Strategic Implications of the "Kurdish Spring"

Final Report
September 2013

Prepared for: Director, Office of Net Assessment
Office of the Secretary of Defense

Eric Brown, Abram Shulsky, Hillel Fradkin, Lewis Libby and David Ernst
Principal Authors

Contract No. HQ0034-09-D-3006
CLIN 0011

1015 15th Street, N.W. ▯ Sixth Floor ▯ Washington, D.C. 20005 ▯ 202-974-2400 ▯ Fax: 202-974-2410
www.hudson.org

Table of Contents

Introduction **2**

I. The Kurdish Awakening **4**
- **Kurdistan Assembled** **12**
- **The Rule of Four** **14**
  - Turkey 16
  - Iran 26
  - Iraq and Syria 33
- **Kurdish Strategies** **36**

II. Strategic Kurdistan **41**
- **The Kurdish Population Ascendency** **45**
- **Iran's Imperial Problems** **51**
- **The Green Line** **57**
- **Turkish Strategies** **60**
- **Iranian Strategies** **64**

III. Strategic Implications of the Kurdish Spring **69**
- **1. Turkish-Kurdish Condominium** **72**
- **2. Iranian Hegemony** **81**
- **3. Springtime of Peoples** **91**

Appendix A: KRG Fieldwork Report **102**
- **Founders and Geopolitics** **105**
- **The Swiss Ideal** **108**
- **With God on The Arabs' Side** **112**
- **"A Golden Handcuff"** **117**
- **The Devil Next Door** **123**
- **KRG and the Future of the Kurdish Spring** **126**

Bibliography **132**

Introduction

The Kurds have often been described as the largest ethnic group in the world without their own state. This is beginning to change, in ways that will have a major impact on the Middle East. This report discusses the ways the rebirth of Kurdish national consciousness will, along with other major changes underway in the politics of the Middle East, affect the region's strategic situation.

Despite the efforts of Kurdish nationalists to gain recognition for their aspirations at the post-World War I peace conferences, the Kurdish populations of the Middle East were divided among four states (Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran). Two of these states (Syria and Iraq) were entirely new creations, offspring of the secret Sykes-Picot agreement between Britain and France for the division of the Middle Eastern possessions of the Ottoman Empire. Turkey was a new republic, the (more or less) ethnically-based rump of the Ottoman Empire. Only Iran was a continuation of a pre-World War I polity, the Persian Empire.

The seventy years following the end of the First World War were, in general, a period of oppression and frustration for the Kurdish populations, as various efforts to achieve autonomy or independence were squashed by the four states, to the territorial integrity of all of whom Kurdish nationalism was a potential (or actual) threat. This did not prevent, at times, one of the states from trying to use the Kurds as a weapon against one of the others, but these machinations always ended badly from the Kurdish perspective.

The Kurdish nationalism represented at the post-World War I conferences was probably a minority phenomenon of the Kurdish population, representing a new urban intelligentsia that was just beginning to emerge. The bulk of the Kurdish population remained rural and tribal in its perspectives. This meant, among other things, that intra-Kurdish differences were common, and sometimes violent. During the seventy year period following World War I, however, this began to change. The Kurds were subjected to various modernization efforts associated with the state-building efforts of the four states under which they lived. The results were similar to what had happened in eastern Europe and the Balkans in the late 19th and early 20th centuries: the Kurds began to develop a more modern national consciousness.

The turning point came in the aftermath of the First Gulf War, when, following the anti-Saddam Hussein uprisings, the imposition of a "no-fly" zone over northern Iraq created a *de facto* autonomous Kurdish zone. The overthrow of Saddam and the adoption of the new Iraqi constitution – which granted extensive powers to the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) – marked a further step in this direction. The current turmoil in Syria has also raised the possibility that the Kurdish regions of that country will gain *de facto* autonomy as well.

Equally importantly, the Kurdish region of Iraq has been able to use its *de facto* autonomy to improve its security and economic situation in a way that contrasts favorably with conditions in the rest of Iraq. While this development has been unbalanced in that it depends too heavily on oil revenues (as opposed to other forms of economic development), it still represents a remarkable achievement in a region that 25 years early had been devastated by Saddam's campaign of revenge and destruction.

This example of a dynamic and successful Kurdish polity is likely have a major effect on the politics of the Middle East as a whole. This report looks at the future of the

Middle East with a major focus on the effect that the Kurdish national renaissance may have. To do this, it looks as well at the other major trends affecting the region:

- The disintegration of the artificial "Sykes-Picot" states (such as Syria and Iraq), which have been unable to forge resilient national identities from their constituent parts. As a result, Turkey and Iran, whose state structures are stronger and more firmly rooted in history, are likely to define the political structure of the region, along with Saudi Arabia (and, to a lesser extent, some of the Gulf states), whose wealth and religious/ideological activism give them potential influence.

- The demographic imbalances threatening Turkey and Iran due to the fact that the predominant ethnic groups (Turks and Persians, respectively) have lower birth rates than the minority groups (Kurds in Turkey; Kurds, Arabs and Baluch in Iran).

- The potential change in the influence of outside powers, due in part to changes in the world oil market (i.e., the lesser importance of Middle Eastern oil to the United States, given increased oil and gas production in North America.)

The report lays out three possible futures of the Middle East, taking into account these factors.

I. The Kurdish Awakening

In modern history, the manifestation of Kurdish national feeling is a comparatively recent phenomenon. National sentiments currently rising to the fore in Northern Iraq have their roots in events that took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Kurdish nationalism is the dream of having the Kurdish people, currently divided between Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Syria form an independent country that encompasses the Kurds who live in all four countries. As the Ottoman order declined, and the states that took its place attempted to modernize, the way the Kurds viewed

themselves changed as well. By and large, a sense of national identity trumped blood ties that had predominated for centuries. The history of this transformation is essential to understanding the future of the Kurdish awakening.

Modernity's advances into Kurdistan led to the spread of a new consciousness among the Kurds of themselves as a Nation that was distinct from others. Throughout the twentieth century, nationalism held out the possibility of a new way of organizing Kurdish politics, one which promised also to reverse Kurdistan's strategic fate in the modern era. Over time, however, the various nationalist "revolutions" and movements for "resiststance" to the modern order that arose operated as much to deepen intra-Kurdish divisions as to overcome them. Through this, the Kurds' core problem was left unaddressed, and nationalism began to fragment and decline across Kurdistan in the late 1990s, as some retreated into tribalism and others into Islamism, which rejected the conceit of "nations" altogether. However, there is now a new trend within Kurdish political life, a new "Kurdish Awakening." This awakening self-consciously traces its roots from the twentieth century nationalist movement to centuries before then, indeed, to Ahmad Khani, Sharaf al-Din Bitlisi, and others who not only envisioned Greater Kurdistan as a possibility worth striving for, but , more importantly, began to draw attention to the political problems of intra-Kurdish division and its strategic consequences. In the last decade this awakening has begun to have perceptible political effects, most notably in the Kurdish Region of northeastern Iraq. But it can also be seen in the way Kurds across the region have begun to concentrate their attention on what has made them weak and on the best practical ways for improving Kurdistan's circumstances and prospects. More and more, Kurds have gotten it into their heads that they are better off not being "fortune's fools," and they have thus begun to make plans of their own.

The idea of "Greater Kurdistan" is, of course, a myth that has never actually existed, certainly not in any politically or sociologically coherent way, except in the mental maps of Kurdish nationalists. In this respect, Kurdish nationalism is not unlike many of the other revisionist tendencies now vying over what the future Middle East will look like. As one Iranian Kurd put it, across the Middle East, "everyone has a map of their own," that is, a set of organizing myths and ideas about how the region should be transformed and accordingly structured. The resulting clashes have been wreaking havoc, and these appear destined to continue in the future. Among the Arabs, the consequences of the failed myths that once drove the twentieth century's grand ideological projects are still working themselves out, just as the more primordial and thus stubborn myths rooted in religion, race and tribe will keep reasserting themselves. Turkish "Neo-Ottomanism" and the revival of comparable conceits in "Eternal Iran" are rooted in myths of lost in grandeur and older conceptions of regional order, and these two neo-imperialist ideologies, and the competition between them, are also likely to become defining forces in Middle Eastern affairs. Meanwhile, Islamism's core imperial myths are so utopian that they, too, will inevitably fail, though not soon enough, and likely not before the movement's vanguards try to destroy all that stands in the way of building the impossible. Obviously, therefore, not all revisionist myths are the same; certain ones are more compelling and are superior to others, not just in the kind of political community they seek to create, but in their real-world prospects and in what they have to say about strategy.

For the partisans of Greater Kurdistan, one seminal nationalist myth comes from the story of *Mem and Zin*, an epic poem written down in 1692 by the Kurdish author Ahmad Khani. It tells the tragic story of two lovers from different tribes who were prevented from being together not only in life but in death as well. After a tribal feud

leads to Mem's murder, Zin dies of grief at his graveside and is buried next to him. Vendetta-driven tribesmen then hunt down Mem's murderer, kill him, and leave his body to rot between the graves of the two lovers. As the corpse decomposes between the two graves, a plant rises from it with sharp thorns on its branches and roots that plunge deep into the ground, thereby perpetuating the separation of Mem and Zin even in their death. Readers will note some resemblance between Khani's work and *Romeo and Juliet*, not only in the fates that befell the two pairs of "star-cross'd" lovers, but also in the deeper reflection both tragedies offer on the problems that Honor poses for the development of politics and of strategy. Khani is actually more explicit about the political ramifications of tribal honor than the Bard was, and this is one reason why nationalists have not had much difficulty in appropriating his epic as an allegory for the historical plight and struggle of the Kurds. Like Mem and Zin, the nationalists observe the Kurds have been perpetually divided among themselves. Because of this, they have been incapable of creating and maintaining a state of their own, and therefore they are fated, even more than others to be subject to fortune. As a strategic matter, this basic political failure has meant the Kurds have historically been the subjects and victims of the schemes and ambitions of the better-organized powers that have surrounded them. Thus, in one of the epic's concluding stanzas, Khani writes:

> Look, from the Arabs to the Georgians,
> The Kurds have become like towers.
> The Turks and Persians are surrounded by them.
> The Kurds are on all four corners.
> Both sides have made the Kurdish people
> Targets for the arrows of fate.
> They are said to be keys to the borders
> Each tribe forming a formidable bulwark.
> Whenever the Ottoman Sea and the Tajik Sea

Flow out and agitate
The Kurds get soaked in blood
Separating them like an isthmus.

In the nationalist's telling, the history of Greater Kurdistan is the story of how it has come to be divided. Many Kurds believe that the original partition of their homeland came at the hands of the competing Ottomans and Safavids. The two empires fought relentlessly with one another across the Kurdish territories between them and, after a Turkish victory at the Battle of Chaldiran, they settled upon a boundary in 1514. Through this, Kurdistan was spliced into two parts and became a strategic bufferzone between the imperial spheres, one dominated by Sunni Muslims, the other by Shiites. Early on, the larger portion of Kurdistan was to fall within the Ottoman's realm. But the boundary was hardly a fixed one, and Kurdistan would continue on as a site of persistent peace interrupted by equally persistent turf wars between competing Turkey-based and Iran-based regimes.[1] This history, of course, has not ended, and Kurdistan is still very much in the middle of it.

Throughout the sixteenth century, the Ottoman power managed to extend its influence in to the eastern reaches of Anatolia, Mesopotamia, the South Caucasus, and even into parts of what is now Iran. Rather than attempt to dominate the Kurdish tribes of these areas and rule them outright, the Sublime Porte's policy was to work through existing tribal structures and to try to coopt them.[2] In doing this, the Turks sought to use the Kurdish tribes as defensive bulwarks against the Safavids, and increasingly, also against the Russians, whose own involvements South of the Caucasus were deepening in the latter part of the sixteenth century. The "strategic borders" of Kurdistan were, in effect, to become a function of Southwest Asia's geopolitics, and thus of the expanding and contracting power and influence of the two outside empires, and sometimes more.

Because the Ottomans followed a distinctively decentralized policy in maintaining their majority share of Kurdistan as a security cordon, the Kurdish tribes were more or less left to their own devices. But from time to time, the imperial powers along the plains to the West and to the East of Kurdistan would become restless, at which point their positions in Kurdistan became foundations for strategic aggrandizement.

These realities made influence among the Kurdish tribes a vitally important strategic objective for the maintenance and defense of empire. The Kurds, for their part, tended historically to lean toward the Ottomans, their fellow Sunnis. But it was not long after Chaldiran that the Persians and Turks began seeking out one another's distinctive weaknesses and exploiting them. Early on, the Persians—and not long after, the Russians, too—became skilled at insinuating themselves into the Kurdish buffer zone and, by this, they sought to turn and drive the Kurds against their Ottoman rulers. With the help of such strategies, the Safavid power was able to stage something of a comeback in the early seventeenth century, and it had managed to regain control over much of the South Caucasus, what is now northwestern Iran, as well as a sizeable chunk of Kurdistan.[3]

The Persians regarded the Kurdish tribes as extensions of Persia's own expanding, multi-ethnic imperial portfolio. Like the Turks, the Persians worked through existing tribal structures to sustain Kurdistan as a defensive bulwark against their foreign enemies, and also to keep the Kurds in line. In practice, however, the Safavid's outreach and presence in the region was frequently less intrusive than the decentralized approach preferred by the Turks. The Persians' "soft reign" policy only enhanced Kurdish political autonomy, and starting in the seventeenth century and on up until the early nineteenth, an assortment of Kurdish principalities—Ardalan, Soran, Baban, Kelhor and others—sprang up and faded away. The Kurdish principalities managed to get by when they were able to

play the outside powers against one another and derive benefits from their rivalry by acting as tribes for hire on the frontiers.

Some modern nationalists will hark back to this era as a "Golden Age" of Kurdish rule across Greater Kurdistan when the political domination of outside powers was minimal.[4] In reality, the historical capacity of the Kurds to have much influence over Kurdistan's political order and strategic circumstances is exaggerated in the nationalist's telling. If anything, when outside influence waned in Kurdistan it was because the empires were too weak or too involved elsewhere to impose their wills on the region. Moreover, this era of autonomous tribal emirates was hardly a time of Kurdish unity. While there were some efforts toward confederation, the tribes were more often feuding with one another over matters of honor and blood than reflecting on how to unify themselves.[5] As far back as 1597, the Kurdish historian Sharaf al-Din Bitlisi reflected on why the Kurdish "Nation" had failed to develop any large-scale political organization, writing that:

> If the Kurds have a bad characteristic, it is that none of them accepts the authority of others. Each individually thinks of his own pride, they do not think collectively of their collective pride, they do not support each other and they do not unite. About this bad characteristic of the Kurds the learned professor Mala Se'deddîn who was the teacher of Sultan Murad has, in his history which he has written for the Ottomans, talked about the Kurds saying: "Every Kurd is an independent entity for himself raising the banner of arrogance and power, living freely in the mountains. If you look at their unity, solidarity and thinking they do not unite in anything else apart from the declaration of faith."

Tribal Honor and its demands thus made it difficult to accept political authority, and this made the construction of an overarching governing arrangement and a politics to bind the

Kurds together impossible. Without them, the Kurds had no way of combining or concerting their actions, and thus no possibility of strategy.

Of course, this might seem a perfectly acceptable way for people to live up in the mountains—until, that is, outside powers would "flow out and agitate." When this occurred, divisions among the Kurds became a ready target for the outside powers whenever they wished to insert themselves into Kurdistan, whether this was for defensive ends, offensive ones, or for the purposes of knocking tribal upstarts back down a few pegs. In this way, what Kurdish efforts there were toward larger-scale organization were routinely nipped in the bud, and the Kurds persisted more or less as the instruments and thus the fodder of the strategic frontier policies of the imperial order that encircled them.

That order started to come undone in the latter part of the nineteenth century as nationalistic and other modernizing currents began to weaken the empires from within. And yet, modernity was much slower to penetrate Kurdistan because of its rugged and variegated human and natural topography. It would not be until the First World War that a somewhat organized movement of Kurds began to envision a nationally unified Greater Kurdistan under self-rule as a future worth striving for. But because of the divisions among the Kurds and their lack of developed political institutions, the Kurdish homeland was to be parceled out among four different states, not one of them ruled by Kurds. The modern consequences of this political failure turned out to be far more horrendous for the Kurds than anything they had experienced before. The new order of nation states was harsher and more intrusive and violent than the imperial order had ever been. Kurdistan was to become, in effect, a shared frontier into which four very different state-building enterprises would seek to project power and extend their writ.

Kurdistan Assembled

The epicenter of the twenty-first century Kurdish political awakening is the Kurdish enclave of northeastern Iraq, or as the Kurds call it, "South Kurdistan." Now about twenty years old, the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) that governs the area represents the most successful effort at Kurdish self-rule and state-building in all of history. The KRG's emergence has thus inaugurated an entirely new era in the nationalist pursuit of the idea of Greater Kurdistan. In addition, the fact of the KRG has already affected the deep structure of political and strategic affairs across the Middle East, and in time, its continued emergence may transform them.

The KRG was launched in 1992, after the United States established a no-fly zone over the skies of Iraqi Kurdistan. Following their liberation from the Baathist tyranny, Iraq's Kurds took their freedom to plunge themselves into tribal warfare that was driven as much by Kurdish honor as it was by outside powers. However, after the United States helped to broker a Kurdish peace, the once feuding parties—the PUK run by Jalal Talabani, and the KDP run by Masoud Barzani—agreed on a new power-sharing arrangement that became the new foundation for KRG. Since then, the Kurds of Iraq have devoted themselves to building up a mini-state to call their own. This has been a widely acknowledged success, and since 2003, the Kurds of Iraq have managed to provide for themselves far greater security and stability than anything their immediate neighbors enjoy. Now that religious warfare is threatening to consume the Arab lands of Iraq once again, the Kurds are confident that they will be able to hold their own.

Nevertheless, the KRG is still vulnerable politically and militarily, and its neighborhood is a uniquely inhospitable one to Kurdish ambitions, especially nationalist ones. Not only do the Kurds face a hostile regime in Baghdad, they're once again

becoming squeezed in by a new competition for power in Southwest Asia. In the latest iteration, Kurdistan is pinned down in the middle of a three-way strategic and sectarian rivalry between Turkey, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and a broad-based Sunni Arab Islamist movement backed by rival Gulf monarchies. Each one of these forces in the emerging order is seeking to impose itself on Kurdistan, and the existential challenge for the Kurds, as it has been for centuries, is not to get chewed up in the coming clash. To complicate matters still further, the Kurds' quasi-state is not without glaring structural flaws and internal feuding, some of which may yet be exploited by outsiders.

And yet, there are sound reasons to expect that the KRG will cope and will continue to secure itself, and that through it, or some new governing structure that comes from it, the Kurds as a Nation will continue to emerge as politically and strategically consequential actors in their own right over the next twenty years. For almost a decade now, the KRG has been forging new connections with Kurdish parties and others all across Greater Kurdistan, including with the Diaspora. In fact, through KRG, Kurds have become better connected with one another and with the outside world than at any time in their history, and it is through these involvements that a powerful new trend toward greater organization and unification of the many Kurdish factions has been established.

In September 2013, the KRG will convene in its capital city of Erbil what has been billed as an "historic" inaugural session of the "Kurdish National Congress." According to reports, 39 different Kurdish political parties will be involved in the congress representing all four quadrants of Greater Kurdistan—South Kurdistan, North Kurdistan (Turkey), West Kurdistan (Syria), and East Kurdistan (Iran)—as well the Diaspora in the West. The official conveners of the assembly are the two top Iraqi Kurdish leaders, KRG President Masoud Barzani and Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, as well as Abdullah Ocalan, the founder of the militant Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK).

Ocalan will not be attending the congress, though he has sent his blessings to it from his Turkish prison cell. In times past, these three men were all leaders of feuding Kurdish factions and sworn enemies. But based on reports, the main theme of the Congress will be on the intractable problems of intra-Kurdish divisions and on the practical ways in which these might be overcome. In addition to setting a common agenda for developing Kurdistan's economy, civil society, and political institutions, the conference will also focus on reconciling factions into a united front which would work "peacefully and democratically" to promote national self-determination across Greater Kurdistan. [6]

Whatever comes of this particular initiative, the ambition behind it and the many other similar pan-Kurdish efforts made by KRG is clear. As President Barzani has remarked of the congress, "the ideal of historical Kurdistan is still omnipresent." Not only this, but in the twenty first century, that political idea has acquired an effective state sponsor in the form of KRG, which has self-consciously sought to revive the new Kurdish Awakening and to place itself at its center. Through this, the Kurds are actively seeking to give their national myth of a Greater Kurdistan a political and strategic reality that it has never had before. If the Kurds are to have any chance of doing so, they will need to deal with the modern political problem of intra-Kurdish division, and this will require first of all transformation of Kurdish nationalism from within.

The Rule of Four

Kurdistan was like hell in the First World War. Though often forgotten in the West, Kurdistan had been an active theater in the war, as the Russians pressed in on the Ottoman realm from the north, the British came up via Persia, and the Sublime Porte launched an internal war against its own Armenian subjects. Christian-Muslim relations had, in fact, been deteriorating for some time in the eastern reaches of Ottoman Anatolia,

not only because of Istanbul's rivalry with Russia, but because of growing communalist hostilities between the Armenians and the Kurds. Many Kurds became the shock troops in the sultanate's *jihad* and willing participants in the mass killings of the Armenians, which left one million of them dead. At the same time, entire communities of non-aligned Kurds were slaughtered in Armenian retaliations and by advancing Russian forces, with as many as one million Kurdish lives left dead.[7] Once the warring armies withdrew, Kurdistan only fell deeper into starvation, disease, cannibalism and political chaos.

After the war, the tangled diplomacy that led to the exposure of the secret Sykes-Picot arrangement combined with the American championing of the self-determination of nations left the Allies with a diplomatic nightmare and a list of promises which couldn't be kept. According to the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres between the Allies and the Ottoman Sultanate, what is now southeastern Turkey was to be a Kurdish autonomous zone centered on the Kurdish city of Amed, now known as Diyarbakr. With League of Nations approval, the Kurds were to be granted the option of voting to form a state of their own. But by 1923, the Kemalists had wrested power and were threatening Britain's position in northern Iraq. In negotiating with the new Turkish power, the British reneged on their promise to the Kurds by signing in 1923 the Treaty of Lausanne, which fixed the modern border between British-ruled Iraq and the new Republic of Turkey.

To the Kurds, this amounted to a "Great Betrayal," as they had been promised autonomy and the prospect for self-determination and then denied it by the Western powers.[8] In reality, however, the Kurds were in no shape to become their own rulers. Kurdistan's decimation in the war and the deep tribal and other divisions within it meant that they were in no position to construct and maintain political institutions of their own. As the Kurdish scholar Nezan Kendal has put it, "Following the fall and the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire all its subject peoples were able to set up their

own states. The only exception was the Kurdish people, largely because of the political incompetence and historical backwardness of its leaders."[9]

As the map was redrawn, Kurdistan would be quartered and henceforth submerged within the four nation-states of Syria, Iraq, Iran and Turkey. Through this, Kurdistan became a frontier for the four very different state-building enterprises that would dominate the region for the next sixty-eight years. Between 1923 and 1991, a period which the Kurds have called the "Rule of Four," the Kurds' consciousness of themselves not only as a people, but as a Nation distinct from and apart from others only deepened. At the same time, the divisions among the Kurds also deepened, and this only increased Kurdistan's vulnerabilities and strategic incoherence, as well as the frequency with which outside powers used these divisions for their own strategic agendas.

Turkey

While the Ottomans had attempted for centuries to use Kurdistan's tribes and mountains as a barrier against the Persians and Russians, the Kemalist regime was intent on establishing a modern nation-state in which all its citizens were "Turks" and unified by a common language and culture. Thus, on March 3rd 1924, on the very day the caliphate was abolished, the Kemalist regime officially denied the existence of a Kurdish identity that was separate from a Turkish one. This decision was clearly driven by the trauma of the Sublime Porte's ultimate loss of control over the eastern reaches of Anatolia and lingering fears that the Kurds, with the collusion of outsiders, would seek to dismember the new republic and detach Kurdistan from it. For any Turkey-based regime, East Anatolia was critical for regime security. From its creation, the Kemalist project distinguished itself by its zealous and systematic efforts to uproot Kurdish identity and to transform Kurdistan into Turkey.

The resulting intrusion of Turkish state power only spurred on the development of the Kurds' understanding of themselves as a Nation. This had first begun to insinuate itself in the nineteenth century as the Kurdish tribes of Anatolia became increasingly exposed to modern armies and, through them, to modern ideas. Prior to the nineteenth century, the Ottomans had come to rely heavily on the Kurdish Amirs to keep the peace in Kurdistan and sustain it as defensive barrier against their imperial rivals. But as the Ottomans increasingly came to blows with an expansive Romanov Empire, the latter discovered a knack for turning Anatolia's minority peoples against the Sublime Porte. [10] In the Russo-Turkish War of 1804–05, the Russians encouraged the Kurds to shift allegiances and rebel against the Turks. This experience launched a series of Ottoman efforts to transform Kurdistan and to formally incorporate it into a Turkey-centered polity. This Turkish project was never fully successful, and in important ways, is still ongoing to this day.

