters whose identity is primarily Islamic rather than Kurdish and who tend to vote AKP; (3) supporters of the Turkish state and Kemalism. It is important to keep in mind this heterogeneity when dissecting the state's policies towards its Kurdish population.

Among armed factions fighting the Turkish state, there are currently three organizations, of which the PKK – in spite of its decline in firepower and popularity – remains the most important. After unsuccessfully trying to re-brand itself as a non-violent political actor through successive name-changes, the PKK – ranked as a terrorist organization by both the EU and the U.S. – has resumed violence in 2004 and is operating from its remote camps on Mount Qandil. They appear to have reached an understanding of mutual non-interference with the Northern Iraqi parties and continue to conduct operations inside Turkey. On a parallel track,

the leadership under Murat Karayılan and imprisoned Abdullah Öcalan is vying for a general amnesty for PKK fighters that would enable them to reintegrate into Turkish society. Öcalan went so far as to advocate a truth and reconciliation commission modeled on South Africa¹⁶.

The second grouping is the Turkish Hizbullah (TH), a religious fundamentalist organization that went from fighting the secular PKK to targeting the Turkish state sometime in the mid-1990s. While it was infiltrated and a huge number of its members were killed and arrested by 2001, it is unclear whether TH is actually defeated or merely in dormancy¹⁷. The third group are the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK) about whom little is known other than that they have launched deadly attacks against foreign tourists and Turkish civilians since 2005, issue very radical statements and appear to lack any popular basis¹⁸.

b) State policies towards Kurds in Turkey

Since this article focuses on regional cooperation and relations toward Iraq, I will be brief in this section. After Abdullah Öcalan's capture and the lifting of the state of emergency in the Southeast, there was a brief phase from ca. 1999-2004 during which the political establishment and the media began to look for new avenues to solve the Kurdish problem by de-securitizing its approach and addressing the Kurds' grievances: equal citizenship, freedom of cultural and linguistic expression, economic development, among others.¹⁹ Not least of all, in the process of opening accession talks with Turkey, EU-motivated reforms were implemented in the area of human rights. The resumption of terrorist attacks by the PKK in 2004 – in the first ten months of 2006, the Turkish state recorded 250 attacks – and the shift to an increasingly nationalist mood and discourse inside the country, exacerbated by the dual election year 2007, brought this trend to a (temporary) halt.²⁰ Yet, there appears to be a growing realization in the political class that a political settlement is the only viable solution. For the time being, however, the legitimate fear of footing the bill of a softer stance towards Turkey's Kurds at the ballot box, effectively prevents any immediate measures.

c) Turkey's policies toward Northern Iraq

Turkey's stance on Northern Iraq – the subject of very extensive media coverage in both Turkey and Kurdish media outlets – by all accounts boils down to two closely connected objectives: (1) preventing an independent Kurdish entity (with Kirkuk) and protecting the rights of Turcomans; (2) ensuring its political and economic influence in Northern Iraq and preventing other external powers (esp. Iran) to predominate; and (3) eliminating the PKK in Northern Iraq. While the elimination of the PKK's camps on Mount Qandil and the desire for influence in Iraq are self-explanatory aims, Ankara's allergic reaction to the mere mentioning of a Kurdish state needs some more argument.

The underlying fear on behalf of Turkey's government is that an independent Kurdistan would have an osmotic effect and automatically strengthen irredentist and pan-Kurdish segments and sentiments among Turkish Kurds and in a worst case scenario lead to a

renewed intra-state conflict between separatists and the state on the scale of the early 1990s. Massoud Barzani, for instance, has in fact very good relations with related tribes in the border region. Occasional public sound-bites by Kurdish politicians also fuel suspicion such as well-known DTP-member Leyla Zana's statements in Diyarbakır that the Kurds' three leaders were Jalal Talabani, Massoud Barzani and Abdullah Öcalan.²¹

There are, however, a couple of critical points that make such developments very unlikely. For one, conditions on the ground are no longer favorable to an insurgency with the desertion of rural areas depriving insurgent groups from both a support base and a battleground suitable for guerrilla warfare.²² More importantly, it is highly questionable whether even during the height of the PKK's success and popularity, a majority of Kurds in the Southeast favored secession from the Turkish state.²³ While many Turkish Kurds may be proud of the KRG's achievements, outside of the ultra-nationalist camp the demands of citizens in the Southeast are overwhelming limited to better state-citizen relations, full rights of cultural expression and economic development.

Official relations with the Kurdish leadership in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah have turned problematic since the Iraq War of 2003. During the 1990s, Turkey had had close links with Barzani's KDP that it sought to employ as a proxy against the PKK in Iraq, and tens of thousands of *peshmerga* militia fighters were at one point on the payroll of the Turkish army²⁴. Following the Turkish parliament's refusal to grant permission to American troops to launch an offensive against Iraq from Turkish soil on March 1st 2003, Turkey offered later in the year to send occupation forces to Iraq. Strong lobbying by Kurdish leaders against any Turkish presence finally resulted in the offer's withdrawal and Turkey's exclusion from direct (military) meddling in Northern Iraqi affairs.

At the same time, both the Iraqi President Talabani and the head of the Kurdish regional government Barzani have time and again reiterated their intention of one day seeing an independent Kurdish state – even if it might not be feasible right now. In combination with statements about Kirkuk as an integral part of the Kurdish region made by Barzani in an interview with the Turkish channel NTV²⁵, and his threat to intervene in Diyarbakır should Turkey intervene in Kirkuk²⁶, large parts of the Turkish establishment have come to view the Kurdish leaders as openly provocative and anti-Turkish. Even if we consider that statements deemed inflammatory by Turkey may be primarily directed at a domestic Northern-Iraqi audience²⁷, mistrust is running high. In February-March 2007, a public debate erupted between the head of the Turkish armed forces General Büyükanıt and PM Erdoğan whether one should talk with KRG officials at all, with the army arguing for silence²⁸.