As the Sublime Porte came to be aware of how backward it was and of its vulnerabilities in East Anatolia, it launched a sweeping effort to modernize its military and transform its policy toward its Kurdish frontiers. As part of the effort to restructure and westernize the military, the Janissary Corps, whose ranks had been heavily supplied with enslaved Anatolians, was formally phased out by 1826. But this corps had been the backbone of imperial power among the non-Turkish tribes in the East, and its disappearance had the inadvertent effect of undermining Istanbul's influence in Kurdistan. As a result, Kurdish tribal leaders began to flout Ottoman authority, and the Kurdish bufferzone thus crumbled. During the 1820s and 1830s, Istanbul responded by undertaking to govern the Kurdish lands directly, and the Turks began eliminating the very Kurdish Amirs on whom they had once depended. [11]

In 1839, Sultan Mahmud II launched the Tanzimat reforms, which aimed to reverse the empire's decline by again radically restructuring it. Through these reforms, the Sublime Porte began to enlarge the reach of imperial power and sought to establish direct control over Kurdistan. This policy, which once again began to wreak havoc on existing tribal political structures, was an utter failure, as it inadvertently led to the collapse of law and order in the Kurdish countryside. [12] As a result, once-suppressed tribal disputes between Kurdish families sprang back to life. Territorial and religiously inspired hostilities between the Kurds and Armenians also intensified. As the imperial order continued to contract with nothing left to replace it, Kurdistan fell into deeper chaos, and soon the Kurds began to devise their own solutions to their troubles.

Gradually, Kurdish religious leaders began to amass power around themselves by using mysticism infused with elements of populism to sway populations and rule them. The famous Shaykh Khalidi promoted a type of Naqshbandi Sufism, influenced by his studies in India, which permitted its adherents to become instant Shaykhs themselves and to appoint their own deputies. These religious organizations ultimately combined with proto-nationalistic sentiments to promote a new Islam-inspired political consciousness, which then spread across some parts of Kurdistan. [13] The results of this first Kurdish Awakening were often explosive. In 1880, the popular preacher Shaykh Ubayd Allah of Nihri led an armed group of partisans into Qajar-controlled Kurdistan in a bid to liberate it. In a communiqué to the then-British consul general in Tabriz, William Abbott, the Shaykh explained that:

> the Kurdish Nation . . . is a people apart. Their religion is different [from that of others] and their laws and customs are distinct . . . the Chiefs and Rulers of Kurdistan, whether Turkish or Persian subjects, and the inhabitants of Kurdistan, one and all are united and agreed that matters cannot be carried on in this way

> with the two Governments [Ottoman and Qajar] and that necessarily something must be done, so that European Governments having understood the matter, shall inquire into our state. We are also a nation apart. We want our affairs to be in our own hands. [14]

Almost as soon as this revolt was launched, the Persians and Turks combined to put it down with the diplomatic backing of the British and the Russians. No one wanted an independent Kurdish polity, and they all contributed to stopping it. While not a nationalist revolt *per se*, the Shaykh's venture into Qajar-controlled Kurdistan and his capacity to rally the tribes there demonstrated that the Kurds were increasingly networking across Greater Kurdistan in ways that were beyond the control of established imperial powers. In the modern era, this pattern would become a problem for the nation states once they began to organize to venture into Kurdistan themselves.

The Kurds' sense of themselves as a Nation, an ethnically and religiously distinct minority, also developed as a function of their growing tensions with the Christian Armenians and resentment toward them. European countries, particularly Russia, constantly pressured the Ottomans to protect their Christian subjects. When Istanbul cracked down on their Christian minorities, the diplomatic backlash in the Christian world was normally quite severe and costly. As a result, the Ottomans actually provided the well-behaved Armenians with special privileges that other minority populations did not have which The Kurds resented. [15]

As the situation in Kurdistan further deteriorated and concerns over Russian subterfuge mounted, Ottoman administrators found themselves in search of a substitute for the old order that they had uprooted. In 1891, Sultan Abd al Hamid established an irregular Kurdish mounted force, the Hamidiya, in East Anatolia, which mirrored the Russian Cossacks. The new institution was designed to reestablish some semblance of an

order in Kurdistan that would permit the empire to govern the territory from a distance while relying on its inhabitants to act as a bulwark against foreign encroachment. The basic idea was to create an influential group of Kurds who, unlike the Shaykhs, could be counted on to be loyal to the Sublime Porte and would provide the empire with a security corridor. This Turkish-made elite would in turn facilitate the Kurds' co-optation and reintegration into the empire. [16]

In some ways, the creation of the Hamidiya reflected the chastened Ottoman understanding that direct control over Kurdistan was not feasible, even though a position in the region remained critical to the empire's defense. In the end, the Hamidiya did serve to create a security corridor and a strong Kurdish resolve against the Russians, but it proved counterproductive to the agenda of imperial integration. Hamidiya officers, who had been tasked with administering the Kurdish and Armenian communities and collecting their taxes, proved corrupt and abusive, and this inspired great resentment among the people. Among other things, it fanned existing inter-ethnic hostilities, and generated even stronger national consciousness among both Armenians and Kurds, who increasingly saw themselves as ethnic nations apart from the Turkish one and acted accordingly. [17] Most important for ordinary Kurds, the Hamidiya corps came to be seen as venal and erratic, and representative of the interests of a faraway power, not of Kurdistan.

By the late 1880s and early 1890s, two Kurdish dynasties, the Sayyids of Nihri and the Badr Khans, began actively promoting two very divergent streams of Kurdish ethnic nationalism. One emphasized autonomy within empire, and the other separation from it. Shaykh Abd al Qadir of the Nihri dynasty became a champion of greater Kurdish autonomy within the Ottoman imperium. The Badr Khans, by contrast, lit off a revolt

against the Ottomans in Buhtan in 1879 and 1880 which didn't last, but did involve greater networking between tribes based in the Ottoman and Qajar realms.[18]

The Young Turks' revolution in 1908 would become a pivotal event in the development of the pan-Kurdish movement. Growing Turkish nationalism led other populations in the Ottoman Empire to adopt similar nationalistic aspirations. Among those who were enthusiastic about an agenda for the modernization and westernization of the Ottoman Empire was the Kurdish intelligentsia. In a development that seems strange from the present perspective, some Kurds favored an inclusive, non-ethnic, form of Turkish nationalism in which they could be included In the Ottomans' last days, the development of a modern Turkish national identity also featured prominently in the writings of the urbanized Kurds, most notably Ziya Gokalp. A Kurd from Diyarbakir province, Gokalp was to become the intellectual father of pan-Turkish nationalism, or Turanism. As the imperial framework for organizing politics crumbled, he argued for the establishment of a new Turkish regime on the basis of a modern nationalism rooted not in race, but in shared moral, linguistic, artistic, and religious connections. Gokalp's ideas not only underpinned the formation of Kemalism, they also came to embody one variant of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey, which had as its ultimate objective equality based on citizenship rather than the autonomy or self-rule of ethnic nations. [19]

Initially, the empire under the administration of the Committee of Union and Progress, a formerly secret society of Turkish intellectuals committed to the empire's modernization, was relatively lenient in their policies toward non-Turks and in granting political autonomy to them. This policy was reversed, however, after the 1909 coup attempt in Turkey, Bulgaria's declaration of independence, and Austria's seizure of Bosnia. The collapse of the empire's western reaches stirred up Turkish fears over losing the East, and these fears only grew as news of nationalist and anti-Turkish sentiment

among the Kurds seemed to increase. Kurdish Shaykhs who had been embittered by the disorder wrought by the Tanzimat reforms increasingly made their frustrations public. In 1910, Shaykh Abd al Qadir issued a notice in the Istanbul press that the Kurds desired full autonomy from Turkey. That same year, Shaykh Said Nursi gave a rousing speech in the Kurdish city of Diyarbakir urging Kurds to overcome their differences, and pronouncing that "Kurdistan belong[s] to the Kurds and not the Armenians and not the Turks." [20] These political rumblings in Kurdistan only drove Turkish efforts to subdue East Anatolia further, especially because they rekindled longstanding fears that the Kurds would leave open the empire's back door for the Russians. Obviously such fears were not unwarranted. In 1910, one Kurdish rebel leader, Shaykh Abd al Razzaq, came out of exile in Europe to advocate the idea of Kurdish autonomy under Russian protection. [21]

By 1914, Turkish-Kurdish tensions began to subside as war closed in. Many Kurds rallied to the sultan as willing accomplices in the deportation and eventual mass killings of Armenians. The historian David McDowall notes that these events and the Armenian reprisals galvanized deep-seated ethnic hatreds and led the Kurds to be more aware of their unique identity than ever before. [22] But as the war wound down, Turkey was determined to prevent the emergence of an independent Kurdistan within its borders. The Turks had some success in penetrating and co-opting Kurdish organizations and social clubs in an effort to thwart this. After the Greeks and Italians attempted to seize areas of the Anatolian Peninsula, many Kurds gave up the push for independence and fell in with the Turks. When faced with the prospect of becoming subjects of a European power, the Kurds opted for the power they knew.

With the advent of the Kemalist regime, Turkish efforts to suppress anything that smacked of "Kurdishness" intensified. With the abolition of the caliphate, the government banned Kurdish language and all historical and cultural references to

Kurdistan in education, print, and civil society. Any visible symbol or organization suggesting Kurdish distinctiveness was criminalized. The very use of the words "Kurd" and "Kurdistan" became punishable offenses, and Kurds from then on were known pejoratively as "mountain Turks." In 1925, a Naqshbandi dervish, Shaykh Said, organized and directed thousands of irate Kurds in a revolt against the fledgling republic. In essence, this was an Islamic rebellion against the new aggressively secularist policies, widely seen as offensive to the Kurds, who remained deeply religious and looked nostalgically to the times of relative tribal autonomy. [23] The month after the uprising, the Turks instituted the "re-establishment of order" policy, enabling Mustafa Kemal with enormous power to shut down publications and associations at will. In effect, the Turkish state's forays into Kurdistan provoked not only greater Kurdish resistance it also required and drove the centralization of power in the Kemalist regime. The government subsequently unleashed a campaign of terror on the Kurdish populations, and by 1930, it had effectively crushed nearly all of the revolts. Subsequently, the government passed a law absolving Turkish forces of all murders of Kurds during the campaign. [24] While most of the violence subsided by the end of the decade, the Kurds in Dersim continued to rebel until 1938, when they were massacred.

In 1932, the republic began rolling out a new policy aimed at forcibly transforming Kurdistan and turning the Kurds into Turks. It began with government-led efforts to populate Kurdish areas with ethnic Turks and a systematic campaign aimed at imposing Turkish identities on the Kurdish populations of East Anatolia. Over the course of two generations, these Turkification policies proved somewhat effective in urbanizing, secularizing, and de-tribalizing huge portions of Anatolia's Kurdish populations. But while Kurdish society was altered by state power, it didn't produce

greater political integration, and the Kurdish desire for separation from the Turkish republic remained a powerful one. [25]

In fact, one inadvertent consequence of Turkification was to create a more modern, secular and ideologically coherent Kurdish national movement. It was also through this that the Kurdish Rebellion returned with a vengeance in the 1980s, especially following the birth of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), whose leader, Abdullah Ocalan, was an ethnic Kurd who grew up speaking Turkish and had been a student in Turkish state schools. [26] At the height of the PKK-led rebellion, the Kurdish nationalism in Turkey became synonymous with PKK's ideological radicalism and violence. This naturally strengthened Turkish ethnic nationalism and its hostility toward Kurdish nationalism. [27] The rebellion also opened up new opportunities for Turkey's foreign enemies to acquire new leverage over it by supporting the Kurdish rebellion.

In time, PKK's terror campaigns began consuming the nationalist movement itself, with implications for Kurds elsewhere. PKK's terror began to sow real divisions among the Kurdish populations since many didn't want a part of it. Through this, the nationalist movement became increasingly fragmented, and this enabled Ankara to mobilize and even arm factions of Kurds against each other and the PKK. The resulting operational and ideological disputes reverberated across Kurdistan, as opportunistic factions began to create cross-border linkages with factions operating in other countries. For example, in the intra-Kurdish tribal war in northeastern Iraq between the KDP and the PUK in the 1990s, the PKK took action against Barzani's KDP because the KDP's leadership was cooperating with the Ankara for its own purposes.

Since Ocalan's arrest in 1999, the PKK began to develop more of a political ground game. In East Anatolia, it has acquired much greater public support from Kurds because of its efforts to build new political institutions, and people there now openly

display their support for PKK and its autonomist political agenda.[28] Across the border, KRG officials are frequently mum about PKK's militancy but openly praise the PKK's greater political sophistication and, in some ways, the emergence of KRG and PKK's greater focus on politics has clearly influenced one another. PKK is still the dominant actor in the Kurdish movement in Turkey, but the nationalist movement is now broader, more political and less ideological, and not as regimented as it was in the past. There is a strong emphasis on cultural and political autonomy for the Kurds in East Anatolia, but there is a running disagreement over whether this should lead to democratic equality in a constitutional Turkey or to Kurdish independence from the republic altogether. To some Kurds, the self-governing KRG within a federal Iraq represents one model for splitting the difference, although there has been resistance to such proposals in Ankara out of fear that autonomy will be used to build the foundations for independence.

While Turkey's efforts to transform Kurdistan drove the build-up of the Kemalist regime as well as Kurdish nationalism, Kurdistan has also played an important role in the unraveling of Kemalism. Since the rise of the Islamist-rooted AK Party, new models of for political integration between Turk and Kurd rooted in invented concepts of "Ottoman pluralism" have become available. AKP has, in fact, won significant support from Kurds through its policies of "democratic opening" and by offering Islam, not ethnicity, as the foundation for citizenship. This new governing mythology and the Islamic argument that Kemalism effectively set Turkey at war with itself has had deep appeal among the Kurds. Indeed, it is difficult to see how AKP could have succeeded in rolling back the secular regime as quickly as it has done without political support for it from Kurdistan.

At the same time, Ankara's new Islamic orientation has driven two Kurdish nationalistic counter-responses, one secular, and the other Islamic. The former has attacked AKP's Islam-based outreach as a new form of Turkish imperialism, whereas the

latter has argued that "Turkish Islam" is not compatible with "Kurdish Islam" or, for that matter, with the Kurds' ambitions to national self-determination. The Ankara regime's deepening Islamic orientation will not, by itself, dull Kurdish nationalism. In fact, it is more apt to generate new fault lines between Turk and Kurd than fix existing ones.

Iran

The early Qajar rulers, like the Safavids before them, had a policy toward their Kurdish frontiers that relied heavily on working through existing tribal structures, and this meant the Kurds enjoyed considerable autonomy from centralized power. This began to change, however, when the Qajar dynasty became aware of the Sublime Porte's own modernizing and self-strengthening efforts, and also because of increasing security concerns caused by growing disorder in Ottoman Kurdstan in the post-Tanzimat era. Indeed, Ubayd's rebellion inspired the Kurds in Persia and in Ottoman Anatolia with a common sense of identity and purpose. As the Qajar fear of loss of control over their western borderlands grew, they committed power to Kurdistan in ways they had never done before. [29] By World War I, the regime had consolidated tribal authority and, through this, was working to centralize the administration of the Kurdish regions.

In the lead-up to the First World War, the British and their Russian rivals had been engaged in competitive meddling in Persia's internal affairs, and this only inflamed Persian nativism and fears that outsiders were seeking to carve them up. Thus, when the Qajar regime collapsed in 1925, there was broad Persian support for Reza Shah, a military man whose devotion to transforming Iran into a modern nation-state in many ways resembled Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's approach to Turkey. In this, Reza Shah's regime was like the Kemalist one in that it sought to incorporate Kurdistan fully into the

new state, and this meant transforming the Kurds into New Iranians. As Iran stumbled along on its path to modernization, Kurdistan erupted.

In the 1920's, one tribal leader, Ismail Agha Simko, came to embody the Kurdish resistance to the Shah's efforts to create a state. Simko took advantage of the Qajar regime's deteriorating power and succeeded in establishing a loose tribal confederation that inhabited a large swathe of territory near Lake Urmia, in northwestern Iran. In 1922, this Kurdish fiefdom was crushed by forces commanded by Reza Shah. After his defeat, Simko slipped across the border into modern-day Iraq, where he established a base of operations for launching new raids into Turkey and Iran. For years, Simko's forces harassed the Shah's government and threatened to undermine imperial rule. Simko's fight, like Shaykh Ubayd's fifty years earlier, wasn't aimed at the foundation of a new nation, but reflected instead a deep nostalgia for the era of tribal rule and relative autonomy that existed before Iran undertook to modernize itself. [30] In 1929, Reza Shah's government somehow persuaded Simko that he would make a great provincial governor. His interest piqued, he came out into the open, whereupon Persian troops killed him. For the Shah and successor regimes, including today's Islamic Republic, this would become the default approach for administering Kurdistan: reward those who cooperated and acquiesced to imperial authority, and eliminate those who do not.

The Shah's government pursued policies in Kurdistan not unlike the ones implemented in Kemalist Turkey. Among other things, it sought to dismantle Kurdistan's tribally-based political structures and to urbanize and educate the Kurds in Iranian state schools. As in Turkey, these policies had the unintended consequence of making the Kurds and their political aspirations more modern and nationalistic. However, the Iranian government did not pursue the modernization of Kurdistan aggressively as did their Turkish counterparts.[31] Iranian gradualism resulted in part because the Persian regime

wasn't itself as modern as the Turkish one, and it thus wasn't able to organize itself to project power into Kurdistan in the systematic and invasive fashion of the Turks. Moreover, the Shah's regime was not nearly as intent upon establishing an order based exclusively upon ethnic nationalism. The new Iranian state thus emphasized "Kurdishness" as an adjunct or extension of modern "Persianness" and Iranian national identity, rather than as something that needed to be suppressed. For all of these reasons, Iran's early efforts to domesticate and integrate its Kurdish frontiers had very different results than Turkey's.[32] Arguably, the Iranians were also more successful in co-opting the Kurds: Kurdish resistance to the intrusion of the Iranian state was slower to develop in any organized way and it did not lead to the violent insurrection that Turkey experienced.

Yet modernity arrived in Iranian-held Kurdistan not just via Persian filters but also from elsewhere in Kurdistan. Through this, pan-Kurdish nationalism came to offer an alternative to the Iranian state and to the domesticated "Kurdishness" which it sought to promote. This not only gave the Kurds a basis on which to distinguish themselves politically from the rest of Iran, it also began to generate some problems for the Iranian regime's outreach into Kurdistan. Whenever central power and its attractions were weakened, Kurdish nationalism asserted itself. In 1941, Reza Shah abdicated under pressure from the USSR and Britain, and in 1942, the Komala Party, or the Society for the Revival of the Kurds, was established in the city of Mahabad. In 1943, the party launched a pan-Kurdish journal, *Motherland*, and leaders were speaking openly about the desirability and prospects for a unified Kurdistan that incorporated the populations of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. At first, the persistence of tribal structures in rural Iranian-controlled Kurdistan limited the reach of pan-Kurdish ideals, but they did take root in urban centers, such as Mahabad, where they would flourish.[33]

In the course of the Second World War, Iranian state power collapsed in Kurdistan, and the influence of the Soviet Union filled in the resulting vacuum as Russian forces moved into northern Iran. Nationalist Kurds took advantage of this opportunity and the Soviet-aligned Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) was formed in 1945 under the leadership of Qazi Muhammad. Shortly after the party's founding, the legendary Iraqi Kurdish leader Mulla Mustafa Barzani arrived from Iraq with a force of about a thousand fighters in tow after failing to win independence for the Kurds from the British colonial administration. Not long afterward, Qazi Muhammad declared the independent Kurdish Republic of Mahabad, an announcement which had an electrifying effect not only on Kurds in Iran but also on Kurdish populations elsewhere. [34]

The republic's survival relied almost entirely on the good graces of the Soviet Union, which via Azerbaijan provided Mahabad with outside support. But because of latent Azeri Turk contempt for the Kurds, the Kremlin decided against maintaining a position in Kurdistan for the long term. The Mahabad Republic began to unravel almost as soon as Soviet forces exited Persia in 1946. While the Soviets pressured the Kurds to make peace with the Iranian government, without the backing of an outside power, Qazi Muhammad was not up to the task of negotiating Kurdish independence with Tehran. The Iranians ordered Barzani to disarm, but he and his band of partisans soon fled to the USSR. When the republic collapsed in 1946, the Iranian government broke up the KDP and Iranian troops re-occupied Kurdish regions.

While short-lived, the Mahabad Republic is remembered across Greater Kurdistan as a model of Kurdish self-rule. It is, after all, the only fully independent state that the Kurds have established, and the KRG has sought to present itself as Mahabad's successor. For Kurdish nationalists who study their history, however, Mahabad also taught a critical lesson: the support of an organized power may not be a sufficient

condition for the establishment of an independent Kurdish republic, but it is a vitally necessary one if a landlocked state is going to sustain itself.

After the overthrow of Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq in 1953, the KDP began to rehabilitate itself. As a result of Iranian repression, more and more Kurdish activists in Iran went across the border to Iraq, which was becoming a safe haven for the pan-Kurdish movement. Mustafa Barzani himself returned to Iraq in 1958 and began reconstituting a pan-Kurdish revolutionary force.[35] This was not sustainable, however, as the Iraqi-Iranian Kurdish liberation movement effectively came to face two enemies, one in Tehran and the other in Baghdad, which itself was worried about growing Kurdish power in the north. Tensions soon mounted between Kurds such as Barzani who were supported by the Shah to rebel against Baghdad, and those who were allied with the central government in Baghdad to fight the Iranians. In order to keep up his fight against Baghdad, Barzani turned his back on the Iranian Kurdish struggle against the Shah.

Throughout the 1960s, Iranian Kurds became divided between those who supported Barzani's faction in Iraq and those who opposed it. In 1967, a new Iranian Kurdish group, the Revolutionary Committee, was formed to promote pan-Kurdish nationalism and for a little over a year, the group was able to harass the Iranian military. Without wider Kurdish support, however, the Iranian government suppressed the movement. In 1970, Baghdad settled on an agreement for autonomy with the Kurds, and this led Iranian Kurds to approach Barzani and request his support in fighting for the liberation of East Kurdistan. But Barzani declined, as he did not wish to antagonize the Shah.

In the fall of 1978, the Iranian branch of KDP, under the leadership of the charismatic Dr. Abdul Rahman Qasimlu, formed a committee dedicated specifically to fomenting unrest against the Shah's government. When the revolution came in 1979, the

Iranian KDP was already well organized.[36] With the collapse of the Shah's government, the Kurds took over at governing themselves, and they seized the main military garrison in Mahabad in February 1979. When the Islamic regime began to consolidate its power, it managed to assert its control over the minority-dominated provinces with relative ease—with the notable exception of Kurdistan.[37] At first, the KDP naively welcomed the Islamic regime, which it thought would be more open to Kurdish political autonomy than the Shah's government had been. But as 1979 progressed, Khomeini declared *jihad* on Kurdish nationalism, which was deemed an un-Islamic enemy of the revolution. The state-led repression that followed was clearly motivated by the Islamic Republic's felt strategic need to establish itself along its western frontiers and root out subversive elements which outsiders might turn against them. In addition, since the Kurds were mostly Sunni, the Ayatollah's war on the Kurds was also seen as religiously driven.[38]

To establish its power across a rebellious Kurdistan, the Islamic regime was required to fight a guerilla war that lasted for years and consumed upwards of 10,000 lives. In the initial skirmishes, hundreds of Kurds perished, but the Iranian forces suffered heavy losses, too. Tehran thus sought a deal with the rebels as it regrouped. The Kurdish camp compiled a list of twenty-six demands, all asking for greater national autonomy, including the freedom to use their language, to establish their own security force, and to use Kurdish administrators in Kurdish regions. Later, in parliamentary elections in 1980, the vast majority of those elected from Kurdistan were from Kurdish parties. But the Islamic regime voided the results, and that same year, re-launched its efforts to bring the Kurdish provinces firmly into submission. By late 1981, Iranian troops seized control of Bukan, the last free urban center in Kurdistan, but it would take another four years for the regime to gain control of the countryside. The campaign in Kurdistan was still fresh on the minds of Iran's leaders at the start of the Persian Gulf

War. In 1991, Tehran would surge nearly 200,000 troops into Iranian-controlled Kurdistan as a demonstration of force against anyone with an inkling of separating. [39]

While cross-border ties and collaboration between Iranian and Iraqi Kurds continued to deepen, the Iran-Iraq War generated new divisions among them. The Iraqi KDP had established bases in Northern Iran in order to fight Saddam, who in turn was fighting the enemy of Iranian Kurds, the Ayatollah's Republic. What resulted from this was to become an altogether familiar pattern for the Kurdish Nationalist struggle, as intra-Kurdish tensions mounted between two factions formed with the purpose of fighting two different enemy governments. [40] While there were efforts to reconcile these factions, the regime snuffed them out. Iranian capacity for sowing divisions amongst its Kurdish opponents improved, notably through assassination. Most prominently, in 1989, Tehran successfully assassinated Abdul Rahman Qasimlu, the KDP general secretary in Vienna.

With the nationalist movement in disarray and increasingly fragmented, the Islamic regime once again reverted back to its preferred methods of empire maintenance. By the 1990s, the government began to provide the Kurds with more cultural autonomy and political room to breathe. In the Khatami era, Kurds loyal to the government began to win office in Kurdish-majority municipalities. The relative success of this policy was possible because the pan-Kurdish movement had been broken and external circumstances were favorable to it. There was, after all, a brutal intra-Kurdish tribal war in nearby Iraqi Kurdistan, of which Iranian Kurds wanted to be a part, and Iran also actively coordinated with Turkey to keep tabs on the Kurdish nationalists. All this conspired to effectively weaken the Kurdish desire for separation from the Islamic Republic, at least on the surface. By and large, Kurdish activists began to claim their goal was to live in a federal Iran in which Kurds have greater equality and autonomy, but not independence. [41]

By the Ahmadinejad era, however, the regime was once again tightening its grip over Kurdistan, and Persian nativism was also resurgent. To Kurds, this was seen as an imperial reaction to growing fears stoked in part by the U.S. military invasion of Iraq as well as the relative success of KRG in providing security for the Kurds.[42] The Iranian Kurdish movement has since assumed a more popular, "grassroots" character that operates largely underground and is increasingly disconnected from comparatively more Tehran-aligned provincial elites. Kurdish nationalism is also reportedly very strong among the youth, including those who grew up in the Khatami era and who thus had a taste of relative "freedom." In the future, therefore, whether the Kurds seek autonomy in a federal Iran or to detach East Kurdistan entirely from the Islamic Republic will be driven as much by developments in other parts of Kurdistan as in Tehran. Without any other compelling models, Tehran will have a much easier time controlling and extending its reach into Kurdistan. But if KRG is seen as a success, Iranian Kurds will seek this success for themselves, inside or perhaps also outside of the Islamic Republic.

Iraq and Syria

After World War I, the British colonial administration in Iraq created one government for two nations, one Arab, the other Kurdish. As Iraq and then Syria were decolonized, the tribal nature of Arab society meant that the Arab governments' policies toward Kurdistan were not as aggressively anti-tribal as they were under the westernizing regimes of Turkey and Iran. As such, Kurdish society retains a tribal character in Iraq and Syria that is absent elsewhere in Kurdistan. Originally, the tribes impeded the penetration of nationalist ideas and sentiments into those parts of Kurdistan ruled by the Arabs. At the same time, persistence of tribal autonomy helped to condition a general expectation in political autonomy that strengthened the Kurdish resistance to Baathists

who sought to subject Kurdistan to Arabization. Much like in Turkey during the 1930s, the intrusion of Arab power into Kurdistan and the violence of Arabization policies had the effect of modernizing the Kurds' ethnic identity. [43]

In Iraq, nationalism itself came to be mobilized by the charismatic Mullah Mustaffa Barzani, the founder of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which was created with the expressed purpose of establishing an independent state. Barzani had a knack for rising above tribal rivalries and interests. Through this, he amassed an impressive fighting force that proved itself in Iraq campaigns and against Iranian troops in defense of the fledgling Kurdish Republic at Mahabad. Barzani was also distinguished for his ability to win the support of outside powers. After Mahabad, the USSR backed Barzani's return to Iraq, and the Kremlin considered deepening its support to the Kurds a way of destabilizing the U.S.-allied governments in Turkey and Iran. Starting as early as 1961, Israel would also give support to the Kurdish rebellion in what began as a covert effort to keep the Iraqi Army pinned down in the mountains at home. According to Israelis involved on the ground, many Jews became sympathetic to the Kurds' national struggle and wished to fully back their bid for independence.[44] The Kurds also reportedly looked to the Zionist model of state-building as worthy of emulating. These relations were not lost on Iraq's Baathist rulers; in 1966, the Iraqi Defense Minister warned that foreign powers were conspiring to establish a "New Israel" in Kurdistan.[45] That perception is still prevalent in capitals across the region to this day.

Washington joined Israel and the Shah's Iran in backing the Kurdish rebellion. Like Iran, the U.S. wanted to grind the Baathist regime down, but it was opposed to Kurdish political independence. After the failure at Mahabad, the Kurds understood they required strategic patronage, but knew it could not be relied on; as Barzani said: "The Shah wants the Kurds with their heads over water, with him holding their forelocks."[46] In

1974, the rebels made a bid for formal independence. The next year, Iran and Iraq managed to resolve a longstanding border disagreement, at which point Iran cut off life support to the Kurds, who were summarily crushed. The Shah's and implicitly the U.S.' betrayal was branded into the Kurdish consciousness.[47] Afterwards, the Kurdish revolution fragmented, and the Baathist campaign to reduce Kurdistan to ruin was begun.

Syria's Baathist policies under Hafez al-Assad also sought to Arabize Kurds, though the Damascus regime never became as severe. A more apt comparison for Syria's policy toward Kurdistan wasn't Baathist Iraq, but its main ally, Iran: Kurdish political organizations were given greater autonomy, though troublemakers were swiftly marginalized or assassinated. At the same time, the regime sought to use Kurdish factions, namely the PKK, to pursue its own strategic agendas externally.[48]

Kurdistan's prospects, and the Kurds' views of the U.S. as well, were fundamentally reversed in 1991 and the subsequent establishment of a no-fly zone over the Kurdish Region. The war revived popular calls for national independence, and to many, an Independent Kurdistan seemed possible in a way that it hadn't since World War I. But the internecine tribal warfare that ensued became an open invitation to outside powers, and Iran, Baghdad, Turkey and also the PKK all dove in to help one side against the other. The fighting became inertial and debilitating for both sides, and with this, the prospect of Kurdish autonomy was close to evaporating. It was this reality that eventually brought the two factions to negotiations, and to reconstitute the KRG around a new political settlement with the conclusion of the intra Kurdish Civil War in 1998.

Iraqi Kurdistan has since rapidly emerged as the political and cultural center of the Kurdish World. Following the toppling of the Baathist regime in 2003, the Constitution of the modern Iraqi state has come to recognize Kurdish autonomy for the first time in its history. KRG's focus has been on securing its realm and building-up the

various economic and civic institutions that can sustain a nation. Now, an entire generation of Kurds has grown up under a Kurdish government, free to use Kurdish rather than Arabic as their official language. Significantly, this has been accompanied by a revival of Kurdish intellectual life. As of mid 2012, 2,265 Kurdish language books were published in Iraq; only 181 were published elsewhere in Kurdistan.[49] The Diaspora is also more and more involved via KRG in initiatives focused on the development of Kurdistan's economic and social infrastructure, and expatriates are moving back. Meanwhile, KRG has allocated $100 million annually to send citizens for advanced studies all over the world and to bring that knowledge back to develop Kurdistan. Through all of this, KRG has already had a "demonstration effect" on the nearby Kurdish populations in Iran and Turkey, as well as the now autonomous Kurdish enclave in Syria. More and more Kurds are looking to South Kurdistan as a model, and they've also been asking why they can't have this for themselves.

Kurdish Strategies

Can the Kurds cohere as a Nation? Will the trend toward greater self-organization and unification established by the Kurdish Awakening continue and deepen? The answers to such questions have far-reaching and potentially transformational implications for the future order in the Middle East. For centuries, Kurdistan has been a strategic cipher; the Kurds have been more acted upon by the better-organized powers that have surrounded them than actors in their own right. While some orders have been more favorable to Kurds than others, what strategic coherence there has been in Kurdistan—whether as a bufferzone, a frontier or a hinterland—has historically been more the product of outsiders pushing in on it than anything internally generated by the Kurds.

Nationalism penetrated into Kurdistan later and more unevenly than in other places in the Middle East. Once it caught hold, it provided the Kurds everywhere with a new basis for organizing their political life. But as Denise Natali has shown, the nationalist movements that emerged came to be defined less by their relations with other Kurdish movements than by their respective struggles with the four different regimes under which they lived.[50] Thus quartered, the Kurds' various bids for political independence were mostly uncoordinated, and very often were at cross-purposes with one another. Periodically, the Kurds did find ways to cooperate across borders. But for the most part, the different movements came to embrace their own distinct agendas, as they each had different "revolutionary" and "resistance" struggles to wage, and different enemies to fight.

Nationalism thereby came to suppress existing intra-Kurdish divisions and replace them with new ones. This reinforced the Kurds' vulnerabilities to outsiders, as well as their strategic myopia, as Kurdish factions would end up acting against and sometimes even warring with one another. Not surprisingly, nationalism itself came to be seen as a failure, and in the 1990s, there was a retreat into tribalism, and also into political religion.

Now in South Kurdistan, it is common to find people who will say that the "Kurdish Spring" occurred in the civil war and factionalism of the 1990s, and that they are happy to be done with it. This political maturity and sobriety has helped to rekindle the debate over where to assign the blame for the Kurds' failures to form a state of their own—was it, after all, the designs of outsiders and the imposition of an alien order onto Kurdistan, or was it the Kurds own weaknesses due to their division and lack of political development? There's no simple resolution to this debate, but in South Kurdistan there has been a growing emphasis on accepting responsibility for the Kurds' own failures, and to do what's possible to not repeat them and improve Kurdistan's prospects.[51]

This has been the basis for the political awakening and the KRG's successes so far, as well as for its ongoing efforts to transform nationalism and harness it so that it might serve the project of Kurdish state-building rather than undermine it. So far, KRG has pursued this goal of promoting coherence in two related ways, one internally-focused, the other externally.

Internally, KRG has actively sought to suppress the politics of "resistance" and "revolution," the default mode of the nationalist movements and insurgencies that sprang up in the twentieth century. Instead, it has sought to concentrate nationalism's energies and attentions on the development and transformation of Kurdistan. This would seem a common sense thing to do, but in the Middle East, it is exceptional, and it lies at the core of what is now distinguishing South Kurdistan from the neo-imperial, neo-tribal and sectarian politics which is animating much of the rest of the region, and driving its future. As a practical matter, this has included focus on the development of "national" institutions, including the economy, public education, and civil society, and by pushing particular social agendas, such as women's equality. Such initiatives have further differentiated the Kurds as a Nation. Kurds have a long way to go, but the further down this pathway that they tread, the more they distinguish themselves from their neighbors in Arab Iraq, Iran, Syria and in Turkey. By building up these "facts on the ground," there has been a general weakening of the bonds of the tribe and development of a genuine nationalism, one that is rooted in civic responsibility and "collective pride."

Externally, KRG has insisted on following a policy of neutrality with respect to the powers which surround it. This course is as necessary as it is difficult to maintain given the Kurds' predicament as a landlocked nation squeezed in the middle of more powerful ones. As a people, the Kurds, or factions of them, have an historical and potential dispute with every one of the powers which surrounds them—whether Arab,

Turk, or Persian. Not only will conflict with one of them be costly, and reduce the Kurds' ability to defend themselves on other fronts, but it will invariably generate faction among the Kurds, as it has in the past, just as it is likely to invite the scheming of outsiders. In the present and future era of strategic-sectarian rivalry, the pursuit of such a "Swiss Ideal" will require a sustained effort, and it may not always be attainable. But it will be an important policy to maintain, and enforce, if KRG is manage to build-up the internal defenses and cohesion it will need to prevent Kurdistan from becoming a playground for outside powers.

By these strategies, and connected ones, Kurds have a chance of developing the governing structures and defenses they will require to cohere and perhaps even sustain their independence, if this comes. Of course, this trend needn't continue; it could be reversed, perhaps with the encouragement of outsiders, and lead to a re-tribalization or re-factionalization of South Kurdistan. But it is a trend all the same which needs to be taken seriously, because if it succeeds, the Kurds will cohere as a nation, and on the basis of this, they will become more of an "effective actor" in regional affairs capable of doing strategy.

Of course, while nationalism and KRG's efforts at developing Kurdistan cannot be separated, they will not always be mutually reinforcing. Right now, Ankara and Tehran, as well as the U.S., are all pressuring KRG to act to rein in and moderate nationalism. If KRG pushes nationalism too aggressively, it runs the risk of provoking a state or several of them to combine against it. For these reasons, KRG is apt to move cautiously. Along this pathway, the development of a future "South Kurdistani" nationalism whose horizons are not Greater Kurdistan but remain firmly situated in Iraq's present-day boundaries is always possible. It is on this basis that KRG has attempted to convince the powers that be that it is not a threat, not yet anyway. It is also on this basis

that an already *de facto* independent KRG has sought and managed to establish a *modus vivendi* with the powers that neighbor it, including Iran, but especially Turkey.

Indeed, while the KRG's stated policy is neutrality, they are leaning heavily in the direction of Turkey. The deepening energy and commercial relations between the two are fundamentally reshaping the Turkish-Kurdish relationship. Turkey is also the most secure and direct route to where KRG officials self-consciously say they want to be, that is, among the world's "civilized" nations.

KRG thus has a number of strategic reasons to compel it to moderate nationalism, not least of which is Kurdistan's geography. In the future, the landlocked Kurds will continue to press for access to the sea and for access to the outside world. The Kurds understand from their history that there can be no independence without this, that without it, they will always be more subject to others than they wish. Till then, the Kurds' have availed themselves of multiple routes to the outside, including via Iraq and Iran, but especially Turkey. In the future, the heavily populated Kurdish areas along Turkey's border with Syria may also provide them with another way out, and KRG has already sought a role in stabilizing the Kurdish areas in the northeast of that country. KRG will continue to cultivate new pathways for growth, however changing circumstances permit or demand.

But against these pressures to rein in nationalism, Kurds from across Greater Kurdistan are now looking to the KRG not just as a model of Kurdish self-determination, but as an enabler of it. This presents an enormous strategic opportunity for KRG. Indeed, as the aforementioned congress and other initiatives point out, the KRG has self-consciously sought to position itself at the center of the Kurdish Awakening. For them, the operative strategic horizon is not KRG's present day borders, but Greater Kurdistan.

Indeed, as one top KRG official put it, the KRG is striving to be a modern government for Kurds in Iraq, "but we are also part of the movement."

In this context, the KRG's current understanding with the powers around it could seem more a tactical expedient than anything else. KRG's orientation toward Turkey appears rooted in a set of deeper strategic calculations about the future. Turkey, after all, is where the largest portion of Kurdistan lies, and also where the majority of Kurds live. If the KRG can harness any part of this for its own strategic purposes, it will have the opportunity to augment its security and strategic power in profound ways.

II. Strategic Kurdistan

One of the Kurds' origins myths tells of the ordeal with the Iranian emperor Dahhak through which they became aware of themselves as a unique "Nation." In some ways, the story also provides a serviceable encapsulation of Kurdistan's strategic history, especially in the modern era. Dahhak was a harsh and erratic tyrant afflicted by a grotesque "cancer" in the form of two snakes that grew out of his shoulders. To alleviate his disease, the tyrant demanded that every day his Kurdish subjects give him two children so the snakes could feast on their brains. When faced ultimately with extinction, the Kurds learned to deceive the tyrant. They mixed the brain of one child with lamb brains, then fed the concoction to the snakes, and thus were able to help some of their children escape to the mountains, where they have managed to survive as a people ever since.

During the "Rule of Four" era, the Kurds were more an "affected actor" subject to the wills and the state-building projects of the better-organized Arab, Persian, and Turkish powers which surrounded them than actors in their own right. Kurdistan's

modern fate was to be, in effect, squeezed between four different political and sometimes military struggles of attrition in which the Kurds were usually on the losing side and, very often, accomplices in their own subjugation. It was this modern ordeal and the Kurds' repeated failures to change their predicament that reinforced a deep strategic myopia among them and that drove a collective retreat into the belief that they had "no friends but the mountains."

With U.S. intervention in the First Gulf War, however, the strategic situation of Kurdistan was dramatically transformed. Until 1991, the four states that ruled over Kurdistan fought with one another and even employed Kurdish factions as proxies, but they held one core security interest in common: keeping the Kurds divided and down. Yet, as a result of the 1992 no-fly zone, this conspiracy of states against the Kurds was effectively shattered. The Baghdad-based regime could no longer effectively play its part, and a Kurdish safe haven was subsequently formed in northeastern Iraq. The state-building and political awakening that has since taken hold in South Kurdistan raises the prospect that these changes in the Kurds' circumstances will be lasting ones. Through this, the Kurds' strategic horizons, their operative idea of what's possible, has also become enlarged.

Now, a new nation under self-generated power is striving to be born. Such aspirations have rarely ever been realized other than through war. KRG's emergence, if it continues, will become a source of destabilization and possible conflict. Whether KRG is formally independent or not, and regardless of the character of its future relations with Greater Kurdistan, the very fact of its emergence will present a model of self-rule to Kurds living outside of South Kurdistan. This Awakening itself will have ramifications for the region's two most powerful states, Turkey and Iran, compelling them to respond to these new political pressures not only internally, but externally as well. The KRG says

it wants peace with all of its neighbors, for this provides the best opportunities for building and growing stronger. In 2003, the Kurds willingly submitted to remaining a part of Iraq, not least because the new Iraq possesses a constitution that recognizes the Kurds' right to continue developing their region for themselves peacefully. But KRG is also preparing for war; it now has a standing force of some 200,000 *peshmergas* and it is seeking more advanced weapons systems to keep a balance of power with Baghdad and preserve its autonomy from other potential threats.[52]

For the time being, it seems implausible that the Baghdad regime would be able to militarily re-establish control over South Kurdistan, at least not until it fully reconstitutes its air forces. (KRG has been attempting to stop this, just as it has sought to balance Baghdad through the acquisition of advanced weapons of its own.) Aside from this, Baghdad would also need to secure the active involvements of both Turkey and Iran to help asphyxiate the KRG, in effect. This could happen again. In 1991, after Operation Provide Comfort, Tehran and Ankara became increasingly concerned the U.S. was intent on establishing an independent Kurdish state on their borders. The two governments became instantaneously cooperative with each other, and Iran cut off its support for PKK. In 1994, President Demirel met with President Rafsanjani; the two heads of state hadn't met since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The focus of their meeting was the Kurdish challenge, and both leaders pronounced their opposition to any prospect of a Kurdish state. Subsequently, the security sectors of both countries met several times a year to exchange information on the Kurdish nationalist movement. [53]

Yet such a concert of established powers against Kurdistan can no longer be counted on, not least because the Middle East is already at war. The Islamic Republic and Turkey are engaged in a deepening rivalry with one another, as well as with the Gulf monarchies, across the Arab world. This tripartite strategic-sectarian competition is one

driver currently unraveling the modern state-based order, and the resolution to this conflict is nowhere in sight. Insofar as these three pillars of the Islamic Middle East continue to vie for power and influence, their rivalry will make it more difficult for them to cooperate with respect to the Kurds. In the meantime, as Turkey and, secondarily, Iran have built up new lines of equity in KRG through deepening energy, commercial and other connections, the perennial Turkish-Iranian rivalry is once again heating up in Kurdistan.

The Kurds describe the emerging configuration of power in Southwest Asia as a reversion to an older, pre–Sykes Picot order in which the Arabs were politically fragmented into sub-national tribal and sectarian units and the imperial powers based in Turkey and Persia held sway over all. Indeed, of all the existing states in the region, Turkey and Iran will have the greatest power over the immediate strategic environment in which the KRG must operate and the future Kurdish Spring will unfold. In the future, both countries will be seeking to develop positions and influence across Greater Kurdistan because their security and ambitions depend on it. But these powers could be more apt to collide than to cooperate. If the KRG can sustain itself in the ensuing struggle for power, then they will attempt to use these rivalries to their benefit, as indeed the emirates of the Golden Age once did.

In 1991, the "Rule of Four" was made the "Rule of Three," and now, with Syria engulfed in religious war and KRG with *de facto* independence in the context of a federal Iraq that is also at risk of ethno-sectarian war, Kurdistan lives under the "Rule of Two and a Nominal Half." In the next twenty years, a number of other anticipated developments are likely to also dramatically change Kurdistan's strategic prospects. First and foremost, demographic changes now underway are transforming the deep structure of power across Southwest Asia. The Kurds are experiencing a new demographic vitality

whereas the core populations of the modern powers that fenced them in—the Arabs, Turks, and Persians—are all in demographic recession. These population pressures by themselves will be a disruptive force on the current order of things, just as they will have enormous bearing on the future one. In particular, they will have far-reaching ramifications for the strategic conduct and performance of both Turkey and Iran. In time, they may also combine with the Kurdish Awakening and have the effect of emboldening the Kurds' nationalist ambitions to re-shape the political and strategic map of the Middle East from the inside out.

The Kurdish Population Ascendency

In twenty years time, the number of people calling themselves "Kurds" in the core of Southwest Asia now appears programmed to swell to upwards of 50 million. The Kurds are already the largest ethnic group in the world without a state of their own, with most estimates placing the total population at about 30 million. Of course, the Kurds themselves routinely claim much higher numbers, and not always without reason. The discrepancy has as much to do with the state suppression of accurate demographic data as it does with the imprecise nature of ethnicity and the fact that it is a difficult thing to measure. But even if we begin with the baseline estimates of 30 million Kurds, based on what can be surmised from present-day total fertility rates (TFR) in the heavily Kurdish areas of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, the total population of Kurds in the Middle East may grow in the next twenty years by 20 million, i.e., 67 percent, if not more. [54]

This and other population trends will have far-reaching implications for political and strategic affairs across the Middle East. Among other things, the burgeoning Kurdish population could become a tremendous boon to the KRG if it is successful at positioning itself at the center of the Kurdish Awakening and harnessing it. If this

occurs, the KRG—or, for that matter, other Kurdish actors—could acquire enormous new powers and influence over the internal politics of neighboring states. Even if the Kurds do not succeed at large-scale self-organization, however, their growing numbers will have far-reaching ramifications for the KRG's relations with the Arab lands to their south and for the region's two most powerful countries, Turkey and Iran.

In fact, the growth rates among ethnic Kurds now appear likely to outstrip those of the ethnic Turkish and Persian populations that surround Greater Kurdistan. The overall fertility in both Turkey and Iran has dropped dramatically in recent decades. At current rates, the total population of the two countries—including all ethnic groups—will not grow by all that much. By 2035, the total population of Turkey, both ethnic Turks and Kurds, is expected to grow by only 13.4 percent, to roughly 88.5 million. [55] Iran's population will likely grow by then by only 12 percent, to 85 million. [56] In both countries, therefore, the rates of overall population growth are less than half the rate among the populations of Greater Kurdistan.

Already, the burgeoning populations of Greater Kurdistan are affecting the substructure of power within Iran and Turkey, and this will intensify because of the now widening birth-rate differences among ethnic groups inside these countries. The Kurds' mountains, in effect, are becoming crowded, and their populations are already encroaching on the states below. This new demographic situation will generate new opportunities for the Kurds and for their Awakening-era ambitions, including their quest for a state of their own.

A "Post-Turkish" Turkey

When considered as a whole, Turkey's demographic future bears some resemblance to that of Western Europe, although on balance it is less stark. Since the mid-twentieth century, fertility rates across Turkey have been declining. Between 1960

and 1965, the country's TFR was around 6.05, but the rates have plummeted, and between 2005 and 2010, reached replacement levels of 2.15.[57] In Istanbul and other urban centers of Turkey's western half, birth rates are now even lower, at 1.7 children per woman.[58] Meanwhile, until the turn of the century, the population aged fifteen to twenty-four was growing steadily, but it leveled off entirely during the first decade of the twenty-first century.[59] These and other demographic indicators, combined with Turkey's higher levels of economic development and public health, all strongly suggest that the country's population is, as a whole, growing older.

Yet as a demographic matter, if not also politically, Turkey is not one nation, but at least two. While birth rates among ethnic Turks have fallen dramatically to replacement levels, Kurdish fertility has remained comparably higher and well -above replacement. In a country that has been ideologically and constitutionally resistant to acknowledging the existence of different ethnic groups, reliable assessments of ethnic birth-rate differences are not publically available. Turkish officials instead use the code-words "regional population growth" to refer to what will likely become a transformation in the country's make-up. TFR in the country's eastern half, and specifically in Southeast Anatolia where ethnic Kurds are known to be in the majority, is as high as 3.65—far above anywhere else in the country.[60] While demographic trends in West Turkey resemble the ones in Western Europe, population trends in East Turkey, according to Nicholas Eberstadt, look more like the ones in Pakistan.[61]

At present, Turkey's Kurds are conservatively thought to be about 19 percent of the total population.[62] At current birth rates, however, the Kurds will become a considerably larger proportion of the total in twenty years time, ranging between 30 and upwards of 40 percent.[63] And if these trends hold, the Kurdish population may well

become the majority in Turkey within two generations. Demographically speaking, the future of Turkey is thus looking increasingly "post-Turkish."

Turkish officialdom has clearly taken note of these realities. Prime Minister Erdogan has made boosting the country's birth rates something of a personal mission, urging women to have more children. Although, on the surface, the prime minister's calls could be seen as being addressed to both Kurds and Turks, he has also stated—in a clear allusion to trends in ethnic birth differentials—that the year "2038 will mark a disaster" for the country. [64]

The anticipation of this future—not just the demographic realities that are bringing it about—will be a defining issue for Turkish politics and strategy over the next twenty years. Few modern societies have undergone such a dramatic change in the relative proportions of dominant and subordinate ethnic groups as the change that trends in Turkey suggest it will experience. The closest analogue may be twentieth-century Lebanon; in 1932, its Shiite Muslim population was just under 20 percent of the country's total, but by 2005, some estimated this number had more than doubled, to 40 percent. [65] Along the way, the growth in the Muslim population relative to the once dominant Christian one contributed to the country's destabilization. Moreover, the comparatively younger and burgeoning Shiite population in particular would become the core of the Amal Movement and later of Hezbollah, both Iran-backed belligerents in the civil war that inflicted havoc on Lebanon for fifteen years.