Turkish officials, in turn, have added their share of oil to the fire by continuously bringing up the possibility of a Turkish military intervention in Northern Iraq – even without consent from the U.S. – should developments be opposed to Turkish national interests.²⁹ The high-point so far came on April 12, 2007, when Turkey's Chief of General Staff Gen. Yaşar Büyükanıt said that in order to defeat the PKK “an operation into Iraq is necessary and will be useful.”³⁰ Additionally, Turkey's foreign policy toward Iraq from 1991 onwards used to be focused on the ‘Turcoman axis’, i.e. creating and supporting the Iraqi Turcoman Front

(ITF) that heightened ethnic tensions by accusing Kurds of human rights violations against the civilian population.³¹ Thus, both parties have entered into a game of mutual suspicion where relations are increasingly seen through a zero-sum lens. It should come as no surprise that the KRG's relative inaction toward the PKK (other than closing an office in Erbil) and reports of arms trafficking and furnishing PKK-fighters with passports, are seen as an indication that Iraqi Kurds want to use the PKK as a token in negotiations with Turkey.³² Conversely, Iraqi Kurds advocate a political rather than a military settlement with Jalal Talabani stating that it was only possible "to bring the PKK down from the mountains if there is a general amnesty in Turkey."³³

Conditions on the ground are no longer favorable to an insurgency

Lately, and in spite of the run-up to the presidential and parliamentary elections in April and November respectively, there has been an increasing amount of voices calling for a different angle on Northern Iraq. According to their vision, in an ideal scenario a Kurdish state with strong political and economic ties to Turkey would give Ankara much more leverage in Iraq than it enjoys today, contribute to a settlement of Turkey's domestic Kurdish question, purge the PKK and boost regional economic performance.³⁴ Perhaps in a preview of such a political rapprochement, economic relations with Northern Iraq have already developed quite spectacularly and Turkish investments are booming. There is a hope in Turkish foreign policy circles that strong economic ties could function as a restraint on further Kurdish independence in Iraq.³⁵

One hint of a tacit begrudging acceptance of realities on the ground can be seen in the shifting weight attached to "red lines" – Ankara's most popular foreign policy tool in the immediate post-war period. According to Kemal Kirişçi the three pillars of Turkish policy: (no Kurdish entity in N-Iraq, no annexation of Kirkuk, protection of the 'ethnic brethren' Turcoman minority) have crumbled, and the zero-sum mentality in government circles is slowly giving way to a more pragmatic and constructive school of thought.³⁶ While Kirişçi believes that an incursion into Northern Iraq without consent from the U.S. is out of the question and does not see Kirkuk's fall as a *casus belli*, many others like Murat Somer disagree.³⁷

Seeing as the military and most political parties including the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) are as of yet undecided about the course to pursue and where to actually draw "red lines", upcoming events both in Turkey (elections) and Iraq (Kirkuk referendum) will likely determine the future of bilateral relations.

IV. Iran

a) Kurds in Iran

The short-lived Republic of Mahabad, the only independent Kurdish state in history, existed on present-day Iranian territory before surrendering to Persian troops in 1946. It is

assumed, with the usual caveat, that there are about 5-6 million Iranian Kurds, the majority of whom live in the West of the country bordering Iraq and Turkey with another significant population in the capital Tehran.

The leading Kurdish political force throughout most of Iran's post-war history has been the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI), an heir to the party that ruled the Republic of Mahabad. Successively infiltrated and purged by agents under both the Shah

Turkey's foreign policy
toward Iraq from 1991
onwards used to be
focused on the
'Turcoman axis'

and the Ayatollah regime, the PDKI proclaims to pursue a moderate agenda with limited autonomy for Iranian Kurds – explicitly mentioning the KRG's constitutional status as a model for Iran.³⁸ Having momentarily sided with Saddam during the Iran-Iraq War, the party appears to have lost most of its following and given way to more radical movements like the Marxist Komalah and, in particular, The Party for Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK), which is allied with and has its headquarters in immediate vicinity

to the PKK. In addition, it is allegedly supported by Israel and the U.S. as a proxy against the Islamic Republic.³⁹ The overriding theme of these movements, whose popular support is very difficult to gauge, is that they do not call for separation or pan-Kurdish unification but aim at cultural autonomy and a regime change in Tehran.

b) State policies towards Kurds in Iran

The official conception of Iran's Kurdish minority (and all other minorities, for that matter) is that the two dominant characteristics shaping each individual's identity are membership of the ancient Iranian nation and culture and Islam. Only the third pillar is ethnicity which is officially recognized and granted some privileges like a TV channel in Kurdish. Crucially, Iranian Kurds are declared separate from their ethnic brethren in neighboring countries and unrest in the region of West Azerbaijan is officially blamed on foreign instigation as well as on the area's poor economic record rather than indigenous ethnic strife. Soon after seizing power, Ayatollah Khomeini's troops crushed a Kurdish uprising in 1980 that tried to benefit from the overall chaos in the country and subsequently killed their most prominent leaders in Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou in 1989 and Sadeq Sharafandi in 1992.⁴⁰

In February 2006, the killing of ten Kurdish demonstrators in the city of Maku helped to trigger a spiral of violence in the Kurdish provinces of Iran with mounting Kurdish protests against the government resulting in further state repression and Kurdish reprisals. In response, Iran has started to adopt Turkey's longstanding policy of employing local people as 'village guards' in order to divert PJAK's focus and create dissent among ethnic Kurds.⁴¹ However, the scale of unrest is not to be likened to the PKK's fight against the Turkish state in the early 1990s and it does not currently pose a serious threat to the regime in Tehran.

c) Iran's policies towards Northern Iraq

Iran's foremost policy toward Iraq is to preserve its territorial integrity and prevent the disintegration into separate ethnically delineated parts. Except for the unwillingness to tolerate an independent Kurdish entity bordering its own Kurdish region, another motive behind Iran's insistence can be derived from the fact that given the ethnicization and sectarianism of politics and the 60% population share of Shiite in Iraq, future Iraqi governments are likely to be led by Shiite parties, who in turn are reportedly in close contact with Iran. Having proxy control over Northern Iraq as well would clearly be advantageous for Tehran.