To avoid a similar fate, Turkey will require a new politics, one that seeks a political solution to the Kurdish rebellion and reconciles the decades-long dispute between Turks and Kurds. In this, Turkey will have its work cut out for it. Not only is the Kurdish population growing faster than the ethnically Turkish one, but eventually, the majority of Turkey's population that is of working age and also of military age will be

born of Kurdish households. If these people are not employed, they will become a source of more unrest. If they cannot be politically integrated as full citizens of Turkey, their already strong longings for a state of their own will intensify, and they may rebel.

Ethnic birth differentials within Turkey correlate very closely with the country's urban and rural divide. Urban-dwelling Turks have had many of the experiences associated with declining fertility elsewhere, including increased use of birth control, expanding opportunities for women, and rising household incomes. Urbanization among ethnic Kurds, by contrast, has been much slower and it is much more uneven; many Kurds still live in the country's more rural and impoverished areas. Statistically, these realities are priming Turkey for greater civil strife. According to demographer Richard Cincotta, intra-societal conflict occurs with much greater frequency in older countries in which the median age is higher than twenty-five and expected to rise. [66] The principal driver of such conflict is often the differences in demographic trends between older, once-dominant, urbanized ethnic groups and a younger, more rural population that is growing and seeking a better life in the cities. As the latter population begins to encroach upon the cities, it begins to affects the livelihoods of people there.

This could reinforce the existing barriers to social integration. In Turkey now, intermarriage between Turks and Kurds is rare and becoming more so. Around 97 percent of married Turkish women between the ages of 15 and 39 are married to another Turk. [67] Moreover, in every four-year age bracket between 30 and 49, the percentage of Kurdish women married to Kurdish men is in the low or mid-nineties. [68] According to the Turkish statistics bureau, the propensity of Turks and Kurds to intermarry has actually decreased. In 1993, for instance, 8.3 percent of married Kurdish women had a Turkish husband, and by 2003, the number had fallen to 6.6 percent. [69] The fact that intermarriage has actually

decreased suggests that Turkey's population is becoming ethnically polarized and is not growing closer together.

Today, Turkey's most cosmopolitan city, Istanbul, is also the world's largest Kurdish city, having decades ago been a destination for Kurdish landowners and others migrating from the country's eastern half. Many of the Kurds who reside in West Turkey can be seen as the heirs of Ziya Gokalp's grand Turanist project to create a new modern, post-racial "Turkish" identity. While that project has succeeded in the secular West, it has also been in retreat in deep Anatolia. Moreover, despite the history of internal migration and the fact that Kurds can be found all over Turkey, 78 percent of the Kurdish population remains concentrated in the eastern part of the country. [70] Most recent data strongly suggests the Kurds are also staying put. According to reports from the Turkish statistics bureau, migration between the Turkish and Kurdish regions of the country has steadily declined. Meanwhile, the percentage of the Kurdish population living in the eastern half of the country has risen from 47.7 percent in 1965 to 56.1 percent in 2003. [71]

Between now and 2033, it is possible that urbanization and economic development in Southeast Anatolia could reduce the Kurdish birth rate and bring it more in line with the ethnic Turkish one. However, straight-line projections point to a future Turkey that will be profoundly transformed, and possibly also increasingly torn in two. While Turks are concentrated in West Turkey and the majority of Kurds are in the East, the spine of the country running across the lands of Central Anatolia and along the Taurus Mountains is much less populated. It therefore serves as a natural dividing line between two populations who are moving rapidly along two divergent demographic paths. Across the centuries, Turkey-based regimes have been projecting power across the mountains and into Kurdistan. In the future, this could become increasingly more

difficult to do, as the mountains could become a line of demarcation between two peoples headed toward separate national futures.

Iran's Imperial Problems

The controlling regime of the Iranian Empire itself faces a deepening demographic crisis, though one that is very different from the crisis that bi-national Turkey must contend with. In the next twenty years, the crisis faced by the Islamic regime involves the demographic contraction of its now dominant ethnic Persian Shiite base combined with growing minority populations in the empire's less-developed and peripheral provinces, including in predominantly Sunni Muslim Kurdistan.

The core driver of the Iranian Empire's demographic problems will be the continuing collapse of birth rates among Persians. As Nicholas Eberstadt has noted, with exception of instances of famine and war, the drop in fertility in Iran over the past three decades may very well be the sharpest in human history. [72] While most majority-Muslim nations have experienced dramatic declines in fertility, Iran's drop is exceptional. It has also occurred in an astonishingly short period of time: according to the United Nations Population Division, the Iranian TFR dropped from 6.54 between 1980 and 1985 to 1.77 between 2000 and 2005. [73] Over the past three decades, Iran has experienced a decline in fertility of over 70 percent, and the steepest drops are among ethnic Persians.

Persian Iran's demographic collapse is routinely ascribed to sociological developments such as increasing urbanization, women's education, and access to family planning. While these are all likely contributing factors, shrinking birth rates may also be linked to the advent of the Islamic Republic itself and to the general insecurity that prospective parents feel living under a regime that has engaged in declared and actual warfare with most of its neighbors and the United States since its creation. While such

sentiments are difficult to measure, it could be that Persian Iranians are having fewer children because they do not want to raise them in the Islamic Republic.

There is, of course, very little consensus among demographers about the actual size of Iran's ethnic groups or about how to measure them. The Kurds of Iran are routinely said to number anywhere between 8 to 11 million, and people commonly split the difference by pegging the Kurds at 12 percent of the total population. At the same time, calculations based on Iranian census data and other demographic data from Iranian sources suggest the Kurds could be as much as 20 percent. [74] KRG officials themselves claim that the Kurdish population in Iran exceeds 13 million. [75] That number seems more a declaration of belief than anything rooted in hard data, though it is not implausible if one considers, as many Kurds do, the Lur peoples of Luristan as ethnic Kurds.

Of course, measuring ethnicity is hard to do, and it is particularly difficult to do in Iran. Iranian society as a whole is much less "modern" than a country like Turkey, and this is a factor that has retarded the growth of ethnic consciousness, at least historically. The Islamic Republic itself, however, actively represses ethnic identity and data on it for reasons having to do with the regime's ideological underpinnings—"ethnicity" is regarded as a Western, un-Islamic concept. Because ethnic identity and nationalism can be a rationale for organized resistance to Islamic-Persian imperialism, the regime seeks to actively suppress it.

Be this as it may, some estimates peg the number of ethnic Persians at about 42 million, or roughly as few as 56 percent of the country's total population of 74.5 million.[76] The country's minority populations—Azeri Shiites, Kurds, Lurs, Baluch and Arabs—make up the remainder. Collectively, these minority populations now comprise as much 44 percent of the empire's total population—and many of them want out of the Islamic Republic as it currently exists. Moreover, given the estimated birth differentials

between ethnic groups, the total percentage of Persians in Iran appears programmed to decline while the total number of non-Persians will increase. Because of the difficulties in measuring ethnicity, it is difficult to assess just how quickly this will occur, but it will be a driver of Iran's political future all the same. The regime will thus come under intensifying pressure to integrate burgeoning minority populations. If it fails, it will risk opening the door to an ethnic backlash on potentially multiple fronts.

In this, Iran's western frontier may well be the empire's most vulnerable fault line. It stretches from the Azeri-dominated northwest on the Caspian Sea down through Kurdistan, then Luristan, and then to the heavily Arab province of Khuzestan, situated on the Gulf. Fertility rates among the populations of this multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian border region are all high. This is also the case in the empire's southeast, home to the tribal Sunni Baluch, who have actively resisted Persian-Shiite imperialism. While only 2 percent of the total population, Baluch TFR is over 5, the highest in the empire. [77] The Baluch will thus rapidly become a much larger portion of the population, and along with this, their insurgency against the Iranian regime may also grow.

As fertility among ethnic Persians has collapsed, Azeri Shiite birth rates have also tapered off to roughly replacement levels. The Azeri Shiites are now the largest minority population, numbering approximately 13 million, or 16 percent of the total population. [78] They are also the best-integrated minority, although there have always been occasional murmurings of Azeri nationalist separatism. In the future, this could become more pronounced if the regime defines itself more along ethnic Persian nationalist lines (as Ahmadinejad did), or if the regime weakens and comes under challenge in other parts of the empire. Indeed, while there is now reportedly very little coordination between different minority groups within Iran, activists in the Kurdish Diaspora has been actively

seeking to build relations among minority communities to bring greater pressure to bear on the regime.

Meanwhile, the empire's Sunni minorities—the Arabs (about 2 percent of total population), the Baluch (also 2 percent), and the Kurds (10-20 percent)—have all sustained birth rates above replacement level. The peripheral regions where these people live are still the poorest and most rural in the empire. This is especially so in the Baluch areas of the southeast, where TFR is above 5. [79] Iranian Kurdistan is relatively more urbanized than Baluchistan is, but according to Eberstadt, fertility rates among Iranian Kurds are well above replacement levels, between 2.3 and 2.9 TFR. [80]

The fact that the demographic collapse is affecting Persian Shiites disproportionately poses a number of potential problems for a regime that is rooted in Shiite Islamism. As Iran's minorities collectively begin to overtake the majority, this will create new pressures on the Islamic regime to discover a way of integrating them or to spend on developing the capacities to suppress them. When the Islamic Republic first tried to establish control in Kurdistan in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution, it became quickly bogged down in a costly guerilla war. In all likelihood, it will become more costly and more complicated for the regime to dominate Kurdistan outright in the future if Kurdish national consciousness grows.

This said, Iranian Kurds who have moved to Persian-dominated cities reportedly become more integrated and more inter-married with other ethnic groups than Kurds in Iraq or in Turkey. For this, language could be a useful measure of integration. The general trend has been for Farsi to spread in the country, and with this, it is carrying the dominant culture. As such, dual-background children, whether Azeri-Persians or Kurd-Persians, end up using Farsi and identifying with Persian culture. For these reasons, Kurdish ethnic consciousness now appears weaker in parts of Iran than it does in Turkey

or Iraq. So far, therefore, the general trend has been that the attractiveness of "Persianness" will not necessarily decline as a function of declining fertility alone. As such, both Iraqi and Iranian Kurds will claim that they are, as Kurds, brothers, but from different cultural backgrounds.

However, Kurdish national and ethnic identity is not insignificant in Iran, and its political power can grow. It is said to be strongest in the rural areas of Iranian-controlled Kurdistan, as well as in the predominantly Kurdish urban centers like Mahabad or Sanandaj. In the future, the number of people in Iran who identify themselves as "Kurds" will change as a function of the attractiveness of Persian culture and language. In this, however, the Islamic regime and "Persianness" may come to face heightened competition from "Kurdishness," since this is likely to become more attractive as a result of the success of the Kurdish Awakening. In the future, KRG's take-off has the potential to create conditions for Iraq's Kurds that are far in advance and more attractive to Iranian Kurds than what the Tehran regime can offer or is inclined to offer.

Like the Kurds, Iran's Azeris, Baluch, and Arabs all share borders with their kith and kin in neighboring countries. This potentially makes the Iranian regime's efforts to control its peripheries more complicated and costly insofar as it requires greater build-up along the borders, or insofar as maintaining domestic security requires disrupting an ethnic group's international networks. In this, the Kurds have much greater potential for damaging the security of the Iranian regime than all the other minority groups do. The Baluch of Pakistan, after all, are nowhere near as politically organized or equipped militarily as KRG is, and Islamabad, with Beijing's backing, shares Tehran's interest in keeping them that way. Saudi Arabia may intensify its radicalizing outreach in Khuzestan, but since the Arabs make up such a small portion of the empire's population, the internal threat that they pose to the regime is not as severe as a large-scale revolt in

Kurdistan might become. The venal oligarchy in Baku has demonstrated little interest in a "Greater Azerbaijan," and likely won't until the "post-Soviet Era" has become something else entirely. The latter is possible, especially if the Azerbaijanis were to strategically align themselves with their fellow Turks in Ankara, but this development requires Turkish preeminence, and so is farther off.

Iran's Kurds, meanwhile, are unique as their connections to Greater Kurdistan have historically inspired Kurds to rebel or to otherwise cause trouble for Persia-based regimes. As such, Kurdistan is the most likely place where the political ramifications of the Iranian Empire's demographic crisis could become regime-threatening. Here, it is useful to imagine that, farther off in the future, a Kurdish power whose western and southern borders are relatively secure could come to see a repressive Persia-based power more as an enemy that is occupying East Kurdistan.

Iranian officials, like their counterparts in Turkey, have been scrambling to reverse current population trends, with the Supreme Leader himself calling on Iranians to more than double their size to at least 150 million.[81] Under Ahmadinejad, the regime suspended the national family planning program, imposed limits on women receiving certain kinds of education, and enlisted the mullahs in Qom to ramp-up baby-making via fatwa.[82] Yet such pro-natalist policies have had little effect in changing people's behaviors elsewhere, and there is no reason to think they will make much of a difference in Iran. The same can be said about the Turkish government's efforts at boosting fertility. When such government-led efforts fail to produce results, governments then have the option of muddling along, and thereby to more or less allow demographic trends to run their course, or to take more radical action in an attempt to offset or avert their coming crises.

In choosing which way forward, neither Turkey nor Iran will be able to procrastinate, at least not for long, because of the fundamental vulnerabilities of the ruling regimes in both countries. In coming years, the new pressures and threats which these regimes face as a consequence of the Kurdish Spring in particular may come to be multiplied through their evolving competition with one another, as well as with the Sunni Arab Islamist movement backed by the Gulf Arab monarchies. Insofar as it deepens, this three-way strategic-sectarian rivalry will remain an engine of great political upheaval and suffering across Southwest Asia, and their contest may come to focus, as it has historically, on Greater Kurdistan. For now, of course, the main locus of this intra-regional competition is among the Arab republics which not long ago held sway across the southwestern stretches of Kurdistan, namely, Iraq and Syria. The clashes within these Arab lands are already affecting the Kurdish Spring and its future course.

The Green Line

The collapse of the old imperial order in the First World War bequeathed to the newly established Arab nation-states a set of political and strategic dynamics with which the states managed to cope for a time, until increasingly, they could not. Decades of economic mismanagement and new demographic and globalizing pressures rendered these regimes no longer viable. As the Arab Springtime including the religious warfare in Syria and Iraq has amply made clear, these countries were nation-states in name but not in content. Now, these countries have overtaken even Kurdistan as strategic ciphers; their weakness and continued breakdown into factions is both a function and a driver of the evolving strategic-sectarian competition within the region.

Now, as the state-based order in these Arab lands unravels, it is shifting the internal balance of power among the Arabs away from the republics and toward the Gulf

monarchies, principally Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Since these two monarchies no longer face competition from the Arab republics, their outreach in the region is hardwired to expand in coming years as a function both of their competition for power and influence with one another and with outside states, principally Shiite Iran, but one day possibly also Turkey.

Currently, the default mode of the monarchies' outreach is more tactical, opportunistic, and sectarian than anything else. In practice, this means more support for the contending factions of the Sunni Arab Islamist movement, notably the Salafists and the Muslim Brotherhood. The growth of these movements could hasten the decline of what's left of nationalism and the states could continue to weaken or unravel along ethnic, tribal and sectarian lines. Through this, new Islam-based subnational polities could be formed, but they will be costly for the monarchies to sustain, and it is difficult to see how they won't be constantly undercut by their own penchants for fanaticism.

The resulting deterioration of the state-based order among the Arabs will thus be one dynamic affecting Kurdistan. One big question on which the future of Kurdistan will turn is whether KRG will have the capacities to fend off Islamism's encroachment. A great deal will depend on how rapidly Kurdish state-building is able to supplant divisions among Kurds, and thus build-up sufficient public loyalty to inoculate them from Islamism's temptations. So far, KRG has managed to perform well at this, and it has also begun to share its experience and expertise with Syria's autonomous Kurdish enclave. If anything, Arab Islamism, just like Persian Islamism and Turkish Islamism, has reinforced the ethnic basis of Kurdish nationalism. If KRG can continue to draw strength from this, then it may derive some other benefits from the coming disorder in the Arab world, as indeed it already has.

The decomposition of the Arab political order has effectively freed large areas of Kurdistan from controlling Arab regimes and also spurred-on greater levels of Kurdish self-organization in both northwest Syria and of course Iraq. If this trend deepens, it could even become a driver of Kurdish state-building efforts, including build-up and modernization of the Peshmerga forces. Along the way, Syrian Kurds will be looking to the outside, perhaps to KRG, or maybe Iran, for security assistance, just as KRG will increasingly be looking for military training and advanced weapons from Turkey or Iran, or from extra-regional powers like the U.S. or Russia.

Taken together, these are breaking apart the *modus vivendi* that brought the Kurds into Iraq after 2003. At the time, the Kurds deliberated, but ultimately decided they had good reason to commit themselves to a unified Iraq. Unlike its neighbors, the new Iraq actually possesses a constitution that permits the Kurds to continue developing their region for themselves. The Kurds also had to take into account U.S. policy in favor of a united, federal, Iraq. Moreover, belonging to a sovereign Iraq also enhanced the Kurds' security, for it meant they were not left out in the open between Iran and Turkey. The Kurds have little reason to exit this arrangement insofar as it remains good for their security and, presumably, beneficial to their own state-building project. But insofar as their southern border becomes even more fractious and violent, the Kurds' desire for formal independence will grow. Kurds now see protracted war among the Arabs as inevitable. While this is bound to have implications for Kurdish security, they also see the continued deterioration of the situation in the south as a potential opportunity for formally detaching themselves from the rest of the country.

Any movement toward Kurdish independence will likely work to magnify the urgency with which both Turkey and Iran will feel they need to deal with the Kurdish Spring. Turkish-Iranian cooperation against the Kurds is not out of the question, but

insofar as they are warring with one another via the Arabs, coordinated efforts between the two powers in Kurdistan will be difficult. More likely, both Iran and Turkey will need to come to their own strategic policy for dealing with the Kurds, and these policies will be devised on the basis of each regime's self-conscious understandings of their respective vulnerabilities and strategic opportunities in light of the Kurdish Spring.

Turkish Strategies

Analysts once referred to the "Kurdish Question" in modern Turkey, but this already seems a quaint and overly simplistic way of framing the Turko-Kurdish relationship or assessing its future. The Turkish Republic now faces Kurdistan on three fronts—internally, where there is a burgeoning and increasingly more sophisticated Kurdish population; in autonomous Syrian or "West" Kurdistan; and in northeastern Iraq, home of the KRG. If it succeeds in coping with the Kurdish Spring, Turkey could acquire a level of security and strength that has eluded it since its creation in 1923. If Ankara cannot cope, however, Turkey will remain a middling country with glaring structural vulnerabilities, or worse, it could be plunged into inter-ethnic conflict. If the latter occurs, it is not clear where the conflict will end, especially if Turkey's outside enemies were to involve themselves with the Kurds, and when it does exhaust itself, the Turkish Republic may be reduced to a rump of what it is now.

Turkey is a market-oriented modern democracy, a flawed one, but a democracy all the same. From this starting point, the Turks could come to see that their best chance for security is through the creation of a more equitable order aimed at neutralizing Kurdish separatism and promoting a political solution to the rebellion. This can be done only through greater commercial and other involvement in East Anatolia and wider Kurdistan, not less. Practically, this will be difficult to do, but it may even be more

difficult to accomplish politically, not only because of recalcitrant Kurds who want out of the republic, but also because of intractable Turks whose ethnic nationalism will prevent them from making the necessary compromises.

In dealing with the Kurdish resistance, one option would be to turn, as past Turkey-based regimes have done, on divide-and-rule tactics or, failing this, on repression. In earlier times, however, the success of similarly-inspired policies—from the creation of the Hamidya, to arming anti-PKK Kurdish factions—derived from their ability to use tribal or ideological divisions among the Kurds against them. But insofar as the Kurdish Awakening progresses, dividing nationalist Kurds against one another will become an increasingly complicated thing to do. Indeed, as Kurdish actors are increasingly connected and cooperating among themselves, Turkey's efforts at subversion could inadvertently inflame Kurdish nationalism against it.

Meanwhile, the drift toward a "post-Turkish" future and the widespread anticipation of the demographic shift discussed above could compel the Turks to take drastic actions. As a general rule, societies in which a once-subordinate ethnic group comes to challenge a dominant one demographically are likely to have increasing friction and conflict—unless, that is, a political solution can be devised to handle the new population dynamics. Ethnic groups become fearful when their size declines in absolute terms, and especially when it declines relative to others. The experience of demographic decline can inspire what demographer Christian Leuprecht calls "memories of ethnic domination" which, when the declining group is confronted with a rising minority population, leads to a sense of "collective insecurity."[83] Leuprecht argues that the "potential for violence increases in the case of mutual demographic fears between groups." It is thus always possible that Turkish honor and ethnic nationalism will destroy any possibility of a political solution to the Kurdish Spring.

While the Turkish state may have legitimate reasons to act with force in East Anatolia or elsewhere in Kurdistan, the complexities and costs of all such punitive operations have multiplied and will likely continue to do so. Indeed, since its creation in 1923, the Turkish Republic has effectively been at war with the Kurds: with the exception of Korea, Cyprus, and Afghanistan, all of the Turkish army's deployments have been in Kurdistan. The campaign against the PKK from 1984–99 cost the country an estimated $300 billion and over 40,000 lives. [84] In the future, conducting such operations will be increasingly costly politically and economically because the Kurdish populations will be larger and more internationally connected than ever before.

Large-scale Turkish military involvements in Kurdistan could galvanize Kurdish nationalism, and this in turn could accelerate the formation of cross-border connections among Kurds or even encourage the Kurds to look to Iran or Russia for assistance. Likewise, if Turko-Kurdish relations were to deteriorate within Turkey, this would likely have adverse implications for Ankara's relations with Erbil. For that matter, this might well invite the meddling of Turkey's perennial foes. Across the centuries, Russia and Iran have sought to take advantage of the vulnerabilities of the Turkish position in Kurdistan, and they will continue to seek leverage in this way.

The Kurdish Spring is likely to fundamentally transform the relationships between Turkey's domestic and external security. As a strategic matter, the threats within the republic and without are no longer separated by sovereign borders. Instead, Turkey's domestic security and stability will require it to become ever more deeply involved in Kurdistan. It will need to effectively enlarge the frontiers of its political and commercial influence into Greater Kurdistan, and thus to draw the Kurds toward it so as to neutralize the threats of anti-Turkish Kurdish factions as well as the subterfuge of foreign powers.

Western countries have been rightly concerned with Ankara's autocratic trajectory and its new, "independent" foreign agenda. These are a product of the regime's Islamism, but they are not only that. In fact, both trends are likely to intensify as part of Turkey's efforts to deal with the Kurdish Spring. That is because coping successfully will require greater strategic autonomy, something Turkey can only acquire if it disentangles itself from the grasp of Iran and Russia. Since AKP's rise to power, the Turkish economy's take-off has quite literally been fueled by Russian and Iranian energy. Currently, Turkey consumes roughly 1.5 trillion cubic feet of natural gas per year, over half of which comes from Russia, and nearly 20 percent from Iran. [85] Both countries have thus acquired potential leverage over Turkey's actions and policy choices. Therefore, insofar as Turkey seeks to cope independently with the Kurdish Spring, it will need to reduce its dependence on Iran and Russia.

It is in this context that Turkey is presently pursuing its new energy relations with the KRG, whose natural gas reserves are estimated to be over 200 trillion cubic feet. [86] Turkey's involvement with the KRG is likely to grow. But as the country disentangles itself from Iran-Russia, it may have to devise new methods to organize and manage its new entanglements in Greater Kurdistan.

In attempting this, Turkey could look more and more to its Ottoman past and to the strategies that the Sublime Porte pursued to co-opt the Kurdish populations living along the empire's periphery and create a buffer zone. If Turkey can likewise create a security cordon by incorporating the region's Kurds as clients, even in a loose imperial arrangement, then the country would make considerable progress toward the strategic depth and autonomy it seeks.

So far, the now-ruling AKP government has attempted to do this through two broad policies. First, the AKP has sought to replace the ethnic basis of Turkish

nationalism and citizenship with Islam. Second, it has aimed to centralize power. Both policies are rooted in the AKP's ideological-political agenda, but in the era of the Kurdish Spring, both are also deepening for reasons independent of the party and its ideological agenda. In fact, both of these trends could become more pronounced if Turkey continues to try to build up a position in Kurdistan, not only because the Kurds will resist Turkish ethnic nationalism, but also because many Kurds want out of the republic. Thus, the so-called "democratic opening" toward the Kurds could actually require the reverse, that is, a greater centralization of power. Such a shift could set Turkey's autocratic trajectory in its course and could lead to the creation of a "managed democracy" comparable to contemporary Russia's.

Iranian Strategies

Over the next twenty years, the Islamic Republic could come to face far more urgent and existential challenges than the ones posed to it by the Kurdish Spring. However, Kurdistan could generate potentially debilitating problems for the Islamic Republic's control over the empire that may drain its capacities to cope on other fronts and also to pursue its strategic aggrandizement in the Gulf. Since 1979, the Kurds have complicated the Islamic Republic's efforts to establish and maintain itself in power in Iran. These difficulties, and the costs involved in dealing with them, are likely to multiply because of Kurdish political and demographic pressures. Were outside powers to become more involved with the Kurds, these pressures on the regime could be made more severe and could force the regime into courses of action which it would prefer not to take. Thus, reconciling imperial ambitions with the deep structural vulnerabilities of empire will be a core tension shaping Iran's long-term strategy, as it is for all empire-builders.

Over the next five years, however, the Kurdish Spring is more likely to act as a propellant for Iranian strategic outreach than an inhibitor of it. Presumably, the Islamic regime understands that it needs to stay ahead of the Kurdish state building that is taking place next door in Iraq, as well as the rolling population crisis at home. In this context, the anticipation of a future of structurally and demographically diminished prospects could come to reinforce the already significant pressures building within the regime to pursue its strategic aggrandizement now, rather than later. This, in turn, could drive its acquisition of nuclear weapons as well as its efforts to obtain a controlling position in the Gulf while it possesses the manpower to do so. From such a position, Iran could succeed at establishing itself as the region's new hegemon, and theoretically, it might then be in a better position to handle the Kurdish Spring.

Along the way, however, the regime will remain vulnerable to the Kurdish Spring and will thus be compelled to develop a strategy for dealing with it. The Islamic Republic will discover that some of the methods of empire maintenance it relied on in Kurdistan in the past will no longer work, and that in fact, they may pose quite a risk to imperial cohesion and other goals.

On its face, repression is a more practicable option for Iran in Kurdistan than it is for Turkey. Iran's Kurdish population is smaller and more urbanized than Turkey's. As a result, the Islamic Republic has had more success than any other state in degrading Kurdish nationalist sentiment and separatism within its borders and in keeping the Kurds' political organizations weak. Of course, this has required an enormous and sustained effort on Tehran's part, and in the future, it will become more difficult and costly to keep the Kurds firmly within the empire's grasp.

As the KRG continues to develop and support the political awakening across Kurdistan, Tehran's difficulties in repressing nationalism within Iran are likely to grow in

tandem with the consequences of failing to do so. In the past, Iranian Kurds have used any deterioration in the controlling regime's power to assert their own sovereignty, and they will continue to do so. Since the advance of Kurdish nationalism could also compromise imperial prerogative among the Sunni Baluch and the Arabs, and perhaps even the Azeris, the regime must be vigilant about keeping it in check. In the future, however, Iran's Kurds may discover they have much more external support, including from (and/or via) the Iraqi Kurds. While in the past, repression had largely been an internally focused operation, such a policy will increasingly require Tehran to operate externally, that is, elsewhere in Kurdistan, to be successful.

While Iran has some capacity to do this, the regime does not want to become involved in large-scale operations in Kurdistan. After all, this would likely become an enormous undertaking, since it is bound to inflame Kurdish nationalism against it. Moreover, it has the potential to become a serious drain on Iran's limited energies and resources, which the regime would rather devote to its pursuits in the Gulf. Presumably, Tehran also understands that its enemies would like to use Kurdistan as a base from which to try to contest it on its home turf and, by opening this second front, force limits on its outreach in the Eastern Mediterranean and Gulf.

For these reasons, Iranian outreach into Kurdistan could be cautious and restrained. So far, Tehran has used its influence in KRG to pressure it to remain inside a united Iraq. One alternative that it might consider is to rely on methods that hark back to the Safavid era. In the late 1990s, when Khatami first came to power, Tehran began to grant the Kurds far greater autonomy than they enjoyed elsewhere. In fact, for a significant period of time, Iran's Kurds controlled more than 80 percent of relevant local administrations in the northwestern part of the country. [87] This strategy helped to soften

Kurdish nationalism and also to reduce the costs involved in maintaining imperial control over Kurdistan.

In the future, some parts of the regime would likely prefer to follow such a "neo-Safavid" policy in Kurdistan, as this would free Tehran to pursue its interests elsewhere. However, the risks and also the limits of such a strategy are bound to increase for two reasons. The first has to do with the development of the KRG. When Khatami was in power, Iran had favorable geopolitical circumstances for implementing a "small state" strategy in Kurdistan, for the KRG was still recovering from civil war and was in no position to offer a counter-model for the Kurds. Ultimately, this policy was thrown out when the chauvinistic Ahmadinejad came to power because of fears that the KRG and the Americans in Iraq would inspire a new bout of separatism. Since the KRG still exists, the costs of empire are still higher than the regime wants, and they could become even more so.

Because of this, the regime will be obliged to strengthen its position and influence across Kurdistan. This will inevitably lock Tehran in a competition with the proponents of the Kurdish Awakening, the Turks, and assorted others who do not share Iran's interests. In the face of this, Iran will continue to seek to minimize the costs of its empire in Kurdistan while relying on its well-honed talents at subversion and political warfare to neutralize those who oppose it. As the Kurdish adage goes, "the Turks will offer either poison or honey; the Iranians offer only honey—with poison in it." In effect, the regime will seek to cope with its own vulnerabilities through subterfuge and by exploiting the factions, fears, and weaknesses of its neighbors. As the latter fall into disarray, the regime will be in a better position to offer itself as an alternative.

There is, however, danger in pursuing this policy for the Islamic regime as it is presently constituted. In the past, the growing factionalism within the regime has likely

been a source of its resilience in the post-revolutionary era: with more factions, albeit increasingly smaller ones, contending with each another, the Supreme Leader is in a better position to play factions off against one another and thus preserve the regime. But these methods of rule begin to break down in an imperial system like Iran's as the factions are able to grow larger and thus to amass greater power. From Khatami to the newly elected president Rouhani, there has been a strong tendency to conduct outreach among the burgeoning Kurdish populations in an effort to win their support. Over time, one inadvertent consequence of their actions could be the weakening of the central regime and an increasingly polyvalent configuration of power in the empire. While this would not be a problem for a commercial and constitutional empire, it becomes a major problem for imperial cohesion in an empire like Iran's.

For these reasons, the Islamic Republic's encounter with the Kurdish Spring could lead it to invent new modes and institutions of imperial governance. Whether Iran can do this over the next twenty years is an open question, although some already existing institutions, like the IRGC, provide the foundations for a new Iranian Empire. Moreover, the regime has begun experimenting with a new security service in Kurdistan, the Razim force, which is designed both to root out Kurdish separatism and to actively recruit Kurds as officers. Such an approach is reminiscent of the methods employed by the Safavids centuries ago, when they created a new praetorian guard through which to integrate the diverse peoples of the Iranian plateau into their imperial order. If the Islamic Republic is to maintain its empire and pursue its foreign ambitions, it could require a similarly new approach to Kurdistan.

III. Strategic Implications of the Kurdish Spring

In analyzing the alternative futures of the Kurdish Spring and its potential strategic implications, we've sought to consider a range of dynamics and factors both within Kurdistan and outside of it, including the following.

The Kurdish Awakening: The Kurdish national movement has come to focus greater attention on the development of Kurdistan, including the institutions of Kurdish self-rule. The epicenter of this awakening is the KRG of Iraq, which has established security and political stability in South Kurdistan, thus creating the conditions for economic and social development and greater connections between Kurds and the outside world. The Kurds' success has been especially notable when contrasted with the disintegration of political order in Syria, the ongoing instability and ethno-sectarian violence in Arab Iraq, and the international isolation of the Islamic Republic. Because of this success, the KRG has had a demonstration effect on Kurdish populations elsewhere, and it has consciously sought to situate itself as an effective state sponsor of nationalism and self-determination across Greater Kurdistan.

Population Trends: Over the next two decades, Kurdistan will likely experience a new demographic vitality, while the population bases of the powers surrounding the Kurds will be undergoing a relative, if not precipitous, demographic contraction. In 20 years time, the Kurdish population will become larger, perhaps as large as 50 million, and it will be comparatively more youthful than the Turkish, and Persian populations are likely to become significantly older. These population trends will fundamentally alter the deep structure of power across the region, and they will affect the strategies and performance of all aspiring powers, including KRG.

Decomposition of the State-based Order: The continued decomposition and potential disintegration of the modern framework of nation-states may continue. As the nation-state order is peeled back, it will reveal older, more stubborn of ethnicity, tribe and religion. This trend will especially affect the artificial Arab republics of Iraq and in the Levant, although it will also generate new pressures external and internal pressures on the region's two power states. At the same time, the weakening of the state-based order is likely to create new prospects for Kurdish independence.

Strategic Sectarian Rivalry: The three-way rivalry between the Islamic Republic, Turkey and the Gulf monarchies is likely to continue over the next twenty years. This competition is both "strategic" and also "sectarian" insofar as its future may be shaped as much by divergent religious agendas as it will be a contest for power and influence.

The Revolution in Energy Affairs: Changes in global energy production in the coming decades will fundamentally alter the geostrategic centrality of the Middle East. The most consequential changes will be occurring in the Western hemisphere. By 2020, the United States will likely be completely independent of Middle Eastern sources of energy. This will be a benefit to the American economy and potentially to national security. Meanwhile, it is likely that demand in Asia will grow: By 2020 India will import 91.6 percent of its oil, and the People's Republic of China will import 76.9 percent. The core focus of both of these Asian powers will be on the Persian Gulf and Southern Iraq. Kurdistan is peripheral to this, but may or may not become integrated into this new Eurasian energy economy.

The United States: Over the next twenty years, the U.S.' power and influence in the Middle East is likely to contract as a function of our declining interests in the

region. This withdrawal will be largely a political choice resulting a changing assessment of the region's strategic importance and over our larger sense. The U.S. will still have interests in combating terrorism, WMD proliferation, and possibly stabilizing alliances, or maintaining a geopolitical check on a Rising Asia.

The Asian Arrivistes: Growing energy demand in China and India is likely to compel both states to seek a greater position and influence in the Middle East, especially in the Gulf. However, neither of these countries possesses the military capabilities to secure their growing interests, and such capabilities will take time build. As such, both countries are likely to seek partnerships with regional states through expanding commercial and strategic relations, including arms transfers. In this, Rising Asia's capacity and influence over the Middle Eastern order will grow.

Russia: As an outside power, Russia is distinguished for its historical involvements in Kurdistan and its influence there. As far back as the sixteenth century, Russian military strategists had designs on Kurdistan and were discussing its importance to imperial security. In the twentieth century, Russia became the first and only power ever to back an independent Kurdish state. Currently, Russia has made extra efforts to foster diplomatic relations with KRG, being the first foreign country to open a consulate in Erbil since the toppling of the regime, and Gazprom has already committed to further exploring KRG's energy deposits. The history of Russian Kurd cooperation is not forgotten in the Kremlin, Ankara or in Tehran, nor has it been forgotten by the Kurds. Over the next twenty years, Russia will likely continue to seek a position in the Middle East that will allow it to preserve and possibly expand its position as an energy power and also to counter the prospective emergence of a Turkey-dominated region. An ally in an increasingly autonomous Kurdistan could prove a vital Russian asset.

Israel: Israel will increasingly become the sole Western power in the Middle East with an existential interest in shaping it. While the threats to Israel are likely to multiply, Israel's capacity to adapt and to deal with these threats will also develop accordingly. This could have the added effect of enhancing its role as a frontline state among Western countries, as well as Russia. Moreover, insofar as the U.S.'s position in the region continues to contract, Israel's efforts to actively to shape the kinds of strategic competitions it will meet in the future may increase. In this, Israel's involvements in Kurdistan are likely to increase, possibly even in substantial ways.

1. Turkish-Kurdish Condominium

In one conceivable future, the Turkish dream of becoming the preeminent power astride the crossroads of Eurasia could be realized once again. Yet the governing structure for achieving these ambitions could not be the Republic of Turkey founded in 1923. Instead, it would require a new polity which is not based on Turkish ethnic nationalism and which potentially, may not even coincide within the Ankara republic's present-day borders. This new political arrangement would be increasingly "post-Turkish," since it would rely on a new accommodation with the Kurds, and because the demographic core of its industry and military would need to be based, at least in part, among the burgeoning populations of Kurdistan.

Today's champions of "Neo-Ottomanism" have already constructed the basic building blocks of this future, although building further on these foundations will require a strategic vision and capacity far beyond what the country's current leadership has to offer. Turkish politicians are liable to continue to play upon popular anti-Israel and anti-Western grievances to create the requisite common feeling for better business relations with the Arabs, and perhaps also with the Iranians. But more importantly, it is Turkish

businesses and religious civil society movements that will lead the country's deepening involvements in the region, not Ankara's quarrelsome and polarizing politicians.[88]

Turkey's foreign power and influence will expand only if a national economy that includes the predominantly Kurdish southeast of the country continues to take off and to be integrated politically into the rest of the country. In developing itself, the country will require new strategic flexibility. Most important, the completion of energy pipelines from Iraqi Kurdistan could dramatically reduce the Turkish economy's dependencies on Russia and Iran, and thereby greatly enhance the country's economic and political options. This would place Turkish companies in a better position to engage in some competitive pipeline-building of their own. As a matter of national policy, Ankara could then begin to act on its plan of positioning Anatolia as the hub of a network of landlines of communication connecting Azerbaijan, parts of the eastern Mediterranean, southeastern Europe, and in the farther future, even Arab Iraq and the Gulf. Over the next two decades, the dividends paid by this much-touted "Pipelineistan" strategy will likely not be as great as its champions initially expected, especially if the global production of energy substantially increases. But along the way, Turkey will have established itself as the core of a new Southwest Asian energy economy, and more important, it will have enhanced its strategic autonomy considerably.

As Turkey's economic and other involvements in the Middle East develop, this will perforce require Ankara to develop an "independent policy" and further disentangle it from its already frayed connections to the West, built up during the Cold War. While some in the United States are bound to make a fuss, Brussels will be relieved by Turkey's deepening orientation eastward. At the same time, Europe's security services will be prone to look to Turkey as a strategically valuable partner if there is continued unrest among the Arabs from Iraq to Algeria, or if Turkey continues to look like a reliable

energy alternative to Russia. A nuclear Iran, or the anticipation of one, will also strengthen European views of Turkey as a security buffer between the Middle East and the West. United States politics will remain conflicted and unfocused, but policy toward Turkey could track closely with Europe's.

In this context, a degree of turbulence in a Middle East that is constantly on edge could become a net benefit that promotes the rise of Turkey. Gulf capital will continue to flow to Anatolia, and the West will look to the country as an indispensable ally, a "bridge" to the Islamic World. Even if NATO never pulls out of its decline into strategic obsolescence, the bureaucracy in Brussels could be invested with a new rationale for existing, and Turkey's continued membership in it would be assured. This could provide Ankara with the institutional bridge for the vital transfers of advanced weapons systems and other resources needed to modernize its own military. In the meantime, after the AKP-led purges of the early 2010s, Ankara could go about training a new officer corps whose loyalties would be to the leadership of the civilian government, and more likely, the Party itself. Through this, the country's planned political reorganization could continue on a more secure footing: a new constitution could be implemented, thus allowing for greater centralization of power under a president and possibly the advent of a "managed democracy."

Be all this as it will, Turkey will be able to realize its ambitions only through a sea change in the country's grand strategy and specifically, changes in its governing structures and policy toward the Kurds. Since the day it was founded, the Turkish Republic has been locked into a debilitating politico-military struggle with the Kurds. This has been an enormous drain on the country's resources that has zapped its true strategic potential. Between 1984 and the arrest of Abdullah Ocalan in 1999, Turkey's

wars against the PKK-led Kurdish rebellion took over 40,000 lives and cost over $300 billion dollars to prosecute.

In effect, Turkey has been at war with itself. However, without some semblance of internal peace, the country's dreams of becoming a great power will be impossible to achieve. Indeed, the country's economic take-off over the last decade has been accomplished at least in part because the Turkish-Kurdish conflict has died down. But Turkey has been walking on eggshells ever since, and the fragility of its working "peace" hangs over the future of the country's rise. Of course, Turkey has made some important efforts to find a political solution to the Kurdish insurrection, especially in recent years, thanks to the AKP's "Kurdish Opening." But Ankara has little choice, for outright repression of the Kurds is no longer an option. Now, and over the next two decades, the costs and complexities of prosecuting the struggle against the Kurds are likely to multiply. This will be the result of changes in Kurdish society and, by extension, in the nature of Turkey's competition with it.

First of all, the Kurdish populations of Anatolia will become too numerous and too internationally connected for Turkey to either suppress or neglect them. Over the next twenty years, birth differentials between Turks and Kurds will make the latter a much larger portion of Turkey's total population, perhaps as much as 40 percent, and the Kurdish population could even overtake the Turkish one by the late 2030s. A racially chauvinistic Turkey could seek to offset this demographic future by attempting to import new Turkic citizens from the Caucasus and Central Asia. But such strategies will not compensate for the fact that there could be upwards of 50 million people calling themselves "Kurds" by 2030, and at least half of them will be living within Turkey's present-day borders.

Moreover, twenty years from now, the majority of people entering Turkey's workforce—and also those of fighting age—will come from Kurdish households. While the Kemalist founders of the republic long denied the existence of Kurds and called them bumpkins and "mountain Turks," changing population structures mean the "mountains are full," and the Kurds are increasingly moving to Anatolia's cities looking for work and modern opportunities. If they are not employed, the "national" economy will remain in reality a regional, Turkish one, and among the Kurds, social unrest and longings for separation will intensify. If the country cannot incorporate them and make them citizens, it will be plunged into a new regime-threatening crisis, and possibly into civil war.

The Ottomans aimed to rule the Kurds by supporting local strongmen and dividing the Kurds into tribally based emirates or by employing them as mercenary forces to fend off the empire's enemies in the hinterlands. The Kurds remain a divided people, and Ankara might be tempted to think that these imperial options still exist. Indeed, Turkey's high opinion of the country's imperial past has clearly aided the country's turnaround with respect to the KRG. The Turks fully understand that the new pipelines between northeastern Iraq and their country will help to detach the KRG from Arab Iraq, and by extension, could potentially place the Kurdish national movement on solid ground. But a Turkey-KRG energy corridor is, of course, far preferable to having Kurdish energy outputs flowing eastward to Iran, or southward, for it means that Turkey will, in effect, have acquired a valve on the Kurdish economy that it can turn off whenever it needs to. At the same time, as Iraqi Kurdistan grows wealthier from energy revenues, we can expect that Ankara will continue to prop up pro-Turkish elements in Erbil, including the internal regime security force, the Asayish, which will be instructed to eject pro-Iranian elements while simultaneously cracking down on Kurdish nationalists. Through

this, Turkey will in effect seek to "vassalize" the KRG and to make it into an emirate subordinate to Turkey.

Such a strategy might work, but only up to a point. In fact, a divide-and-rule policy mounted from outside Kurdistan would be complicated, if impossible, to pull off under future circumstances. The KRG, after all, can always acquire other strategic outlets, including Iranian ones. But more immediately, the KRG has consciously networked and positioned itself at the center of the Kurdish nationalist movement, thus making Turkish efforts to politically vassalize and isolate it more difficult to implement. This reality has been driven home by the growing "demonstration effect" that the KRG's emergence in "South Kurdistan" has had on the Kurdish populations of "East Kurdistan," "West Kurdistan," and "North Kurdistan." Through this, the Kurds within Turkey and the Kurds without have become increasingly networked, and they have discovered grounds on which to cooperate. The aspirations of Turkey's Kurds are thus no longer a function of Turkish beneficence and indulgence. Why, after all, should the Kurds of Turkey obligate themselves to somebody else's republic as second-class citizens when they know they can be accepted as equals, as brothers, by their self-governing kith and kin in nearby Iraq? If there is a Kurdish government ruling in South Kurdistan, why not also in the north, where the majority of Kurds live?

Turkey will pine for the days when it faced what analysts once over-simplistically called the "Kurdish question." But the fact is that it now encounters the Kurds on three fronts—in Iraq, in the former Syria, and from within—and Ankara can no longer remain strategically myopic about its borders with Kurdistan. The destruction of the central government in Iraq in 1991 and the disintegration of the central government in Syria since 2011 have irreversibly changed Turkey's regional security environment. Without the complicity of a powerful anti-Kurdish state on the other side, the republic's borders in

the east and the south have become ever more difficult and expensive to police and keep up. If anything, these once sovereign borders have become more like frontiers that transect Kurdistan and require constant negotiation with multiple Kurdish actors to maintain.

Turkey's perennial enemies, Iran and Russia, have already taken note of the country's new situation and its glaring structural weaknesses. Over the next twenty years, they will resist Turkey's efforts to secure itself and pursue aggrandizement, and they will look to Turkey's soft Kurdish underbelly to control it and keep it in line. After decades of struggle, many Kurds affiliated with the PKK still want out of the republic; they will not seek democratic equality, but a state of their own. Moreover, the country's Kurds as a whole are beginning to appreciate how their demographic ascendancy is dramatically improving their political prospects, either for "democratic equality" or for a state of their own. Turkey would be wise to get ahead of this, for it is the greatest obstacle to its future ambitions. If Turkish preeminence has any chance of becoming a future reality, the country will require a new strategy. Above all, it will require a new governing arrangement that is based on a new modus vivendi between Turk and Kurd.

The future transformation of Turkey need not come about through self-conscious calculation or planning, nor is it likely to. The Kemalist republic itself was hatched only after decades of failed efforts at modernizing a flailing and unsalvageable Oriental empire. Likewise, the future impetus for a new governing arrangement could be that the imperatives of reform repeatedly meet dead ends and "fail upwards." The latest policy initiatives launched by the AKP government but pioneered on the ground by the country's Hizmet/Gulenist movement seek reconciliation with the Kurds on the basis of Turkish Islam and the model of "Ottoman pluralism." A civic-minded religion could be an indispensable platform for overcoming past resentments and promoting national

integration. But Turkish Islamists, with their heavily nationalistic conceptions of Islam, are deluding themselves if they think the Kurds are going to accept this without any recognition or autonomy for themselves, not as Muslims, but as Kurds.

Meanwhile, a substantial component of the Turkish public is, and will remain, dead set against the prospect of giving the Kurds any autonomy within their borders, just as hardcore nationalists will rail against any prospect of the republic's "Kurdification" via constitutional fiat or otherwise. While resistance to reform from Turks and Kurds is expected to be fierce, with the right strategy, it will not be insurmountable.

For the architects of a new Turkish power, the most politically productive strategy would be one that is combined with the country's need for a new security strategy. In the future Middle East, there will inevitably be an abundance of security crises that can be used to push through constitutional reforms. Longstanding Turkish fears over dismemberment and the scheming of Persians and Russians will likely be the most powerful motivator of all. Both Iran and Russia have geopolitical ambitions and the resources to devote to them. Insofar as the Iranians see the Turks as their main rival going forward, the two countries will face off with each other in Kurdistan. Through use of the Qods Force and by backing disgruntled Kurdish factions, Tehran will attempt to sabotage any rapprochement between the Turks and the Kurds. With no political warfare capacity of its own, the only conceivable response that Ankara would be able to muster would involve formally bringing the KRG under its wing, and in effect, seeking to transform its Kurdish frontier into a Kurdish security belt.

This will require Turkey to assume enormous liability, for Kurdish nationalism will make any alliance vulnerable to foreign subterfuge. Therefore, Turkish security will demand nothing less than to deepen the relationship with the Kurds, something that can be achieved only through a new understanding between the two nations on the basis of

co-equal sovereignty. Given the intractability and dividedness of public opinion in both Turkey and Kurdistan, it seems unlikely that a democratic republic could manage the politics needed to accomplish this. Instead, the combination of the two nations will likely require a new constitution with a powerful president in Ankara and an overarching, imperial structure.

To achieve this, Turkey's future leaders and their counterparts in Kurdistan will argue that the republic's long struggle with the Kurds has made the country too dependent on outsiders, especially the West, for its own security, and that the Kemalist "birth defect" has been bad for all. Unofficially, this will give rise to vague conspiracies in both "Turkey Profonde" (that is, the Turkey outside of Istanbul) and in Kurdistan of devious agendas spun by the West and by Jews long ago to structurally weaken the Ottoman Empire. The republic, they will argue, is no longer viable without a dramatic reduction in its national territory or a change in its artificial, "Western-imposed" governing arrangements. Thus, the political reinvention of Turkey will inevitability go hand in hand with the country's continued strategic disentanglement from the West.

And through this, a new bi-national condominium between Turk and Kurd could be created that would enlist the KRG as a Turkish ally to rein in Kurdish separatism, and together, Ankara and Erbil would coordinate their efforts. In time, Turkey's ascent and the KRG's rise as the center of Greater Kurdistan could become mutually reinforcing; the enhanced security of one would enhance the security of the other. New economic and other interdependencies could become the basis for the slow asphyxiation of Kurdish separatism. With Iranian and Russian schemes thus defanged, the new polity could go about consolidating itself and securing its new borders.

By thus ending its war with the Kurds, Turkey will be re-founded on the basis of a new Turko-Kurdish condominium. This will permit a new Turkey, a new Anatolian

polity, the opportunity to conduct an external strategy aimed at shaping the region from a position of unprecedented security and strength.