Since the events at Maku in February 2007 when a clash with revolutionary guards left at least 10 Kurds dead, Iran has had to face increasing violence in its majority-Kurdish provinces near the border with Iraq. PJAK, from its camps on Mount Qandil in immediate vicinity of the PKK, has repeatedly made incursions into Iran, reportedly shooting down a helicopter and killing Iranian security forces in several instances. Iran has retaliated by shelling Kurdish villages in Northern Iraq in May 2006 and claims to have arrested and killed more than 100 rebels. During a recent army offensive, Brigadier-General Yahya Rahim Safavi, the head of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, was quoted as saying that "The bandits and counter-revolutionaries should know that Iranian troops will deal with them strongly and will not stop the operation to uproot them."⁴² Additionally, Komalah claims to maintain the organization's two main camps in the Sulaymaniyah province of Iraqi Kurdistan, including its military training center.⁴³ In spite of little official talk about the issue, Tehran is worried that Iranian Kurds from bases in Iraq might exploit the flailing internal security situation to advance their sectarian interests.⁴⁴ Thus, it is evident that Tehran does not want an independent Kurdistan for fear of cross-over implications for Iran's own disaffected Kurdish minority.⁴⁵

By many accounts, Iran has replaced the U.S. as the most influential external actor in Iraq, largely due to its good connections to virtually all Shiite movements and cultural affinity to Shiite Iraqis that allows it to have an impact on the street that the U.S. is unable to compete with.⁴⁶ But Iran's involvement is not confined to the South and the Centre, with a significant Iranian (intelligence) presence reported in Sulaymaniyah and Erbil – site of the infamous arrest of five Iranian consulate personnel by the U.S. army in January 2007.⁴⁷ The Kurdish leadership – which quickly and decisively condemned the Erbil-incident – is itself worried about Iran's growing presence as Iranian designs for Iraqi Kurdistan are not transparent and they suspect a hidden agenda.⁴⁸ Rumors have it, for example, that the Mahdi Army's increasing operations in the at-Tamim province around Kirkuk can be traced back to Tehran.⁴⁹ The Kurdish regional government, in turn, has not delivered on President Talabani's promise to expel Iranian terrorist organizations from its territory.⁵⁰ On the other hand, Massoud Barzani has had good connections with Iran dating to the 1970s and, in spite of initial support for the Kurdish uprising in Iran, Talabani later came to terms with the Mullahs and in the 1990s even received funding during the internecine struggle against the KDP.⁵¹

Iran's foremost policy toward Iraq is to preserve its territorial integrity

With Iran involved in a number of additional international crises (nuclear armament, holocaust conference, support for Hizbullah and Syria, Afghanistan), presided by an aggressively ambitious president and with a strong hand in Iraq's internal affairs, Iran's role vis-à-vis Northern Iraq remains of the highest importance while also clouded in uncertainty about motives and actions – not unlike Tehran's stance on a number of other issues.

V. Syria

a) Kurds in Syria

Syria's Kurdish minority has for a long time been neglected while the international focus was on their brethren in Iraq, Iran and Turkey. Kurds in the 'Syrian Arab Republic', their number estimated at around 1.75 million, roughly 10% of the population, have suffered from discrimination at the hands of the Arab government since the founding of the state but in particular since the 1950s/60s. Until recently government officials would deny the very presence of Kurds inside Syria and PKK-leader Öcalan, allied to the Syrian regime, was quoted as denying the Syrian Kurds' Kurdishness. Hence, success for Syrian Kurds has been conditional upon total linguistic and cultural assimilation with mainstream Arab culture while the use or teaching of the Kurmanji language or celebration of Kurdish holidays have been prohibited. Of particular concern has been the fate of the estimated 300,000 *ajanib* ('foreigners') and *maktoumeen* (unregistered persons), who live at the brink of Syrian society without access to education, health care and many other services since being rendered stateless by a census in 1962.

Analogous to the other opposition movements since the crushing of the Muslim brotherhood uprising in 1982, Kurdish parties and movements have been very weak and prey to infiltration by the intelligence forces and are split in at least a dozen formations. They refrain from calls for separation and generally focus on questions of cultural and linguistic recognition – which carry the lowest risk of a government crackdown – voice human rights and civil liberties concerns, while the most daring lobby for Kurdish regional autonomy akin to the current status of the KRG in Northern Iraq.⁵² In the aftermath of the Hariri killing and the reawakening of the Syrian opposition movements, Kurdish parties actively participated and were among the signatories of the Damascus Declaration from October 2005 that – among other things – called for equal citizenship and a democratic solution to the Kurdish problem.⁵³

b) State policies toward Kurds in Syria

In the past, Syria has dealt with Kurdish uprisings in its oil and gas-rich regions of the North with an iron fist. In March 2004, following the shooting of three Kurdish boys in the wake of a football match, violent attacks on government offices occurred in the northern

region of Hasaka, in particular in Qamishli, but also in the Kurdish quarters of Damascus. Slightly more than a year later, in May-June 2005, another round of violent protests erupted after the tortured body of a leading Kurdish cleric, Sheikh Ma'shuq Khaznawi, was discovered in the streets of Damascus amid accusations of complicity by the Syrian intelligence service.

While the state apparatus in both cases responded with draconic measures, killing an estimated 40 Kurds in 2004 and incarcerating a much larger number, Damascus for the first time in a long while also sent out signals of acknowledging Kurdish grievances and promised to improve the lot of the "sans-papiers". The main reason for this softer stance may have been Syria's strongly weakened regional and international security environment concomitant with the American occupation of Iraq and U.S. accusations of smuggling weapons and terrorists and giving logistical support to Iraqi insurgents.⁵⁴

The geopolitical situation having shifted again with the United States embroiled in what appears to be an insoluble struggle to both appease and democratize Iraq while slowly extracting its troops out of it, Syria does no longer feel under as much international pressure and the threat of externally imposed regime change. Policies towards its Kurdish minority have changed accordingly, with the promise to legalize the *ajanib* and *maktoumeen* as well as the opening of the political process to Kurds quickly shelved and forgotten. According to Kawa Rashid, member of the Kurdish Yekiti party, the upcoming parliamentary elections on April 22nd, in addition to their overall deficiencies in adhering to democratic standards, severely discriminate against Kurds, e.g. by allocating fewer seats to Kurdish constituencies compared to Arab ones and continuing to withhold Syrian citizenship and the right to vote from hundreds of thousands of Syrian Kurds.⁵⁵

The Kurdish region adjacent to Syria's own Kurdish region is seen by Damascus as a latent threat

c) Syria's policies towards Northern Iraq

Of the three neighboring countries, the emergence of the autonomous Kurdish region in Northern Iraq has probably had the biggest impact on Syria. Although Syria has been allied to Iran and had ceased diplomatic relations with Iraq since the start of the Iran-Iraq War in 1980, the last years of Saddam's rule saw vastly improved relations with Baghdad. Diplomatic relations were finally reestablished in November 2006 and Iraqi president Talabani made his first visit in January 2007 to discuss improved border security and allegations of Syrian support for insurgent groups.⁵⁶ In spite of these friendly gestures, the presence of the Kurdish region adjacent to Syria's own Kurdish region is seen by Damascus as a latent threat of osmotic pan-Kurdish nationalism. While there is no evidence of direct physical participation or instigation of the riots in 2004 and 2005, it is safe to assume that the Northern Iraqi Kurds' success has fuelled Syrian Kurdish self-confidence to stand up against discriminatory measures after long decades of subdued suffering. Thus, the KRG's existence may serve as inspiration and a model for their own political objectives.⁵⁷

The KRG is doubly worrying to the Baathist regime as it has in recent years been deprived of its main outlet of Kurdish frustration: support for the PKK. While clamping down on any homegrown Kurdish opposition movement, Syria under Assad the elder encouraged Syrian Kurds to join the ranks of the PKK and fight against and constrain its regional rival Turkey. The PKK in turn refrained from acting against Damascus' interests and denied the Syrian Kurds' Kurdishness. This hypocritical stance appears to backfire with an ongoing struggle taking place between traditional pro-Syrian PKK fighters and younger more radical Syrian members that want to fight the Assad-government. With Mount Qandil becoming more and more of a revolving door that radicalizes recruits that soon after leave due to disillusionment with the PKK's lethargy⁵⁸, the Kurdish provinces of Northern Iraq truly present a multi-faceted danger to Assad the younger.

VI. Cooperation among Iraq's neighbors

a) Turkey-Iran

As change is a constant in the Middle East, the evolution of Turkish-Iranian relations – direct competitors over influence in areas ranging from Central Asia to the Middle East – should not be considered too much of a surprise. After all, both countries have – in spite of their marked differences in other regional, political, philosophical, religious matters – always shared an anxiety and awareness that Iraq's break-up would inadvertently have a negative fall-out for both Turkey and Iran.⁵⁹

In the 1990s both countries accused each other of harboring rebel groups – PKK & Turkish Hizbullah by Iran and Mujaheddin-e Khalq (MKO), National Liberation Movement of South Azerbaijan (NLMSA) & United Azerbaijan Movement (UAM) by Turkey – and their support for proxy groups inside Northern Iraq indirectly pitched Turkey (KDP) and Iran (PUK) against one another in the inner-Kurdish civil war.⁶⁰ From thinly concealed assistance to the PKK during the 1980s and 1990s (Abdullah Öcalan's brother Osman even briefly had an office in Tehran) and allowing terrorist raids into Turkey from inside Iran, Tehran's policy toward Turkey shifted roundabout the time of Öcalan's capture in 1999. In 2006, both Iran and Turkey launched raids against PKK and PJAK camps around Mount Qandil.⁶¹

On the other side, the Turkish ambassador in Tehran announced in November 2006 that the two countries' security forces were to collaborate against Kurdish terrorist groups (meaning the PKK and PJAK) and to carry out joint military operations.⁶² Additionally, Iran has periodically arrested PKK members on Iranian soil and extradited a number of them to Turkey. Iran's national security director, General Ismail Ahmedi Mogaddam, also publicly vowed to ensure better border security.⁶³ While such information ought to be evaluated with a degree of caution, the PKK's military arm indirectly confirmed Turkish-Iranian cooperation by claiming in its annual statement for 2006 that while the vast majority of skirmishes had occurred with the Turkish army, there had been 12 instances where they

fought against joint Turkish-Iranian contingents in the Kelares region.⁶⁴

Several observers have argued that this rapprochement and limited cooperation has been the result of a very successful diplomatic offensive by the Iranian government to pry away Turkey from its foremost ally. With Turkey feeling the fall-out on relations with the U.S. from the March 1st vote, Iran swiftly stepped in and presented itself as Turkey's true and more natural regional ally. After initial reluctance on the part of the army, both the military and political leadership are today convinced of Iran's reliability as a partner in the Kurdish/PKK issue. Strongly enhanced trade and energy links could also influence both countries' strategy and politics in the near future.⁶⁵ Yet there remains significant mistrust on both sides and it is unclear whether future cooperation will extend to wider regional matters. In any event, much will depend on each country's relations with the U.S.