2. Iranian Hegemony

In the next twenty years, Iran could succeed in becoming the hegemonic power of southwest Asia. One likely pathway toward this future would involve Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons along with the failure of the United States and the West to stop it. Bolstered by this success, Iran could pursue its ambitions, chief of which would be controlling the Persian Gulf and its energy resources. Along the way, Iran's strategic aggrandizement would be contested and its power would face built-in limits. But without active U.S. involvement, resistance to the rise of Iran rise could be disorganized, sporadic, and likely ineffective. Through its advances, Iran could shape a new Middle East that would be too costly or too difficult for the United States to return to should it so choose, and this could greatly reduce U.S. geopolitical influence and capacities to cope with a "rising Asia."

While nuclear weapons would likely be a necessary condition for Iranian hegemony, they are not a sufficient one. For Iran, such power could not be built through state-based alliances and military dominance, as the United States has done, nor could it be constructed through commercial and religious outreach, as a "neo-Ottoman" Turkish-Kurdish polity might try to do. Iran will not have the population base, manufacturing potential, or ideological capacity to successfully conduct itself in any one of these fashions. Instead, if Iran transforms itself into the hegemon, its core strategy for building power will probably look much like what the Islamic Republic is doing today. It would involve the creation and maintenance of clients and, above all, the skillful use of subversion and political warfare against its foes. Through this, a rising Iran would seek to

control the region's energy commerce, the bulk of which will be flowing eastward to Asia's markets. In time, this position could be secured with the help of some strategic enablers, likely Russia and China, or maybe even India, whose combined dependencies on Iran could grow as U.S. power contracts.

Along the way, Iran could declare it has nuclear weapons, or it may bide its time and continue deepening and hardening its breakout capacity. The country's nuclear ambitions and the strategic concentration it needs to build its power may not always be mutually reinforcing. Once acquired, nuclear weapons could make it more difficult for the regime to resist its self-aggrandizing or even messianic urges. Because of this, we think a marauding Iran's capacity to inflict damage on the United States and the region will grow, whether it succeeds in becoming the hegemon or not.

In order to achieve the hegemony hypothesized by this scenario, the regime first will have to deal with the two crises -- political and demographic -- which it now faces, both of which will affect its international conduct and performance over the next twenty years. The political crisis is twofold. It is generated by a dispute both among the "children of the revolution"—that is, the regime—over the future of their revolutionary enterprise, and between the regime and those who would rather do away with the Islamic Republic altogether.

This "non-regime" opposition is highly fragmented and comprises secular or at any rate anti-clerical Persian and Azeri middle classes as well as the country's Sunni minorities, including the Arabs of Khuzestan, the tribal Baluch in the southeast province, and the Kurds. The combined potential of these latter two groups to destabilize the regime is likely to grow as a consequence of birth differentials between them and the ruling Persian-Shiite minority. Meanwhile, for the Kurds, the model of Kurdish self-rule

just over the border in South Kurdistan will remain far more attractive than life as subjects to somebody else's tyranny.

To succeed, the regime needs first to resolve its internal disputes in order to put itself on a more secure footing to cope with the opposition and its other longer-term structural challenges. While the Islamic Republic is resilient, its recombinant potential to adjust and to pull this off is unproven. Moreover, along the way, it will face others that seek to exploit these vulnerabilities—Israel, maybe Turkey, and perhaps even a strategically minded United States that develops a working relationship with the KRG.

One likely way forward for the regime would be to attempt to reorganize itself around the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The IRGC may already be the decisive political force in the country, and it is not as encumbered as the hierocracy and civilian elites by the deepening factionalism and allegations of corruption that are now debilitating them. Especially given their critical role in thwarting Saddam Hussein's invasion in the 1980's, the Revolutionary Guards have had great success at portraying themselves as heroes and champions of the Islamic Revolution. They are also feared by Iran's enemies outside the country and by the opposition within. As a creation of the 1979 revolution, the IRGC has had elite and popular representation in it from the start and has thus functioned as a vehicle of national integration. It will likely continue to play this role as the regime enters a new phase in its post-revolutionary development.

As a highly regimented and ideological organization, the IRGC embodies what has becoming the "effectual truth" of what the revolution was for— Iran's establishment as the leading anti-Western power. It is also an organization through which a new and more productive arrangement among the regime's factions can be achieved. Recruitment into the IRGC is now at an all-time high, as the corps is drawing off the offspring of the

last youthquake of the 1970s. For this up-and-coming generation, the IRGC represents a career, but more importantly, a path toward social standing and power.

Going forward, this new cohort may emerge as the core of the regime, and the IRGC could conceive of itself as the new mainstay of the regime, replacing the clergy. But unlike the hierocracy, the Revolutionary Guards would also undertake to pay the bills and would likely distribute wealth through their ranks and businesses more widely and evenly than the mullahs' religious networks. They would recruit from across the country and thus could provide a foundation for political reintegration between Persian and Azeri Shiites. An IRGC-dominated government could then bring to an end the bickering among the decadent mullahs and fortify the country with a reinvigorated revolutionary spirit. Being less concerned with ideological niceties, it could also incorporate Iranian nationalism into its Shiism. (An alternative strategy for the IRGC, in which it downplays both Iranian nationalism and Shi'ism in favor of a multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian imperialism is described below.)

IRGC planners must know they will not possess the manpower or ideological appeal to attempt to dominate the region outright. Moreover, it will take time for the Revolutionary Guards to consolidate their power at home, and they will therefore make serious efforts to fight off attempts by other regime factions to abandon the nuclear program, since possession of nuclear weapons would help bolster their power. Of course, any announcement that Iran has acquired nuclear weapons would scramble world politics. Iran might be wary about triggering a backlash from the United States or setting off a cascade of new nuclear states in the Middle East and might therefore seek first to receive the support of Moscow and the People's Republic of China (PRC) for its nuclear bid and the aftermath. Through this outside leverage, Moscow could wrack Turkey's nerves for a time, and the PRC could act to rein in Pakistan and prevent it from selling or deploying a

nuclear capability to Saudi Arabia. This would forestall the advent of a Sunni bomb in southwest Asia. With its eastern flank secure, Iran would thus be freer to pursue its goals in the Gulf and across to the eastern Mediterranean.

When it declares it has nuclear power, Iran will discover it has enormous new resources at its disposal. It will have the ability to create crises that will drive up oil prices, any remaining sanctions will crumble, new lines of credit will be secured, and the regime will be rescued from bankruptcy. Iran could also demand, and would likely receive, subsidies from the countries that surround it, and in exchange for energy concessions, it would also receive plentiful aid from China and India. At home, the overall prestige and power of the IRGC would grow, allowing it to focus its efforts on outreach.

Once Iran is nuclear, pressures will grow for it to move quickly and with purpose. Its core aim will be to establish control over the region's energy commerce, that is, in the Gulf States, including Iraq and Saudi Arabia. In this effort, Iran might seek the assistance of Russia, whose regime needs high-energy prices and has capability and experience in the region. Thus combined, Iran and Russia could intimidate OPEC and influence the cartel's energy prices. Since China and India may still be too weak to pursue an independent policy in the Middle East, they would likely try to deepen their relations with Iran and Russia. This might set off a new era of intra-Asian rivalry, but either way, Iran and Russia would be in a position to collect the geopolitical return.

Even with Russia's backing, however, the nature of the Iranian regime would hinder its strategic aggrandizement and place costs on the maintenance of any new position it might acquire. The country will face many enemies, including some relatively competent ones such as Israel and possibly the United States, which will contest the regime's advances and exploit any of its vulnerabilities or missteps. Among Sunni Arabs

especially, resistance to Iran will likely be disorganized, but intractable and fierce. Seeking to dominate this outright would be a fool's errand, and we assume Iran, as well as Russia, understands this already.

Therefore, the success of Iran's bid to establish itself as the new hegemon will depend on its skillful implementation of a program of client creation and political warfare aimed at exploiting the vulnerabilities of its foes. In these areas, the Iranians are seasoned and competent, and they will become more aggressive and daring at using these capabilities after going nuclear, or as U.S. power and influence in the region contracts.

We envision two principal paths by which Iran would attempt this, and thus two separate areas in which Iran's opponents might seek to apply counter-pressure. The first locus would be the Gulf States, and the second Kurdistan and Turkey. The Gulf States will be weak and fractious to begin with. In Iraq, Iran will continue to cultivate clients in Baghdad and among the Shia. It will also target the Hawza in Najaf, and this could hamper any organized Shiite religious resistance to Iran's outreach for at least a generation. Iran's aim will not necessarily be to attract others to its banner, but to keep all the parties involved as weak as possible and the Arab Shia relentlessly agitated, divided among themselves and against the Sunnis.

In the Sunni world, Iran would have two options. The first is to foster some kind of pan-Islamist sentiment and rapprochement with those susceptible to its influence, such as the various Muslim Brotherhood organizations or Qatar or the Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan. This strategy would be useful only in pursuing discrete objectives, like opening a second front on Iran's political opponents or sabotaging Saudi Arabia's networks. It would not be able to succeed on a large scale, however, and would certainly generate resistance. Turkey would vie for influence with the Muslim Brotherhood groups, and the House of Al-Saud would ramp up its promotion of Wahhabi-Salafist movements, likely

focusing on acquiring proxies in Khuzestan, western Iraq, the former Syria, and along the margins in Kurdistan. But it is not clear how these efforts could become anything more than a nuisance to a consolidated and purposeful IRGC. If anything, they will drive sectarian populism, and this may further fragment and overwhelm the state-based order.

This, in fact, would feed into Iran's most effective strategy for establishing its hegemony, the promotion of greater fractiousness and religious strife among Muslims themselves. In this, it would be following a pattern of supporting as many different groups as possible and playing them off against each other. In the Gulf, Iran would begin by preying on the master divide between Shia and Sunni, by supporting Shi'a popular opposition to Sunni regimes in places like Bahrein, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Its aim would not be to foment a large-scale conflagration, but many smaller clashes. Therefore, Iranian subterfuge would also home in on intra-Sunni divisions, seeking to pit the Arabs and Kurds against the Turks, the Qataris against the Saudis, the Ikwhanis against the Salafists, tribes against the state, the jihadists against all, and everyone against the Kurds. Sunni countries would struggle to concert their efforts in any meaningful way against Iran. The more this happened, the more Iran would be able to call for Sunni-Shia rapprochement and even extend some military support.

In the Gulf, outsiders might consider applying counter-pressure to Iran by strengthening a Sunni defensive coalition. Some deterrence might be established, but its foundations would be insecure: Sunni disorganization and inevitable intra-Sunni feuding would render any such coalition vulnerable to Iranian subversion. It is difficult to see why Al-Saud would not acquiesce in time to Iran's will, though the monarchy might just as well crumble as its Salafi children revolt at home and the Eastern Province, home to all the oil and the Shia, declares independence from Riyadh.

All in all, Iran would benefit tremendously from growing sectarian tensions in the region. Widespread perceptions of an oncoming showdown between Sunni and Shiite would make it easier for Iran to convince the Shiites to take its side. Without security assurances from anyone else, the polities based in Baghdad and the Basra region—the gap between them may grow through the success of the IRGC's divide-and-rule tactics—as well as the population of Bahrain, would find little reason not to acquiesce to Iranian encroachment. As this dynamic deepened, new clients would present themselves to Iran, including the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt and, possibly, the Alevis of Turkey.

Outside of the Gulf, Turkey and Kurdistan would become ongoing concerns for a rising Iranian power. Turkey's likely response would be to attempt to beef up its connections with the KRG and to turn South Kurdistan into a security cordon. While the Turkish Republic might see this as necessary to secure its own soft underbelly, this could involve Turkey's assuming enormous liabilities. In this, the decisive factor would be the Kurds.

In Kurdistan, Iranian outreach would be competing directly with Kurdish state-building in Iraq. A viable Kurdish state in Iraq, whether formally independent of Baghdad or not, would have a profound impact on Iran's ambitions and future, for not only would it have direct implications for Tehran's control over its own Kurds, it would also have ramifications across Iran's longest and most vulnerable border, from the Caucasus down to the Gulf. Moreover, an independent KRG would effectively mark a defeat for Iran because it would be coming out of Iraq and would thus affect Iran's equity in Baghdad and sharpen the dispute over the status of the Kirkuk oilfields. Iran's preference would be for that energy to flow south and outwards via the Gulf, but with an independent KRG, Kirkuk's alignment would be up for grabs and might tilt toward Erbil.

Because of this, Iran would likely attempt to subdue the KRG and build on its position in Kurdistan relatively quickly, seeking to capitalize on all of its opportunities before they have the chance to disappear. It would therefore attempt to drive Arab factions against the Kurds and to use the Kurds' fears over resurgent Sunni Islamism in Syria and Iraq to draw them closer to Iran. It would also seek to play on residual tensions between the KDP and the PUK, as well as between the Gorran opposition party and the KDP/PUK governing alliance. As Iranian power grew, avowedly pro-Iranian politicians would win office in Sulaimaniya Province. One outcome is that the KRG would be sawn in two, between an Iran-aligned south and a Kurmanji-speaking, Turkey-aligned north. If this occurred, Iran would then incite Alevi and Syrian PKK factions to act against Turkey for the purposes of undermining what is left of government in South Kurdistan. In time, there is no reason why pro-Iranian leaders could not be set up in the KRG and energy to Turkey cut off.

If, however, Kurdish state-building had progressed, either with the help of a Turkish security umbrella or independent of it, then Iran would face stiff resistance in Kurdistan. The methods it has used in the Gulf would not apply in Kurdistan, since unlike the peoples of the Gulf, the Kurds have shown they can organize and would thus stand a chance at repulsing IRGC encroachment. Indeed, it is possible that the ascendency of the IRGC would reinforce the sectarian and Persian chauvinist nature of the regime. Therefore, it is difficult to see how Iran could incorporate the nation's many minority populations, including its Kurds, for whom a Persian-based state would be a problem. This could make it more difficult for Iran to manage its non-Persian minorities, especially the Kurds. If, in the 2020s, this resistance combined with Iran's demographic challenges, it could prove debilitating for the Iranian regime, whether it has a nuclear capability or not.

It is possible that the problems posed by Kurdistan could reinforce a deeper evolution in an IRGC-dominated Iran, and one that would be necessary to establish Iran as the hegemonic power. Following this alternative strategy, the IRGC might, in time, dial down the Iranian regime's propensity to Persian chauvinism and Shia sectarianism. In fact, the IRGC could consciously model itself on the Safavids, who created praetorians among ethnic minorities to sustain and cement their rule. The IRGC could thus become a vehicle not so much for Shiite nationalism, as for imperial integration, sustaining the loyalty of Iranian minority populations by bringing their most influential members into IRGC ranks and granting them special privileges. If the military is the state, then whoever joins the military, including the Kurds, becomes the state. Such an Iranian order would be a model for governing Iran's internal minority groups and could also become the model for Iran's conduct externally, in Greater Kurdistan, as well.

This is perhaps the only card that an aspiring Iranian hegemon can successfully play against the country's own ethnic divisions, and for that matter, against the threats it will face in a developing Kurdish polity to its west. The Kurdish question is thus central to any future shaped increasingly by Iranian power.

Iran's foes should take heed of this, for with external support, an independent government in South Kurdistan could be kept alive as an alternative to the Persian domination of Kurdistan and could even become the key staging ground for the strategic rollback of a future Iranian Empire. It can be expected that Israel, in alliance with the Kurdish Diaspora, would seek to open up a new front on Iran in this way. The United States could become another potential supporter of a free Kurdistan, and a decisive one at that. A future Middle East increasingly dominated by an Iranian hegemon would require a considerable degree of U.S. acquiescence, and thus the United States would likely choose to minimize its exposure to the region because it has no compelling national

interest to remain there. Not all countries would be as fortunate as the United States, however, and as U.S. power contracted in the Middle East, Asia's rising powers, specifically China and India, but perhaps also Russia, might flow in. Their most likely point of entry would be via a rising Iran. Thus, even in retreat, the United States might have sound geopolitical reasons to seek to complicate Iran's rise or to retain an option through which it could reinsert itself into the region should the defense of its enduring extra-regional interests demand it. Playing Sunni factions against the Shiite-based alliance is always possible, but risky and requires U.S. involvement in a religious war. For these reasons, U.S. involvements in Kurdistan are justified, especially in an era of anticipated American withdrawal from the Middle East.

3. Springtime of Peoples

We assume the modern framework of nation-states in the Middle East will continue to weaken and decompose. This dynamic will likely deepen, or it may taper off, but it will be a relentless one all the same that will clear the way for an era of disintegration, in which the region's various tribal, sectarian and ethnic groups try to assert themselves. Through this, the real boundaries that structure the region's political and strategic affairs—not the lines drawn on maps by European powers over a century ago—will be irreversibly, and possibly profoundly, altered. Sovereign borders could be shattered or refashioned, nations could fold in on themselves and fragment, and some countries, like Syria, or possibly Iraq, could disappear altogether. At the same time, once-submerged nations, like the ones long dreamed of by Kurds, would discover new opportunities to be born.

The contraction of U.S. power and influence in the region will accelerate this overall process of decomposition, but the reinsertion of American power would do little

to stop it. This would require a sustained effort, something the United States would not be likely to undertake, especially at a time when U.S. national interests in the Middle East are expected to shrink. Instead, the pace and scope of the unraveling will be driven almost entirely by actors and developments on the ground, not by faraway powers.

The dynamic of decomposition could come to operate like a flood that is stopped only when it hits a dam or some organized resistance. As popular pressures mount, the state-based order will begin to show new stress fractures, and coping with these will require enormous resources, the application of considerable force, and, above all, a new politics. Already, fundamental questions are being asked: What new political forms will be sought? As states seek to justify their existence, what new ideological assumptions and principles will they use to organize political life at home as well as their external conduct in a region undergoing enormous upheaval and transformation? In the end, will the preponderance of states hold on and succeed at reestablishing their authority and power? Or, indeed, will the floodgates be opened?

The collapses and partial collapses of states in 2011 revealed something that many countries in the Middle East—and not only the Arab-dominated ones—have been trying to keep hidden for decades: that they were republics in name, but not in content. Through the failures of the grand ideological projects of the twentieth century, countries have been emptied of anything that can sustain a modern and healthy political life. Nothing has yet appeared to fill this void; no new compact has been offered to bind the now-contending factions together again. There will be calls for a fresh look at constitutionalism, but however much this is worth supporting, it will take time to work out, and in many locales, factionalism and other realities simply will not support it. In the future, the most readily available set of principles for organizing the new politics will be Islamist.

For the state-based order, the remedies are prone to be far worse than the ailment. The Islamist politics of the present and coming era already track with the historical modes of Muslim politics and are thus evolving along two separate and opposing pathways. The first tendency, in effect, has been to "go small," and this has involved a hollowing out of nationalism and a "re-tribalization" of populations along ethnic and sectarian lines. This will continue to produce growing factionalism within countries and factions that reach across state borders, and in both ways, the new Islamic tribalism is contributing to the weakening of sovereign nations and the centralizing of powers.

If there is a positive aspect of any of this, it is that political life could come closer to reflecting populations as they are in actuality, not as the failed nationalisms and state-building enterprises of the twentieth century tried to make them. As the framework of nation-states is peeled back, a pre-modern, almost feudal-looking map of statelets and ethno-sectarian enclaves will be revealed in greater detail. In time, the new polities formed through decomposition may lead to the evolution of new understandings and relations between neighbors that may, farther off in the future, become the basis for a more manageable and relatively benign security environment.

But before this happens, decomposition is bound to become violent. After all, this is the twenty-first-century Middle East, not end-of-history Europe. Many will cling to the modes and orders that they know, or the utopia they wish they lived in, no matter how obsolescent or delusional these become. Moreover, as states unravel, "ungoverned spaces" will proliferate, just as the competition over shrinking resources intensifies and forced "population exchanges" become as much a function of geopolitical rivalries as local ones. Human beings have had good reasons to prefer life in states and empires to the hazards of war-prone and vulnerable city-states. Thus, there is already a second and

countervailing trend in the new religious politics, one that is striving, in effect, to "go large" and to reconstitute the broken political order on the basis of Islam.

In the future, two of the main, though not only, propulsive forces behind the new Islamist imperialism will be Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran, both countries with considerable potential and ambitions to match—and perennial rivals at that. As the order unravels, the ongoing revitalization of the Turkey-Iran rivalry will be as much a function of external developments as of the vulnerabilities that both regimes face at home. Indeed, the unraveling of nations will be nerve-wracking for the self-conscious rulers in both countries. Turkey, after all, is a country with two nations, one Turkish, the other a burgeoning Kurdish one. Iran is an empire that has tried successive schemes but consistently failed at integrating its constituent parts into a unified republic. Since 1979 in Iran and in Turkey since 2002, the ruling regimes have looked to their respective visions of Islam to cope with factionalism within and to organize their competitive responses to one another, including their foreign outreach.

The new Islamic tribalism and imperialism are, in some ways, flip sides of the same coin, and in the coming two decades, they may reinforce one another. As these twin tendencies peel away the framework of nation-states, the region's political and strategic affairs could come to be constructed on the basis of patron-client relationships. The Islamic Republic, already a pioneer in this regard, now maintains many clients, from the Levant to Yemen, including in Hezbollah-land and Hamastan, and of course, in the Syrian regime and among elements of the PKK. Meanwhile, Turkey's Islamist government has attempted to neutralize the Iranian Shiite threat by redefining citizenship in the republic and its external relations on the basis of Sunni Islam. In the coming years, ethno-sectarian enclaves will look increasingly to these imperial patrons for security and financial and ideological support, while these two aspiring hegemons will seek strategic

aggrandizement to conceal their vulnerabilities at home and abroad. As their rivalry deepens, the security environment could increasingly look like a reversion to the pre-modern past, when the Ottoman and Safavid empires still existed.

The glaring difference in the twenty-first century competition is the addition of a third camp, the Gulf monarchies, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Unlike Iran and Turkey, these countries are not capable of large-scale organization on their own, but their money and zeal mean they will remain primary movers in the new Islamic politics all the same. Together, they have bankrolled the two leading Sunni Islamist factions, the self-styled vanguards al-Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood, and they are also the principal benefactors of what purports to be the Islamic solution to all factions, political Salafism. The Gulf monarchies' promotion of these diverse and conflicting Islamic currents is a function of their rivalry with Shiite Iran as much as their struggle with one another. While the monarchies are capable of concerting their efforts with one another and, when necessary, with Turkey as well, such cooperation will be tenuous in the absence of a great Sunni power to impose some semblance of orthodoxy on Sunnism.

A future Turkish hegemon could be such a power or, potentially, such a power could emerge if the Islamist vision of one of the now contending monarchies manages to win the upper hand in Egypt, the real prize in Sunni Arab Islamist calculations. Were this to occur, Egypt could conceivably reconstitute itself as a formidable power in its own right by blending populist Salafism with militarism, although this is farther off in the future.

Be all this as it will, we can already see the outlines of the future competition in the Islamic Middle East, which is presently organizing itself into at least three ideological blocs, one centered on Iran, another on Turkey, and the other a fractious "Sunni Arab uprising" backed by the Gulf. Insofar as this tripartite competition will be led and

conducted by state-based powers, "strategic" calculations based on regime preservation and other interests may override the "sectarian" ones that animate their wars and outreach to clients.

Initially, the division of labor within these ideological agglomerations would almost certainly involve the clients spilling all the blood and the state patrons cheering them on. Yet as the new Islamic tribalism and imperialism both deepen, one of these state patrons—if not all—could begin to conceive of itself less as a regime and more as a religious cause, and thus sectarian passions could trump strategic calculations. This tension between the "strategic" and the "sectarian" will be a defining one in the religious wars to come.

In all likelihood, the clashes in Iraq between 2006 and the present and the ongoing war in Syria will be remembered as the opening skirmishes in these wars of religion. In Syria, one possibility is that an Iran-backed centralizing power in Damascus will ultimately prevail and restore control over the country. This outcome would set a standard, teaching all the ruling regimes in the region that fragmentation is survivable so long as you have a patron. It is more likely, however, that Syria will remain formally divided into three, if not four, different pieces. The Alawites will fall back on their homeland in Latakia, and they may also retain a position in Damascus and Homs. The emerging Alawistan would therefore be connected to the ocean, and in time, would have little reason to stick with Iran and might even look to rebuild ties with the West or its coastal neighbors, Israel and Maronite Lebanon. Meanwhile, the east and south of the former Syria will be divided, controlled by contending Sunni factions, including al-Qaeda types and the Muslim Brotherhood, both of which have their own outside benefactors. The autonomy-seeking Kurds in the northeast would become an ongoing security concern

for Turkey, the likely locus of heated Turkish-Iranian rivalry, and in time, an adjunct to the KRG.

Either future for Syria—control by one power or division—will sharpen the increasing tendency among regimes and ethno-sectarian enclaves to define and organize themselves along the lines of one of the three ideological agglomerations. From here, it is difficult to see how Iraq, or another country in the Levant, will not become the next theater for the contending blocs—assuming, that is, that they manage to avoid a direct military confrontation.

Iran's losses on the eastern Mediterranean would hardly be debilitating for a power of its kind. However, it could feel compelled to launch a new round of sectarian fighting via Shiite factions from the Levant to Yemen if only to demonstrate to its clients the importance of a powerful patron and to its subjects at home that hierocratic tyranny is preferable to sectarian chaos. Turkey would follow suit, perhaps in conjunction with Qatar, in trying to rally the Muslim Brotherhood organizations of the region against the Shiite menace. The Saudi-backed Salafist groups would insinuate themselves wherever the opportunity presented itself. In the ashes of Syria and western Iraq, a jihadist enclave could be formed with fanaticism, and the export of it, the only real source of political power.

Once the flood begins, it is difficult to see how the new Islamic politics, if left to its own devices, would not bring about a larger unraveling of the state-based order. Afghanistan after the Soviet war, with its four years of complete chaos, is a potential model of what a disintegrated Middle Eastern order could look like.

This raises the question, how will these Turkey-, Gulf- and Iran-centered ideological agglomerations fare and perform under conditions of general and intensifying religious warfare? After all, even the "historical" cores in Turkey and Iran could

increasingly come to think of themselves less as cohesive polities and more as causes and vanguards of Islam rightly understood. Neither one of these polities is itself immune to unraveling, and the more they define themselves by the new Islamic politics, the more they are liable to exacerbate ethnic and sectarian divisions at home. Indeed, the breakup of Arab states will inject new energy into movements inside both polities that seek to break away from them. It would seem to be only a matter of time before Tehran's or Ankara's enemies begin to home in on these structural weaknesses.

The Gulf monarchies are themselves vulnerable to religious subversion, the Saudi dynasty especially. But paradoxically, they may prove better able to compete in religious war than Iran or Turkey because of how unmodern they are to begin with. In challenging times, the dynasty, like any tribe, will seek to enlarge itself, and thus the monarchies could strike up a super-tribal confederation and power-sharing arrangement to sustain themselves. In an era of general religious war, the big issue for them would be their ability to sell their energy products, and thus, whether they would have the money to maintain themselves in power. Whether these "interests" could be made to counteract the expansive agendas of Sunni Arab Islamists would be an open question. Insofar as outsiders, including the United States, see Sunni Arab Islamism as a necessary counterweight to Iran, they will not want for resources. Furthermore, even in times of religious war, products can still be shipped by sea to Asia's markets.

Since tribalism is not an option for Iran or Turkey, the centrifugal pulls engendered by the new Islamic politics will likely spur both powers to develop more elaborate modes of imperial governance. This could involve the creation of new constitutional arrangements or new armies and other institutions that could serve as vehicles for political integration. If both succeed, obviously the capacity for larger-scale destruction will be increased and the rivalry will enter a new phase. If one or both of

these empire-building projects fails, Iran's or Turkey's clients will begin to break ranks and the agglomerations will weaken. There is reason to believe this is likely, especially in a time of protracted religious war, when passions will confuse strategic plans or overtake them altogether.

A Turkish regime enthralled with the new Islamic politics but with no imperial organization to match could discover that its external outreach is severely constrained by a domestic backlash from a secular Turkish minority, or perhaps an Alevi population that has discovered it has a theology different from that of religious Turks. More importantly, the regime's sectarian agenda may deepen the fault line between it and its burgeoning Kurdish populations, and it could also alienate the secular KRG, which it needs to secure itself.

Meanwhile, the IRGC, as an organized and ideological force, would provide Iran with an initial leg-up over Turkey in an era of general religious war. Moreover, the expectation of a coming Sunni-Shia showdown would likely facilitate Iran's deeper entry into Arab Shiite Iraq. However, the fact remains that the Arabs and the Persians have an irreducible hatred for each other, notwithstanding their shared faith. The Iranian agglomeration would thus require some force to maintain. Moreover, aside from the Kurds, the only society in the region capable of maintaining some sort of secular politics would be the Persians, so the domestic constraints on Iran's strategic-sectarian outreach may also be considerable.

For both Iran and Turkey, indulging in the new Islamic politics would likely exacerbate the existential threats to them from the Kurdish Spring. Were Arab Iraq to be devoured by ethno-sectarian conflict, this could hasten the KRG's movement toward independence and also reinforce its status as the political center of the Kurdish world. The neighborhood in which they are situated would generate enormous dangers for the

Kurds, but also opportunities. As the states began to disintegrate and the region succumbed to greater turmoil, it could encourage the different parts of Kurdistan to seek their security in one another, with the KRG in the middle.

The Kurds would not be immune to the religious warfare surrounding them, and the contending powers could acquire influence along the margins of Kurdistan. But presumably, politics across Kurdistan would remain rooted in ethno-nationalism and the desire for self-rule, not the sectarian ideologies of others. To the Kurds, Salafist ideology is an imperialistic outgrowth of "Arab" society, the IRGC's religious nationalism and *velayat e-faqih* are "Persian" teachings, and Gulenism and the AKP's neo-Islamism are both "Turkish." Thus, the temptations of the new Islamic politics are weaker among the Kurds; their "Springtime," as some Kurdish leaders like to say, has already passed, and they are happy to be done with it. If anything, religiously inspired turmoil could have the effect of driving Kurdish populations closer together.

Indeed, as the region succumbs to the new Islamic politics, and if Kurdish nationalism begins to gel, it is likely the Kurds will look beyond the Islamic Middle East for patrons of their own. The Israelis, as the only Western power in the region with an existential interest in shaping it, will be seeking friends. Through clandestine or diplomatically conspicuous support for the Kurds, Jerusalem could, in effect, undertake to "reconstruct the periphery" and to use Kurdistan as a base for military operations against any number of threats. Another option for the Kurds would be to look north to Moscow. Russia, too, could conceivably help to arm the Kurds, especially if an Islamist Turkey or Iran is unable or unwilling to prevent Islamist terrorist activity in the Caucasus.

Likewise, while the United States will be seeking to reduce its exposure in the region, it will also have enduring national security interests, including combating WMD and Islamist terrorism. Moreover, developments in West Asia will likely affect U.S.

alliances and interests elsewhere around the world, making a complete withdrawal impossible. Inevitably, there will be debate about whether and how the United States can best shape the decomposition to achieve better, more stable outcomes, or to provide advantages to allies and disadvantages to foes. Discussions about tactics and the capabilities needed to operate in the New Middle East will follow. Kurdistan could emerge as an ideal base for conducting counter-terrorism and counter-WMD missions.

Insofar as they can continue to organize themselves, the Kurds will have the chance to pursue statehood and impress their own designs on this "failed region," especially as their numbers grow. Were Iraq to break up, an independent Arab Shia polity could emerge which, over the next decade or two, could easily grow to 40 million people. Assuming that energy was still being pumped, this new polity could become wealthy and powerful. The Shia of the Gulf States could look to it, not the Persians.

Twenty years later, how might the new Islamic politics run their course and the religious warfare these politics inspire come to an end? Given the balance of forces, it is difficult to see how any one belligerent in a religious war could achieve victory, though in the nuclear age, catastrophe is possible. However, even if the protracted wars of religion remain "low intensity," they will likely become inertial and enormously debilitating. It took the Christian world about a hundred years to grow exhausted by sectarian conflict and to choose to abandon religious politics. Theoretically, an Islamic solution to religious warfare could come faster, especially under modern conditions. It is thus possible that in the future, the Kurds could have a major role to play in reconstructing the Middle East.

Appendix A: KRG Fieldwork Report

February, 2013

There's a tangible optimism about the future in Iraqi Kurdestan that's all the more pronounced by the equally prevalent Kurdish insistence that the rest of Iraq alongside much of the Middle East is plunging headlong into greater upheaval, tyranny and religious warfare. After surviving a horrendous 20th Century, the Kurds in Iraq are now coming into their own, and they've become increasingly self-confident. As one official predicted to us, the 21st will be the "Kurdish Century" in the Middle East. Given the near total reversal of the Kurds' fortunes over the last thirty years, such optimism may be forgivable, especially since it is also sober: the officials and others with whom we spoke were well-aware of the challenges and dangers which lie ahead. But Kurdish optimism is also worth taking seriously, because the Kurds are no longer entrusting their future to Fortune alone. Instead, they now have a strategy, which, so far, appears to be working.

The cornerstone of the Kurds' strategy, the KRG, now represents the most successful effort at Kurdish self-rule and "state-building" in the modern era. In the last century, the Kurds were a cipher, more an "affected actor" subject to the wills of the better-organized Arab, Persian and Turkish states which surrounded them than a force in their own right. But now, via the KRG, the Kurds of "South Kurdestan" have come together and provided for themselves far greater security and stability than what their immediate neighbors enjoy. Externally, the KRG has also begun to emerge as an "effective actor" in Middle Eastern affairs whose power and influence, in the view of many of the officials and others we spoke with, is programmed to grow.

On balance, circumstances have been trending favorably for the Kurds, and badly for their principal historical foes, the Arabs. Thanks in part to the meddling of Iran and

the Gulf States, the Arabs of Syria and, increasingly, those of Iraq have been waging sectarian war among themselves, and therefore are too busy to bother in any concerted way with Kurds. Meanwhile, the Kurds have managed to pick-up some new strategic partners. Ankara has officially come to recognize that the Kurds really do exist, a reversal that has occurred in large part because of Turkey's deepening security and economic interdependencies with the KRG. Iraq's "Kurds have never had it better," one Iranian official recently remarked to a top PUK official that we spoke to.

With room to breathe, the Kurds of Iraq have concentrated on building up their quasi-state and other essential "facts on the ground." Their principal aim has been to provide a secure and stable environment for South Kurdestan's socio-economic development to take place, and also to acquire as much autonomy and leverage over the Baghdad regime as possible. The Kurds are already psychologically divorced from Iraq; the question now is what the terms of the settlement will be. While official policy of the KRG is to remain a self-governing region in a federal Iraq, South Kurdestan's continued success is perforce creating the foundations for independence. In fact, when speaking with KRG officials, one understands that they are building the economic infrastructure that will permit them to push for complete political independence if and when the circumstances make it necessary and possible for them to do so.

South Kurdestan's growing detachment from Iraq is being driven by and also inspires a powerful Kurdish nationalism. To construct a viable state, the KRG will need this nationalism to overcome the societal divisions that have historically kept the Kurds apart, and which have made the Kurds the easy prey to outside actors. In fact, the Kurds' desire for a state of their own is said to be especially strong among the younger generation, which is increasingly urban and connected internationally, including to other Kurds in nearby countries and the Diaspora. Since half of South Kurdestan's population

is now under the age of twenty, it would seem the nationalistic desire for political independence is programmed to become stronger. It is worth remembering that an Iraqi Kurd under the age of 22 has never lived under the *de facto* rule of the Baghdad regime.

Yet the KRG is still weak politically and militarily, and the neighborhood is uniquely inhospitable to Kurdish nationalist aspirations. The Kurds face not just a hostile regime in Baghdad, but they are now situated directly in the middle of a three-way rivalry between the Turks, the Iranians, and a broad-based Sunni uprising in nearby Syria that threatens to spillover into Iraq. The existential challenge for the Kurds will be not getting chewed up in the evolving competition for power. Their strategy is to build-up the requisite internal and external defenses to sustain themselves and, potentially, their political independence, but this will take time and extraordinary effort that must be calibrated in light of their fundamental insecurity and rapid changes in the ambient security environment. As we learned in the course of the trip, Qassem Soleimani, head of Iran's Quds forces, had personally warned a visiting PUK delegation against pursuing independence from Baghdad. The Iranian commander also cautioned the Kurds against becoming too close to Turkey and joining the so-called "Sunni Axis." The fact that the Kurds in Iraq have "never had it better" also means they have all that much more to lose.

This predicament gives rise to a fundamental tension between, on the one hand, the KRG's project of prudent state-building and, on the other, the nationalist longings which now actually sustain and drive Kurdish political life. As one official put it, "we don't want independence if independence will only last a year." The KRG and Kurdish nationalism cannot be separated, but they will not always be mutually reinforcing either. For the KRG project to succeed, the Kurds will require a nationalist politics that can bind them together and insulate them against the external geopolitical and ideological forces which have harmed them and their quest for statehood in the past. But they'll also need

to keep their nationalist sentiment, including their desire for a "Greater Kurdestan," under control for their strategy to be successful. The resolution of this tension will shape the KRG's strategies and also its performance going forward, and we've begun to explore its pathways and ramifications for the alternative futures of the Kurdish Spring.

Founders and Geopolitics

In the midst of the current upheaval in Southwest Asia, the Kurds of Iraq are prone to say their "Spring" has already happened, and they're glad to be done with it. The Kurdish Spring was begun with the First Gulf War. Up until then, the Arab, Turkish, and Persian-dominated states of the region fought with one another, and would often employ Kurdish factions as proxies. Yet despite their quarrels, these states held one primary security interest in common: Keeping the Kurds divided and down. In 1991, with the U.S.-led rollback of Saddam Hussein's armies from Kuwait and the subsequent establishment of a no-fly zone over the north of Iraq, this conspiracy of states against the Kurds was effectively shattered. The Baghdad-based regime could no longer effectively undergird the regional order, and a Kurdish safehaven was formed in northeastern Iraq.

The Kurds used this opportunity to establish in 1992 the KRG, which soon after was plunged into brutal tribal warfare egged on by outside powers. The feud was brought to an end when a new power-sharing agreement was brokered between the two main Kurdish factions, Masoud Barzani's Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdestan (PUK). This arrangement has lasted to this day, and formed a relatively stable political basis for the KRG to concentrate the Kurds' energies on socio-economic development and building up their security.

The Kurds' list of 20th Century grievances is as long as anyone else's in the region, although in South Kurdestan it is not their focus. As the Minister of Martyrs and

Anfal Affairs put it, "we must honor the dead, but we seek to remain open to the future." The lived history of Iraqi Kurds has engrained in their current leadership an appreciation for the tragedy of human affairs, an unmistakable secularism, as well as a political maturity and realism that is in short supply elsewhere in the region. How deep this goes in Kurdish society is difficult to assess, and replicating these sensibilities in the next generation of leaders will invariably be a key challenge. Yet because of South Kurdestan's geography and the precariousness of its security situation, anyone who wields power in the KRG is obliged to have a dynamic sense of current events and what the surrounding region may come to look like, including the Kurds' relative position in it. If the analysis is wrong, South Kurdestan could be devastated. The leadership thus says it must remain "cautious, if not suspicious" of the world around them. Indeed, as one of our drivers put it, when careening along the mountainous road from Erbil to Sulaimaniyya, "if you don't understand your situation, life will destroy you."

This realism and heightened awareness contribute to the utility of attempting to understand the changes underway in the Middle East through Kurdish eyes. The KRG's view of political Islam is uniquely sober. "If modern Islamism emerged from the failure of nationalism, then what will the new era shaped by Islamism lead to?" we asked Fuad Hussein, the Chief of Staff to President Barzani. His answer was succinct: "failed states." In one common Kurdish view, the future of the Middle East is looking increasingly like the Kurdish Past. Although the region's political boundaries may not be altered dramatically anytime soon, if at all, Southwest Asia's strategic and political life is reverting back to older patterns which are defined less by nation-states and nationalism, and more by the sectarian identities of ethnicity, tribe, and above all, religion.

In this emerging "pre-Sykes-Picot order," the Middle East is becoming increasingly torn between competing poles of influence—one Sunni-Turkish, the other Iranian-

Shiite—much as it was before the rise of nation-states, when the Ottoman and Safavid powers were around. There is, moreover, a third major force shaping the coming era that was not there in the 19th Century, and that is Sunni Arab Islamism, or what Kurds sometimes call the "Sunni Uprising." As we know, the growth of the Sunni Uprising has been underwritten by Saudi and Gulf oil money, and is a direct function of the declining power of the nation-state and of nationalism as organizing forces in the Arabic-speaking world. In actuality, Sunni Arab Islamism is itself a diversity of movements, some of which may be inclined to cooperate with Turkey, others with Iran, but which as an aggregate have ambitions that are separate from those of Ankara or Tehran.

In the Kurds' view, the other major accelerant of the emergence of the Middle East's new Sectarian Map has been the rapid contraction of U.S. power and influence. Kurdish officials were strained to describe the interests and domestic motivations behind the reversal of the U.S.'s policy, but it was easier for them to explain its effects. From the Kurds' vantage point, the withdrawal of the U.S. has created a power vacuum, which, in the absence of American restraining influence, has drawn out and intensified the tripartite Turkish, Iranian, and Sunni Arab Islamist competition that is now underway.

The resulting "Springtime of Peoples" is generating a chaotic and dangerous Southwest Asia, but there is also opportunity. In some officials, call them the "Kurdish Machiavellians," there was a self-conscious appreciation of the new potentials being created for Kurds and for Kurdestan. The fact is, Kurdish state-building and nationalism are hitting their stride at exactly the same time as nationalism is collapsing elsewhere and the Middle East's states, the Arab-dominated ones especially, are succumbing to greater political dysfunction and sectarian enthusiasm. Since "Islam prepares people for the next world, not for success in this world," a small, albeit comparatively more competent and secular nation could discover it has greater possibility to enhance its autonomy. It may

even find a way to be born. As Fuad Hussein put it: the regional "system of nation-states will continue to grow weaker, or it will collapse. Either way, this is good for the Kurds."

The Swiss Ideal

As Machiavelli taught, the character of a republic and the circumstances by which it is acquired bear directly on its viability. The KRG's leadership understands both lessons, or at least that's how it appears in their "political messaging" to Americans whose national policies since the aftermath of the First World War have consistently opposed the Kurdish quest for statehood. KRG officials were not inclined to speak about independence from Iraq, and they always stressed that, should it occur, it would not be the direct result of Kurdish initiative, but a consequence of the breakdown of existing states. In the coming "pre-Sykes Picot order," Barham Salih said the Kurdish political ideal would involve becoming a country like "Switzerland." Others didn't quite put it like that, but they unanimously insisted that the goal of KRG was to maintain itself as an island of "security and stability" in the emerging era of strategic-sectarian competition.

This will be no small feat, yet the Kurds claim there's precedent to suggest it can be done. Kurdish nationalist writers, and some of the officials we spoke with, harken back to a purported "Golden Age" of semi-autonomous Kurdish principalities as models for 21st Century Kurds. These principalities—Ardalan, Soran, Baban, Kelhor and others—sprang up and faded away in the course of 16th through the 19th Centuries when the Ottoman and Safavid powers were too weak or too involved elsewhere to impose their wills on their respective frontiers in historical Greater Kurdestan. The Kurdish principalities thrived insofar as they were able to play the Ottomans and Safavids against one another and derive benefit from the competition between them. The actual capacity of the Kurds to have pulled this off historically is likely exaggerated in the nationalist

telling. And in the context of the 21st Century Turkish-Iranian-Sunni Arab Islamist rivalry, this is bound to become an even more perilous balancing act. Yet, for KRG it will be a necessary one all the same. As one official put it, "even if we to push our borders out 200 kilometers in all directions," Kurdestan will still be surrounded by Arabs, Iranians and Turks. To survive in the middle and grow out, the Kurds will need to acquire, first and foremost, the internal defenses to maintain their polity and secure it from becoming a playground for larger geopolitical and sectarian forces.

This will involve overcoming the divisions in Kurdish society that have historically made the Kurds prey to better-organized powers, and inoculating their society against political religion. Kurdish society has some built-in resistance to Islamism, such as traditional Sufism and the tribe. But the hold of these structures is invariably loosened as Kurdestan modernizes, and neither one serves by themselves as an adequate basis for state-building under modern conditions. The other available option for the Kurds is nationalism. Nowadays, what most distinguishes the Kurds from their neighbors is that their primary political reference is national identity. For these reasons, the temptation to see Islamism as authentic religion is presently weak in Kurdestan. Instead, Salafist ideology is seen as an "imperialistic" outgrowth of "Arab" society, *velayat al-faqih* is a "Persian" teaching, and Gulenism or the AKP's neo-Islamism are both "Turkish."

The KRG's greatest achievements to date have been at securing the realm, thus making socio-economic development possible. The internal security services, the Asayish, are effective and notoriously aggressive against Islamist terrorism and subversion. (They've also acted forcefully against the secular opposition, and since Asayish are commanded by the KDP and PUK parties, there is a palpable and understandable fear that their primary purpose will become regime security, rather than public security.) Meanwhile, according to the Secretary of the Interior, the national

gendarmerie, or Zeravani, is increasingly capable and has managed to build up considerable public trust, in part because the force recruits locally from across the region. Moreover, the KRG has undertaken to integrate the Peshmerga militias—which had originally evolved along party and tribal lines—into a modern unified army, and with the proper assistance and encouragement, this could itself become a vehicle for national integration.

As a nation, KRG officials and others consistently spoke of the Kurdish aspiration to become "part of the civilized world," to become firmly "integrated with the West," and to establish a democracy. Most of the KRG leadership has spent substantial time in the West, and they understand the connections between economic diversification and political pluralism. Their expressed goals are to avoid the "Oil Curse" and the rentier state, and they've sought to promote FDI and the development of agriculture, light manufacturing, and tourism. They've also put in place policies to promote rule of law and expand access to quality education. While there's "lots of room for improvement," the educational system has been thoroughly renovated and, according to one World Bank assessment, outperforms schools in the rest of Iraq. Moreover, the KRG has invested heavily in the "Human Capital Development Program," which sends students to universities in Asia, Europe and the United States to bring back useful knowledge for the development of Kurdestan.

The KRG political system can best be described as machine politics. As the opposition described it, the KDP-PUK governing arrangement is horribly corrupt, and nowhere close to creating a basis for a national politics or, for that matter, developing a true democracy. According to Goran Party head Nawshirwan Mustapha, there is no "national KRG government. Instead, Kurdestan is run by "warlords." "There's no national compact, no national economy or common market, no infrastructure, and no

mixing between the [Kurdish] provinces." Moreover, South Kurdestan has virtually "no private sector."' "95-96 percent" of the KRG's official budget comes from "companies affiliated with the two main political parties," and over sixty percent of the employed population in South Kurdestan works for the government.

In the view of Goran members, staff at the *Hawleti* (*Citizen*) newspaper, and academics, the current KDP-PUK governing arrangement operates solely to maintain itself in power and to "control people" and to "crush internal dissent." KDP militias did, in fact, storm into Sulaimaniyya as a demonstration force after Goran's electoral successes against the PUK in 2008. On the other hand, it should be noted that Goran was able to run against the PUK and KDP in the last elections and receive a significant share of the vote. Similarly, the opposition *Hawleti* newspaper is able to publish and survive financially, although it was recently hit with a $12,000 libel judgment in favor of President Talabani.

Aside from calling for "clean" and "national" elections, the opposition seemed to lack a political strategy, and at times, they seemed downright forgetful of the country in which they lived. The KRG's ruling parties derive enormous legitimacy from their capacity to secure South Kurdestan, the so-called "Other Iraq." Not only is it home to Kurds, including increasing numbers from neighboring countries, but it is also a safe-haven to Christians, Assyrians, Turks, Shiites, Yazidis, Turkmen, Armenians and others. South Kurdestan is also a destination for Arab refugees from across the Green Line and from Syria (now 75,000 refugees and growing), as well as for Iranians who wish to escape the Islamic Republic, if only for a weekend. These inflows are placing new demands on the KRG's institutions, which it is now struggling to cope with. Alternatively, the *de facto* heterogeneity of South Kurdestan could become one source of greater political pluralism and of institutions that can sustain it. As it was pointed out to

us, when Kurdish nationalists speak of independence, they say they want an "Independent Kurdestan," not a "Kurdish State."

The KRG's capacity to forge a national and open socio-economic order will obviously be influenced by an array of factors. As Kurdish society modernizes, the demand for greater political freedom is likely to grow, and the KRG's leaders will either act to rein this in, or reform governing arrangements accordingly. Democracy, of course, is only one option among several, and the KRG's continued success at securing the realm may even inhibit democratic institution building and the public's demand for it. The greater the threat emanating from the external environment, the KRG will acquire greater freedom of maneuver if it can continue to provide security at home.

Some of the people we spoke to suggested a tribally-based "Emirate" model as one logical route for Kurdestan's future political development. Given the egalitarian nature of tribes, this may prove appealing to Kurds, especially in the KDP-dominated areas, where tribal structures are more deeply entrenched. But in the absence of either 1) a single tribe establishing its dominance (a "King of Kurdestan" scenario) or 2) the development of an institutional basis for a durable tribal confederation (presently, the KDP-PUK arrangement is breaking down because of Jalal Talabani's illness; the scramble to replace him in Sulaimani Province is liable to be chaotic), it is not clear how resilient such a polity would be, especially in the emerging Middle East. Nor is it clear how such a polity would successfully suppress or accommodate Kurdish nationalism, especially if the latter's horizon is Greater Kurdestan.

With God on The Arabs' Side

President Barzani's Chief of Staff, Fuad Hussein, described the country of Iraq as a ship that is listing badly to one side. The Kurdish side "looks out to light," the Arab

one "to darkness." The Arabs are being drawn under by sectarian strife and a "culture of death," while the Kurds are "responsible" and want to "build." The Arabs seek a return to the past, while the Kurds are seeking out a better future. In Hussein's view, the question for the Kurds in Iraq now is, "Shall we go to another ship?" "If things continue as they are, we don't have an alternative but to think of ourselves."

The Kurdish and Arab societies of Iraq have grown increasingly apart. As Kurds have become more nationalistic, many Arabs have turned to sectarian identities and political religion, or what Kurdish officials disdainfully call a "mosque mentality." Arab Iraq is seen as increasingly torn between the Sunni Uprising and the Shiite Islamism of Iran, and the nearby war in Syria, where the two Islamisms are now doing battle, was said to be a likely precursor to the Middle Eastern conflicts that will come.