Iran swiftly stepped in and presented itself as Turkey's true and more natural regional ally

b) Iran-Syria

Even though they diverge in political system, confession and do not share a common border, both Iran and Syria have been close allies for nearly thirty years and their common perception of interests extends also to Iraq and the Kurdish areas in particular. With Syria facing a most disadvantageous geopolitical situation after the Hariri murder, the retreat from Lebanon, a revitalized political opposition and unrest in its Kurdish areas, Bashar Assad relies more than ever on political backing from its long-time ally.

Thus, as long as the U.S. blames Syria for inciting the Sunni insurgency, there are clear advantages for Damascus in increased Iranian influence in Iraq. Iran steadily becoming the most influential party in Iraq, it is likely that criticism of Syria's role will eventually go away, especially as Iran and Syria will work jointly to keep Iraqi Kurdish aspirations limited to a Kurdish region within a federal Iraq. The Syrians, moreover, are extremely interested in the future status of Kirkuk as they eagerly await the reopening of the oil pipeline from Kirkuk to Banyas on the Syrian coast. Therefore, Syria would like to see Shiite-Iran-backed control of the city, but might also settle for Kurdish control as the Kurds have few other export options than through Syria.⁶⁶

c) Turkey-Syria

The most dramatic sea-change in neighborly relations among Iraq's riparian states has been between Syria and Turkey. From the brink of war during the 1998 stand-off over Damascus' hosting of PKK camps and leadership, relations in a variety of fields from economic to cultural to political contacts have strongly improved, including the common stance on the Kurdish region in Iraq. From the immediate aftermath of the Iraq War onwards, leaders in Damascus and Ankara have jointly stressed their anxiety over the possibility of an independent

Kurdish entity in Northern Iraq. On the first ever visit of a Syrian president to Turkey, Bashar al-Assad went so far as to openly condemn the PKK as a terrorist organization.⁶⁷

Having ceased to use the PKK as an outlet for Syria's own disenfranchised Kurds, Damascus is now, after the riots of 2004 and 2005, openly worried about further osmotic effects emanating from across the border in Kurdistan-Iraq. This has led to an elite consensus in Syria to pursue close relations with Turkey in addition to its alliance with Tehran.⁶⁸ For Ankara, cooperation with Syria on the Kurdish issue – in spite of American disapproval – is also attractive for social-economic reasons. The revival of cross-border trade with Syria is set to boost conditions in Turkey's economically depressed Southeast and thus contribute to a civil solution of Turkey's internal Kurdish problem. Improved living conditions are hoped to translate into stronger loyalty towards the Turkish state and a lessening of pan-Kurdish appeals from the KRG.⁶⁹

VII. What is happening next?

There are a number of pressing, upcoming issues that are sure to strongly influence the further sequence of events in and around Northern Iraq. To finish this survey, we will look at each area of concern and give a cautious prediction of likely outcomes.

a) Oil

Iraq has the world's third largest proven oil reserves (after Saudi Arabia and Iran) and approximately 70% of GDP and 98% of the federal budget derive from oil revenues. The void left in the Iraqi Constitution was filled with a comprehensive agreement in February 2007, establishing national control over oil revenues and their equal allocation according to population figures. Crucially, though, physical control and running of oil fields will be under the authority of the regional governments. This is important as the KRG had already signed exploitation agreements with a Norwegian company and, moreover, corruption and illegal black market sales of oil are reportedly more than widespread. Not least because of these contingencies, unrest among Iraqi Sunni Arabs is rife and domestic as well as international players are highly concerned about Kirkuk, home of an estimated 10% of Iraq's total oil wealth, forming part of the Kurdish zone. Northern Iraq's neighbors Turkey and Syria, in particular, eagerly await the extension of production capacities and increased traffic through the pipelines that lead from Kirkuk to the Mediterranean via either Turkey (Ceyhan) or Syria (Banyas)⁷⁰ and might act accordingly.

b) Kirkuk

The referendum on Kirkuk's future status within the Iraqi state – Article 140 of the constitution calls for a three-step process of (1) normalization, (2) census, (3) referendum

to take place prior to the end of 2007 – is the most pressing and most explosive issue with respect to Northern Iraq. Should the referendum actually be held (by April 2007 normalization had not been completed) and Kirkuk become part of the Kurdish region, which is very likely given the post-war ethnic composition of the city's population, tension is sure to rise. The Kurdish factions in Northern Iraq all subscribe to regional Prime Minister Barzani's claim to Kirkuk professedly based on historical reasons rather than the area's oil wealth.⁷¹ On the other side, neither Sunni or Shiite Arabs nor Turcoman, nor any of Iraq's neighbors supports Kirkuk's inclusion into the Kurdish region and the Iraq Study Group report explicitly called for international arbitration and a delay of the referendum. Reports in the Iraqi press that such a deal to postpone the referendum by two years had been reached between the Turkish and Iraqi governments were dismissed soon after.⁷² At the same time, violence is already mounting in the city with a series of bombings in February 2007⁷³ and 74% of Kirkuk's inhabitants rate their security situation negatively – in sharp contrast to just 5% in Iraqi Kurdistan.⁷⁴

Yet, the al-Maliki government seems to endorse the policy of correcting the Arabization policies of the Baathist regime by offering Arabs that settled in Kirkuk in the last decades roughly USD15,000 and a plot of land if they move back to their region of origin.⁷⁵ This comes amid allegations that up to 600,000 Kurds have moved into the Kirkuk area, compared to an estimated 300,000 who fled from it, in order to guarantee victory in the status referendum. Although these numbers are almost certain to be a grave exaggeration considering the devastation and previous size of the city⁷⁶, the Turkish Chief of General Staff, General Yaşar Büyükanıt, declared that "it is clear what will occur between the Sunnite Arabs, Turkmen and Kurds harboring unfriendly feelings towards one another, when such a referendum takes place, with the demographic structure of Kirkuk having been turned topsy-turvy."⁷⁷ Neither a Turkish military intervention, nor an offensive from Arab insurgent groups like the Shiite Mahdi Army that has reportedly moved fighters into the city⁷⁸, can be ruled out; not to speak of sectarian terror finally reaching Northern Iraq.

Neither Sunni or Shiite
Arabs nor Turcoman,
nor any of Iraq's
neighbors supports
Kirkuk's inclusion into
the Kurdish region

c) PKK

The fate of the PKK but more importantly the action taken by the parties involved will have a huge impact not only on Turkey and Northern Iraq but on regional relations and the standing of the U.S. in the Middle East as a whole. There is a widespread belief among the Turkish policy and media communities that the U.S. has mishandled the Kurdish issue and is either indifferent toward the PKK or secretly allied to it. Moreover, the Turkish government does not seem in favor of a political solution to the PKK threat, rejecting its unilateral ceasefire declared on October 1st, 2006.

The appointment of General Joseph Ralston as U.S. special envoy for combating the PKK has not abetted Turkish anxieties as there has been very little visible progress so far. The U.S. claims to have purged the Makhmour refugee camp near the Turkish-Iraqi border – a major point of contention for Ankara – from arms and PKK members and is trying to convince KRG president Barzani of the need to expel the PKK.⁷⁹ But on the crucial issue of unseating the PKK from its headquarters on Mount Qandil, U.S. officials have explained their inaction with the difficulties of the terrain and the claim that the primary responsibility lies with the Iraqis.⁸⁰ Iraqi Kurds equally have expressed their inability – rather than unwillingness – of defeating the PKK militarily and instead call for a political solution through an amnesty issued by Turkey. And it has become apparent that the KRG leaders will not take the risk of a military escalation with the PKK spilling over and creating insecurity in their territory.⁸¹ Therefore it will be fascinating to see how the U.S. and the KRG will act in the future and whether a continued blind eye towards the PKK might result in increased military and political cooperation between Ankara and Tehran and Ankara and Damascus.

d) Iraqi statehood and Iran's and Syria's relations with the West

A final stumbling block for Northern Iraq and its neighbors is the fate of the rest of Iraq. The Iraqi insurgency and sectarian violence are ripe in many parts of the country and the success of the new U.S. initiative to pacify and consolidate Baghdad seems tenuous at best. With Shiite leader Muqtada al-Sadr's declaration of war against the United States on April 9th 2007 and ongoing ethnic cleansing in many parts of the country, it is not unthinkable to see Iraq completely disintegrate and become embroiled in a full-fledged civil war. With their security and constitutional status wedded to the success of the status-quo Iraq and a continued U.S. troop presence, the Kurds of Northern Iraq would not be able to stay out of the chaos and in all likelihood would be forced to take sides in the struggle. In such an event, intervention to safeguard their protégés (Turcoman and Shiites) and national interests could well lead Turkey and Iran to intervene militarily.

Similarly, the international standing and security situation of Iran could have a major impact on the fate of the KRG. Given the immense influence wielded by Iran in Iraq at the moment, any significant worsening of relations with the United States over either its involvement in Iraq or the nuclear crisis might lead Tehran to instigate fighting inside Iraq. With the Kurds firmly entrenched as allies of the U.S. and – by their own admission – as of today unable to cater for their own security, Kurdistan-Iraq could be a target of Iranian attacks. Increased international pressure on Syria might have a similar effect due to Iran's close alliance with Damascus.

VIII. Conclusion

When summoning all the evidence and assessing the opinions expressed from people across the board, it does seem evident that the establishment of an independent Kurdish state

would lead to instability in the neighboring countries. And this is likely to occur largely irrespective of the respective Kurdish minority's actions since all the state's leaderships have determined that it is not in their best interest to even have a *potential* point of attraction for their own ethnic Kurds. What is more, a Kurdish break-away from Iraq would likely cement ethnic-sectarian politics in the entire region with possible spillover effects on countries with heterogeneous populations like Jordan and Saudi-Arabia as well.⁸² While Turkey's rhetoric is the most belligerent towards the Kurds in Iraq over Kirkuk due to the PKK and especially the fear of a revival of Kurdish separatism, the Syrian regime seems to be the one that has been most adversely affected by the KRG's emergence with almost continuous unrest in its Kurdish provinces. Iran is equally experiencing Kurdish terrorism and protest on its soil and although it has arguably the strongest position to impact Northern Iraq, has been subdued in public statements and has not yet taken any overt measures.

On the issue of regional cooperation over the Kurdish problem, the record is mixed. Some have argued that as a consequence of the stalled EU accession process, strained relations with the U.S. and a shared perception of a national security threat emanating from Kurdistan-Iraq and from Kurdish separatist groups, Turkey – ruled by the reform-Islamist AKP – could turn its back on the West and align itself alongside Syria and Iran.⁸³ In contrast to this alarmist analysis, the reality on the ground appears to be far from that simple. While there have been joint operations between Iran and Turkey against the PKK and PJAK, these are on a very limited scale and closer economic and energy interdependencies should not overshadow persistent contrasts between each country's vision for the region, e.g. relations with Israel. In spite of the astounding Turkish-Syrian rapprochement, there remain vast differences in the way each country deals with their own Kurdish minority. Yet, Robert Olson's assertion remains true that “the odd cooperation between strategic competitors” can be traced not only to colluding interests in curbing Kurdish nationalism domestically – whatever the virtue of such endeavors – but also to the inaction on the part of PUK, KDP and the U.S. to defeat or expel the PKK from Iraq.

The one thing that is clear beyond doubt, however, is that the future of this corner of the Middle East remains as intriguing as ever and of the highest relevance to the region and beyond.

Endnotes:

1. Gawdat Bahgat: 'Saddam Hussein's Legacy: A Preliminary Assessment and Future Implications', *SAIS Review* Vol. XXV, No. 2 Summer-Fall 2005.
2. Human Rights Watch report: <http://hrw.org/reports/1993/iraqanfal/ANFALINT.htm> or <http://iraqshoahfiles.blogspot.com/2004/07/genocide-in-iraq-anfal-campaign.html>.
3. Kenneth Katzman & Alfred B. Prados: 'The Kurds in Post-Saddam Iraq', *CRS Report for Congress*, December 12, 2006.
4. Gökhan Çetinsaya: 'The New Iraq, The Middle East and Turkey: A Turkish View', *SETA Report No. SE1-406*, April, 2006.
5. Michael Rubin: 'Enabling Kurdish Illusions', *The Weekly Standard*, March 19, 2007.

The regional dimension of the Kurdish question

6. Joost Hiltermann: 'Iraq: Kurd Leaders Must Maintain Unified Front', *The Boston Globe*, May 10, 2006.
7. 'Guide to Iraqi Political Parties', http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4511450.stm
8. Mustafa Göktürk: 'Barzani: Independent Kurdistan is our right', *The New Anatolian*, June 6, 2006. <http://www.thenewanatolian.com/tna-8218.html>
9. ICG-Report: 'In their own words: Reading the Iraqi insurgency', *Middle East Report No. 50*, February 15, 2006.
10. Ashraf al-Khalidi & Victor Tanner: 'Sectarian Violence: Radical Groups Drive Internal Displacement in Iraq', *The Brookings Institution - University of Bern Project on Internal Displacement*, October 2006.
11. Hakan Yavuz & Michael Günter (ed.): 'The Kurds in Iraq', *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XI, No. 1, Spring 2004.
12. Robert Olson: 'Relations among Turkey, Iraq, Kurdistan-Iraq, the Wider Middle East, and Iran', *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Fall 2006.
13. Servet Mutlu: 'Ethnic Kurds in Turkey: A Demographic Study', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 4. Nov. 1996.
14. A UN report estimates the number of people who were forced to permanently leave their homes at 950,000 to 1.2 million. Source: *NZZ Online*, February 23, 2007.
15. Murat Somer: 'Failures of the Discourse of Ethnicity: Turkey, Kurds, and the Emerging Iraq', *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 36, No. 1, March 2005.
16. *Kurdistan-Rundbrief*, Nr. 1, Jg. 20, February 15, 2007. <http://www.kurdistan-rundbrief.de/2007/kr070103.html>
17. John T. Nugent, Jr.: 'The Defeat of Turkish Hizballah as a Model for Counter-Terrorism Strategy', *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 1, March, 2004.
18. James Brandon: 'The Kurdistan Freedom Falcons Emerges as a Rival to the PKK', *The Jamestown Foundation - Terrorism Focus*, Vol. 3, Issue 40, October 17, 2006.
19. Murat Somer: 'Sustainable Democratization and the Roles of the U.S. and the EU: Political Islam and Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey', *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 5 (3), Fall 2006.
20. Daniel L. Bynam & Kenneth M. Pollack: 'Things Fall Apart: Containing the Spillover from an Iraqi Civil War', *The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution Analysis Paper Number 11*, January 2007.
21. İlnur Çevik: 'Can you call Öcalan leader of the Kurds?' *The New Anatolian*, March 23, 2007.
22. Matthew Kocher: 'The Decline of PKK and the Viability of a One-state Solution in Turkey', *MOST Journal on Multicultural Societies*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2002.
23. Author's interview with Nihat Ali Özcan, professor at TOBB-ETÜ Ankara, March 8, 2007.
24. M. Hakan Yavuz & Nihat Ali Özcan: 'The Kurdish Question and Turkey's Justice and Development Party', *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XIII, No. 1, Spring 2006.
25. 'Criticism of Barzani's remarks snowballs', *The New Anatolian*, February 28, 2007.
26. Serkan Demirtaş: 'Gül urges Rice over Barzani's threats against Turkey', *Turkish Daily News*, April 9, 2007.
27. Author's interview with Meliha Benli Altunışık, professor at Middle East Technical University, March 12, 2007.
28. 'General Staff rebuffs Erdogan 'Büyükanıt is the voice of the TSK'', *The New Anatolian*, March 2, 2007.
29. Ümit Enginsoy: 'U.S. warns Turkey against military action inside Iraq', *Turkish Daily News*, March 14, 2007.
30. 'Top general calls for a cross-border operation to northern Iraq', *Turkish Daily News*, April 13, 2007.
31. Henri J. Barkey: *Turkey and Iraq: Perils (and Prospects) of Proximity*, U.S. Institute of Peace, Special Report 141, 2005.
32. Author's interview with Nihat Ali Özcan, professor at TOBB ETÜ Ankara, March 8, 2007.
33. Interview by İlnur Çevik: 'Talabani: Visit of Barzani to White House is recognition of identity of Iraqi Kurdistan', *The New Anatolian*, October 30, 2005.
34. Suat Kınıkhoğlu: 'Kirkuk, Northern Iraq and the 'Grand Bargain' *Today's Zaman*, February 20, 2007.
35. Robert Olson: *op. cit.*, 2006.
36. Kemal Kirişçi: 'Turkey's foreign policy in turbulent times', *Chaillot Paper No. 92*, September 2006.
37. Author's Interview with Murat Somer, Professor at Koç University Istanbul, March 20, 2007.
38. PDKI-website: http://www.pdki.org/articles.php?lang=1&article_id=12
39. Seymour M. Hersh: 'The Next Act', *The New Yorker*, November 27, 2006. http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/11/27/061127fa_fact?currentPage=2
40. Farideh Koohi-Kamali: *The Political Development of the Kurds in Iran: Pastoral Nationalism*, 2003.
41. James Brandon: 'Iran's Kurdish Threat: PJAK', *The Jamestown Foundation - Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 4, Issue 12, June 15, 2006.
42. Source: *Mehr News Agency*, February 28, 2007.
43. Komalah-website: http://www.komalah.org/english/html_files/program.html
44. Daniel L. Byman: 'Iran's Iraq Strategy: What Tehran is Really Up To', *The Washington Post*, February 18, 2007.

45. 'Iran in Iraq: How Much Influence?', *International Crisis Group Middle East Report N°38*, March 21, 2005. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?l=1&id=3328>.
46. Robert Lowe & Claire Spencer (eds.): 'Iran, its Neighbors and the Regional Crises', *A Middle East Programme Report - Chatham House*, 2006 and Kayhan Barzegar: 'Understanding the Roots of Iranian Foreign Policy in the New Iraq', *Middle East Policy*, Summer 2005.
47. 'U.S. raid on Iranian consulate angers Kurds', *CNN.com*, January 11, 2007. http://www.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/meast/01/11/iraq_main/index.html.
48. Author's interview with Ömer Merani, KDP-representative in Ankara, April 5, 2007.
49. Soner Çağaptay & Daniel Fink: 'The Battle for Kirkuk: How to Prevent a New Front in Iraq', *Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Watch #1183*, January 16, 2007.
50. 'Iraqi president terms Iran's stance on Iraq "very good"', *Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA)*, October 4, 2006.
51. Bay Fang: 'U.S., Iran could be starting new `proxy war,' experts say', *Chicago Tribune*, February 12, 2007.
52. Robert Lowe: 'The Syrian Kurds: A People Discovered', *Chatham House - Middle East Programme Briefing Paper*, January 2006.
53. *The Kurdish Democratic Alliance in Syria* and *the Kurdish Democratic Front in Syria* were two of the five parties that signed the 'The Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change' on October 16, 2005.
54. Eyal Zisser: 'Bashar Al-Assad: In or Out of the New World Order?', *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2005.
55. Author's interview with Kawa Rashid, March 27, 2007.
56. Steve Negus: 'Talabani seeks better ties in Syria visit', *FT.com*, January 13, 2007.
57. Author's conversation with Harriet Allsopp, March 14, 2007.
58. James Brandon: 'The PKK and Syria's Kurds', February 19, 2007. Source: <http://intelligence-summit.blogspot.com/2007/02/pkk-and-syrias-kurds.html>
59. Gökhan Çetinsaya: *op. cit.*
60. John Calabrese: 'Turkey and Iran: Limits of a Stable Relationship', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1. May, 1998.
61. Mohammed A. Salih: 'Iraqi Kurds fear a new war', *Asia Times Online*, March 14, 2007.
62. James Brandon: 'The Evolution of the PKK: New Faces, New Challenges', *The Jamestown Foundation - Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 4, Issue 23, November 30, 2006.
63. Robert Olson: *op. cit.*
64. *Kurdistan-Rundbrief*, Nr. 1, Jg. 20, February 15, 2007. <http://www.kurdistan-rundbrief.de/2007/kr070103.html>
65. Cengiz Çandar: 'Iran eyes strategic relations with Turkey', *Turkish Daily News*, February 23, 2007.
66. Robert Lowe & Claire Spencer (eds.): *op. cit.*
67. 'Syria, Turkey insist Iraq remain united', *Chinadaily.com*, January 7, 2004.
68. Meliha Benli Altunışık & Özlem Tür : 'From Distant Neighbors to Partners? Changing Syrian-Turkish Relations', *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 37, No. 2, June 2006.
69. Kemal Kirişçi: *op. cit.*
70. Robert Lowe & Claire Spencer (eds.): *op. cit.*
71. Nechirvan Barzani: 'Speech at the Kurdistan National Assembly', January 24, 2007. Quoted at www.krg.org, February 4, 2007.
72. Nidhal al-Laithi: 'Kirkuk referendum postponed for two years', *Azzaman.com*, February 27, 2007.
73. Bassem Mrroue & Kathy Gannon: 'In Northern Iraq, another war looms', *Washington Post*, February 13, 2007. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/13/AR2007021300766_2.html
74. 'Voices From Iraq 2007: Ebbing Hope in a Landscape of Loss - National Survey of Iraq', *abc7.com*, March 19, 2007.
75. 'Iraq endorses contentious plan to relocate Arabs from Kirkuk', *The New Anatolian*, April 2, 2007.
76. Author's interview with Taha Özhan, *Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA)*, April 4, 2007.
77. Interview with *Hürriyet* on February 17, 2007; translated by *JTW News*.
78. Jonathan Finer: 'Shiite Militias Move Into Oil-Rich Kirkuk, Even as Kurds Dig In', *Washington Post Foreign Service*, April 25, 2006.
79. http://ankara.usembassy.gov/statement_013007.html
80. http://ankara.usembassy.gov/statement_020907.html
81. Steven A. Cook & Bernard Gwertzman: 'Interview: Turkish-U.S. Tensions 'Great Underreported Story of Iraq War'', *The New York Times*, March 29, 2007.
82. Gökhan Çetinsaya: *op. cit.*
83. Soner Çağaptay & Mark Dubowitz: 'Ein tödlicher Stolperstein namens PKK', *Financial Times Deutschland*, February 26, 2007.