According to one Kurdish official, the Sunni Arabs have four options available to them for organizing their politics. The only secular option for the Sunnis upon which a compact with the rest of Iraq might be built, Baathism, is now illegal. The other "secular" option, tribalism, has some traction among the Sunnis, but in its current iteration it is deeply anti-statist and not supportive of federalism, and thus was not seen as offering anything that might be productive. The remaining two Sunni options are the political theologies of the Muslim Brotherhood and of salafi-jihadism, or al-Qaeda. While there are differences between the two Islamist streams that may affect their behavior and dispose them, in time, along different evolutionary paths, the Kurds insisted they were ideologically the same. As one official put it, the only thing which distinguishes the Brotherhood from al-Qaeda is the latter's "willingness to kill and to die *now*." Because of this, and the general impoverishment of the Sunni Arab political thought and leadership, the Kurds believe they'll be a source of rebellion and insecurity going forward.

The Kurds' frustration with the Baghdad regime and Maliki in particular was so great that they sometimes described him as "worse than Saddam." They constantly noted his tendency to gather all power into his own hands, marginalizing not only the Sunni Arabs and the Kurds, but the Shia-dominated parliament and the Council of Ministers as well. Moreover, the Shia now ruling in Baghdad were described variously as "fanatical" and as "racist dictators." For other Kurds, the problem wasn't with Maliki or the Arab Shia simply, but with the fact that the geopolitics of Mesopotamia as it has been organized in the modern era (i.e., as "Iraq") invariably leads to a concentration of power in Baghdad, which then undertakes to tyrannize over others.

The Shia were described as a mixed bag. While Baghdad was reverting back to its former ways, the revitalization of the Najaf Hawza and traditional Twelver Shiism was acknowledged to be an important check on authoritarianism in Baghdad as well as Iranian outreach. (According to our interlocutors, Ayatollah Sistani "ordered" Maliki not to carry out his plan to dismiss the parliament, a step which the Kurds believe would have resulted in civil war.) Others argued that Sistani was too old, and that the Hawza's current moderating influence couldn't be maintained after his death. With the acquiescence, if not active support of Maliki's government, the Islamic Republic has been conducting ideological outreach to Najaf. Ayatollah Shahroudi, the former head of the Iranian judicial system, has been propped up as the next *marja* of Iraq's Dawa Party, and the Kurds saw this as the next step in Iran's efforts to ideologically colonize Iraq's Shia.

The Kurds see their competition with the Baghdad regime as a fundamentally military one. As the Minister of Peshmergas said, Baghdad would "use the military option" to crush the KRG if it had one. Peshmergas fought the Arabs throughout the 20th Century, and they still train, principally, to fight the Arabs. Virtually all the Kurds' forces

are deployed along the Green Line, not along the KRG's "international" borders with Iran or Turkey. They are also heavily concentrated in Kirkuk, the primary zone of contention with the Baghdad regime. Whatever Arab-Kurdish security cooperation there once was has evaporated with the American withdrawal. The Peshmergas Minister said the KRG's security cooperation with Turkey was growing. He also asked for U.S. training support, equipment, and intelligence sharing. Even if direct U.S. security support to KRG wasn't possible at this time, KRG officials said at the very least that international arms manufacturers must not be able to sell their wares in Baghdad.

Some saw a dangerous strategic myopia in Kurdish dealings with Baghdad that was adversely affecting Kurdish security. According to this argument, the KRG had to concern itself with the nature of the regime in Baghdad and do what it could to prevent it from becoming too centralized and authoritarian. "If we focus only on what we can get for ourselves, for Kurdestan, we will fail," as one official put it. Whether Kurdestan remains "in or out of Iraq, we cannot neglect Baghdad." "The security of Kurdestan begins in the South."

On these grounds, one potential Kurdish strategy lies in promoting the creation of regions in other parts of Iraq, as permitted by the Iraqi Constitution. If several more semi-autonomous regions were formed—a Sunni-dominated region in Anbar, Nineveh and Salahadin; a Basra-based region, and perhaps others, formed from Shiite governorates—then Baghdad would not be in a position to centralize all power. Among Kurds, there's still some belief that such a federal arrangement is salvageable, and even desirable. Some professors who we spoke to suggested that there was opportunity to foster federalist principles and institutions in the Sunni and Shia areas. This potential, however, will require nurturing if it is to come to fruition; presently, Sunni Arab interest in forming a region seems to have been diverted by the war in Syria, which some Sunnis

believe will ultimately strengthen them and their sectarian agenda within Iraq. While Basra is prickly about centralized power and has periodically expressed dissatisfaction with Baghdad's control of finances, it is unclear how much interest they have in forming a region.

When we discussed Iraq breakup scenarios, the Kurds always ascribed them to developments in the Arab world, never to Kurdish secessionist forces. The war in Syria was seen as a major driver of the intra-Arab clashes to come. Officials saw two broad possible futures, including a protracted Lebanon-style conflict, or the gradual stabilization of Syria through the disintegration of the Assad regime into ethno-sectarian statelets, including an Alawite polity, a Sunni one, and a Kurdish one in the northwest.

In all events, the Peshmergas Minister said that Iraq's "Kurds will support the Syrian Kurds," although other top KRG officials were more cautious about pronouncing on this. The KRG has provided humanitarian aid and training to Syrian Kurds to "defend themselves" at bases in northeastern Iraq. Abdulhakim Bashar, head of the Kurdish National Congress, a Barzani-led initiative to organize Syria's factionalized Kurdish populations, also said the KRG has shared their experience and provided support to the development of Kurdish political institutions in Syria. Among some Syrian Kurdish groups, Barzani is referred to as the "*marja*" or leader and model for all Kurds.

If Assad is toppled, some of our interlocutors said the pull on Iraq's Sunni Arabs to combine with Sunnis in Syria would grow. Either way, the center of gravity of the rivalry between Iranian and Sunni Arab Islamist forces was seen as likely shifting to the East, thus placing the Sunni and Shia of Arab Iraq increasingly at each other's throats.

Some Kurds seemed to suggest that Turkey might feel compelled in the future to take the KRG under its wing and guarantee the security of South Kurdestan. This plausibly could be driven by Ankara's felt need to check Iranian encroachment,

especially if Tehran consolidates its position in Baghdad. Should this occur, Iraq would be divided between three zones of influence, with the Arab Shiites in the Iranian sphere, the Arab Sunnis in religious chaos or increasingly linked with Syria, and Kurds with Turkey. This might result in the soft partition of the country, or even make Iraq the central theater of the tripartite strategic-sectarian struggle now shaping the Middle East, but either way, the successful consolidation of the Islamic Republic's influence over Shiite Iraq would likely make it the world's dominant energy power.

While the Kurdish desire to break free of Iraq is a powerful one, the Kurds' territorial ambitions also tethers them to the Arabs because of Kirkuk, which is claimed as the historical capital of South Kurdestan. It is difficult to see how any Kurdish leader would be able to renounce Kurdish nationalist claims to that area. A likely key focus of the KRG's future military strategy, therefore, will be acquiring the independent capability to wrest Kirkuk away from Iraq by force, or by acquiring the strategic support of a more powerful, outside actor. At present, the most likely "other ship" for the Kurds of Iraq to tie onto is Turkey.

"A Golden Handcuff"

According to KRG officials, the transformation of Turkey's policies toward Kurdish peoples under the Islamist AKP government has been helped along by a strategy hatched by KRG in 2008. At the time, the KRG set about fostering economic interdependencies between South Kurdestan and Turkey on the view that expanded cross-border commerce would provide a basis for Turkey's willingness to deal politically with the KRG and, possibly, improved cooperation. The actual speed with which the ensuing "rapprochement" has taken place is impressive, especially given that not long ago Ankara

was threatening to militarily invade Iraq to suppress what it saw as an emerging Independent Kurdestan.

It is perhaps not coincidental that Turkey's "Kurdish Opening" was rolled-out in conjunction with the so-called "Zero Problems with Neighbors" policy. Despite the latter, Ankara found out that it had nothing but problem neighbors, save the Kurds of Iraq. The Turks' discovery reinforced changes that were already underway in Turkey with respect to its willingness to recognize the existence of an ethnic Kurdish minority within the country. Now, the "KRG is Turkey's closest partner in the Middle East," and it is also assisting Ankara in negotiating a political settlement to the Kurdish Rebellion in Anatolia. Economically, the KRG has become conjoined with Turkey; there are over 1500 Turkish firms operating in South Kurdestan, and the total volume of Turkey's trade with the region is second only to Ankara's trade with Germany. It was, fittingly, at the Erbil International Airport where Prime Minister Erdogan "first" chose to announce that the Turkish "policy of denial of the Kurds was over," according to one KRG official.

The KRG's relations with Turkey were described by KRG officials as a "strategic" *quid pro quo* partnership. For its part, the KRG wants access to Western markets and imported goods, as well as the added security that only a strategic benefactor like Turkey can provide it. It also wants to transport its massive energy resources to international markets. South Kurdestan is said to have over 45 billion barrels of oil, and at least enough gas to fuel Europe for the next eighty years. Obviously, from South Kurdestan, the straightest road to Europe goes through Turkey (or rather "through Diyarbakr," the Kurdish city located in Southeast Anatolia, as one KRG official suggestively put it.) Now, according to KRG officials, the South Kurdestan-Turkey pipeline is already in the works, despite efforts by Iran, Baghdad, and the United States to shut it down out of fears that it will lead to South Kurdestan's further detachment from Iraq.

At the same time, one KRG official suggested that the relationship with Turkey could be a "Golden Handcuff," suggesting that KRG was becoming overly dependent on Turkey. For the most part, however, the KRG officials seemed to believe that Turkey was their best, indeed only, option at the moment for a partner and for access to the wider world. This obviously could change in the event of Iraq's stabilization, a transformation in KRG's strategic orientation, civil revolution, or if South Kurdestan somehow manages to acquire independent access via post-Assad Syria to the Eastern Mediterranean.

As for Turkey, it needs access to South Kurdestan's energy to meet growing domestic demand, and it also appears bent on building itself up as a new "Pipelineistan," the dominant overland hub in East-West energy commerce. Access to energy from South Kurdestan also serves as a hedge against dependence on Iranian sources. Besides this, Turkey's need for a Kurdish partner has fast become a strategic imperative in its own right. This is a function both of new dynamics in the regional security environment and also of the neo-Islamist AKP's politico-ideological agenda.

Externally, the Islamist AKP is now engaged in a full-out strategic-sectarian competition with the Islamic Republic of Iran that includes actual warfare. Only years ago, AKP and Iranian officials proclaimed a desire for a new era of cooperation, but the reality then, as one KRG official put it, was that the two countries were "friendly on the surface, but competing deep below." Now, however, Turkey and Iran are "competing on the surface, and fighting underneath." This is occurring not only in Syria, but increasingly in Greater Kurdestan, from the Syrian Jazeera to Qandil, and from Sulaimaniyya to East Anatolia. In this unfolding competition, a pro-Turkey "buffer land" (or possibly, even a "buffer state") in South Kurdestan that can shield Anatolia's soft underbelly from Iranian-backed Kurdish factions and other incursions could make all the difference.

It is also becoming even more of a strategic necessity because of the AKP's politico-ideological agenda. Ordinarily, a Turkish government in rivalry with Iran might simply repress its restive Kurdish populations and militarize its borders. But given the AKP's ambitions to re-fashion the Turkish polity, it has needed to reduce its dependencies on the military and neutralize the military's political influence as part of its project of rolling back the "Deep State." To accomplish this, the AKP has prosecuted many members of the military leadership, thereby demoralizing it and rendering it unwilling to be pro-active in fighting the PKK. Electorally, AKP has required at least some of the Kurdish vote in Anatolia, and for this, it has needed to find a non-military solution to the Kurdish Rebellion. With the encouragement and active support of the KRG, Turkey has thus entered into peace talks with the PKK leadership.

According to our interlocutors, the AKP's strategy has been working. The Turkish Army was described as a fundamentally anti-Kurdish institution, but not the AKP. In fact, Erdogan's government has Kurdish ministers, and KRG officials visiting Ankara speak to them in Kurdish. In one pro-AKP Kurdish view, the West "doesn't want a strong and united Turkey," and so in the past it has supported the Turkish Army and its war against the PKK. Now, the "ice has melted" in Turkey on the Kurdish question, and Turkey has emerged more powerful and stable as a result. Thanks in part to the prodding of KRG, there is a "general agreement" between "[the Kurdish opposition party] BDP, Qandil [the PKK mountain base], Imerali [the Turkish Prison where Abdullah Ocalan is locked up], and the European PKK" that a political solution is possible. In the Iraqi Kurds' assessment, there's strong support for the settlement on the Turkish side as well. While it took AKP to implement, Turkey's opening toward the Kurds began in Prime Minister Ozal's era, and so it was believed that AKP's policies have real staying power.

There's little doubt that the Kurds would prefer to have multiple lines of access to the outside world, although now all the major roads being built go through Turkey. This could always change, for example, in the likely event that Iran is no longer isolated internationally (either because of regime change, or a nuclear breakout), and such a change would obviously have significant effects on KRG's strategic orientation. While all of the KRG officials spoke of the importance of good multi-dimensional relations with Turkey, there was a difference of emphasis. Many, for example, stressed the need for calibrating relations with Turkey in ways that didn't antagonize Baghdad and especially Iran. Others feared the "handcuff" and too much dependency on Turkey. As such, a neutral position, the "Swiss Ideal," will likely remain an attractive, if not always attainable, tendency in KRG strategic thought.

Indeed, there are divergences in the agendas of the Kurds and the AKP that may in time become sharpened by an assortment of factors. These factors include Turkish racialism, which the AKP's ideology of "Islamic Solidarity" can only partially suppress, if at all, and which is also liable to make a comeback as a result of the growing Kurdish-Turkish birth differentials in Turkey. Another potential factor is the divergence between the KRG and pan-Kurdish nationalism. For instance, in interviews conducted with Turkish Kurdish activists in Germany prior to our trip, we were told that KRG was "in it for themselves," and by pursuing rapprochement with Turkey, Erbil was not acting on behalf of Kurdestan's truly national interests. If such pan-Kurdish nationalism in Turkey becomes more pronounced, then KRG would no longer be as helpful to Ankara in solving its Kurdish problem, since Turkish Kurds would be less susceptible to influence by KRG. Alternatively, a more powerful government in South Kurdestan could itself become more influenced by pan-Kurdish ideology and ambitions, placing it at loggerheads with Ankara.

Kurdish officials acknowledged that the ideological roots of the AKP were in the Islamist movement of the Muslim Brotherhood. However, despite their rejection of Islamism in all its forms, many KRG officials seemed to think that the AKP was benign; at the grassroots, AKP was more "conservative" than reactionary, was more oriented toward Hanafi Sufism than Arab Islamism, and had successfully blended "Islamic values" with modern political institutions. While the much-vaunted "Turkish Model" has been rejected in Arab Spring societies as "irreligious," it is more compelling in Kurdestan. At the same time, the "Sunni" identity of AKP has been sharpened by its strategic-sectarian competition with Iran and with the advent of the Arab Spring. In the long term, the more AKP's Turkey understands itself as sectarian power, the more likely their strategic partnership with the KRG will wind up in places where the more secular Kurds, insofar as they remain nationalistic and seek self-determination, can not follow.

Be all this as it may, our discussions highlighted how deepening KRG-Turkey security and energy ties were creating the conditions for what could become a formal "Turko-Kurdish Confederation." For example, deteriorating KRG-Baghdad relations combined with clashes around Kirkuk could lead the Kurds to reject Iraq, and to formally request protection from Turkey. Another pathway involves an intensification of the Turkish-Iranian contest, perhaps because of Iran's continued satelliteization of the Baghdad regime. In this, Turkey might feel obliged to effectively annex KRG, or support its independence as a buffer state.

Another future—the possibility of a Turkish civil war between ethnic Turks and Kurds, driven by an explosive mix of Kurdish ultra-nationalism, Islamo-Turkish racialism, and Iranian support—was not explicitly brought up, obviously because of the sensitivities involved. However, in a meeting with an Asayish officer that took place well before our trip, we were told that Iranian outreach into South Kurdestan has

intensified and also that pro-PKK sympathies are strong. When we met with the same official during our trip to South Kurdestan, we were told that the Islamic Republic is now actively cultivating PKK forces in Syria and Alevi PKK factions in Turkish Anatolia for the purposes of sabotaging Turkey-Kurdish rapprochement.

The Devil Next Door

The Kurds' relations with the Islamic Republic were compared by one KRG minister to the Yazidis' relations with Satan. In Iraq, the Yazidis are accused of being devil worshippers, much as the Kurds are perceived as being too close with the Iranians. But, the minister said, these perceptions are mistaken. The Yazidis do not worship the Satan, they are only deeply concerned not to anger him. By contrast, they don't worry much about God, since God is benevolent and will forgive them if they perform even one good deed. The Kurds, likewise, are deeply concerned not to anger Iran, because it is seen as a rising power, and it is a particularly unforgiving and ruthless one at that.

Iran was consistently described by the Kurds as the most powerful state in the Middle East. Tehran's backing of the Assad regime in Syria has sent a particularly clear message that it intends to remain powerful. In one Kurdish view, the Syrian conflict has also revealed Turkey's relative weakness. At first, the Turks sought to encourage Assad to deal with the Muslim Brotherhood. But this almost instantaneously fell through, leaving the Turks without a plan. Iran, meanwhile, has invested heavily, and built-up a militia force which by some accounts is upwards of 50,000 fighters. The contrast between the massive Iranian investment in Syria and the "tactical" response demonstrated by those Gulf countries supporting the uprising was regarded as significant. Some of the Kurds we spoke to felt the Sunni Islamist groups, which are organizationally and ideologically more diffuse, were not a direct match for this Iranian force.

The Syrian conflict has thus revealed a basic reality shaping the future of the evolving tripartite strategic-sectarian competition in the region: Shiite Islamism is unified under the Islamic Republic whereas Sunni Islamism is divided between the AKP's Turko-Islamism and Arab Islamism, which itself is further separated between often competing Brotherhood-Ikwhani, Salafist, and tribally-oriented streams. As such, Sunni leaders have no real sense of which way the Sunni Uprising might go in the future, or no truly effective capacity to give it a unitary strategic direction. The Iranians, by contrast, have the advantage of being able to better concert their efforts while exploiting intra-Sunni—including Kurdish—divisions along the way.

For these, among other reasons, Iran was repeatedly described as the KRG's greatest threat. The Islamic Republic's goal is to "keep the KRG weak," or to replace it with a governing arrangement conducive to its own interests. The Iraqi Kurds said the chief reason why the Iranians want to keep them weak is because of Tehran's fear of Kurdish Nationalism and of Kurdish Federalism, which has potentially destabilizing, if not regime-threatening, consequences for the Islamic Republic insofar as the KRG's success could become a model for Iranian Kurds, or "East Kurdestan." Iran has potentially all the more reason to fear an Independent Kurdestan, especially one that is allied with Turkey and/or with the West.

Aside from using military force and the threat of it to keep KRG in line, the Kurds felt that Iran would continue to rely on subversion to keep them divided and weak. We identified at least four ways in which Iran is already attempting to do this. The first involves exploiting historic differences between the Kurds and the Turks, for example, by fomenting anti-Turkish and pro-PKK sentiments within South Kurdestan. This could have the effect of destabilizing the KRG government. Another involves terrorism; Kurdish officials told us that Iran continues to provide support and an operating base for

Ansar al-Islam, a jihadist group that can operate with relative impunity in Greater Kurdestan because of its Kurdish members. A third option for Iran involves drugs. Since 2004, there has been a surge in the trafficking of Afghan drugs from Iran through Kurdestan on the way to Turkey and to Europe. While the Interior Minister has no evidence that this is state policy, Iranian officials are clearly permitting it. The KRG worries that these drugs could become a major problem for South Kurdestan, especially because of its young population.

The fourth option involves preying on the existing divisions in South Kurdestan's political geography. In the KDP strongholds of Duhok Province, where the majority speak Kurmanji Kurdish (the dialect spoken in Turkey), and in Erbil, the Kurds' orientation toward Turkey is strongest. In Sulaimaniyya Province, however, where the PUK and the opposition Goran movements are strongest, people share a much more intimate connection with Iran and to Persian culture. Naturally, it is in Sulaimaniyya where Iran's influence is strongest. It is perhaps telling that Commander Soleimani's warning to the KRG not to pursue relations with Turkey or independence from Baghdad was delivered to a visiting delegation of PUK officials, rather than to KDP officials. Meanwhile, Iran's power over Kurds derives not from its attractiveness, but because of its nearness and nastiness, as well as its ability to manipulate Kurdish factions and drive them against the KRG. One Kurdish official described Iran's support for the Kurdish Islamic Union, a Brotherhood-inspired movement which is fiercely "anti-corruption." The power of Islamism could always grow in Kurdish Society, especially among the young, if the KRG fails to evolve a more democratic socio-economic condition.

Meanwhile, Iran could also try to drive Kurdish nationalism against KRG. "All Kurds have the goal of a United Kurdestan," said Nawshirwan Mustapha, the charismatic leader of Goran which KDP claims is supported by Iran. But, he said, KRG was not

interested in being a "national government," the implication being that Erbil was becoming one of the obstacles to Kurdish Unity, rather than a vehicle for it. Goran leaders also said that KDP-PUK officials are creating a "1975-like situation" which is putting too many Kurdish eggs in the Turkish basket. This is one example of an anti-KRG Kurdish nationalist argument with real power; "1975" harks back to the crushing defeat of Mullah Mustafa Barzani's Kurdish Revolution, after the Kurds were famously "betrayed" by the Shah's Iran and the United States. This and other debates occurring now within the Kurdish Nationalist Movement will therefore be important to watch because they will become shapers of the KRG's performance and its strategic orientation, including its relations with other Kurdish populations outside South Kurdestan.

KRG and the Future of the Kurdish Spring

Over the long-range, the KRG will need to harness nationalism so that it can continue building up South Kurdestan's defenses and provide a sound political basis and the relevant "facts on the ground" for the acquisition of real strategic power. If it fails to do this, then the Kurdish Future will continue to look like the Kurdish Past, and Kurdestan will be subject either to deepening regional chaos or the "modes and orders" which outsiders attempt to impose on it. If it succeeds, however, Kurds will become even more of an "effective actor" in regional affairs. This will depend to some extent on the KRG's capacity to establish itself as a sufficiently authoritative shaper of Kurdish nationalism. Presently, KRG is striving to become just that, and there is already evidence of an emerging tension between those whose nationalist horizons stop at the actual "borders" of South Kurdestan and those who look beyond to Greater Kurdestan.

Among our interlocutors, there was a self-conscious appreciation of the political, demographic and other transformations now scrambling strategic relations and the deep

structure of power across Southwest Asia and of the new opportunities not just for KRG, but for Kurdestan. On a number of occasions, for example, we asked about Turkey's demographic situation over the next twenty years. Most officials were not inclined to opine on it length, but they were certainly aware of it because it is clearly an important factor shaping KRG's influence on Turkish affairs. Indeed, the official who forecasted a "Kurdish Century" did so after we asked about Turkey's demographic situation. At the start of this new era, the KRG is now the most advanced expression of Kurdish "state-building" in history, and we've been attempting to map out how, if it manages to stay together, it might connect or compete with Kurdish populations and strategies elsewhere.

In one future, the operative idea of the "nation" could remain limited to the KRG's current "borders," and thus we could envision a "South Kurdestani" nationalism emerging. The divisions within the Kurdish Nationalist Movement as a whole are in fact quite substantial and may prove to be "stickier" over time, making this future more plausible. The orientations of the respective Kurdish movements in Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran continue to be shaped by their historical experiences and relations with their "host" societies, and they are divided by tribe and language as well. Nevertheless, there has been a powerful modern tendency in each of these movements to create greater nationalist unity in the countries they operate, and also toward greater connections with outside Kurdish movements. As one KRG official observed, the PKK in Turkey has evolved politically and created a new "consciousness" that "brought out the best" in the Kurds of Turkey. Moreover, today, Turkey's BDP (a political outgrowth of the PKK) enjoys close connections with the Iraqi KDP and PUK, and through them, with the Syrian KNC and the two main Iranian Kurdish opposition parties, Komala and KDP-Eran. Such linkages—which are now actively being fostered by the KRG—were unthinkable five years ago. Through interviews with Kurds from across Greater Kurdestan, including the

Kurdish Diaspora, we've been assessing these connections and how they might evolve over the next twenty years. In South Kurdestan, officials now speak openly about the right of Kurds everywhere to national self-determination, and of KRG's role as a "beacon" to Greater Kurdestan. The KRG may become that, if the Kurds can keep it.

---

[1] Gareth H. Jenkins, "Occasional Allies, Enduring Rivals: Turkey's Relations With Iran." *Silk Road Paper*, *Central Asia Caucuses Institute Silk Road Studies Program*, (May 2012.) http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/silkroadpapers/1205Jenkins.pdf
[2] David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, (New York NY: IB Taurus, 1996) p. 28-29
[3] Douglas Streusand, *Islamic Gunpowder Empires, Ottomans, Safavids and Mughals*, (Boulder CO, Westview Press, 2010) p. 47
[4] Maria T. Oshea, *Trapped Between the Map and Reality, Geography and Perceptions of Kurdistan,* (New York NY: Routledge Publishers, 2004) p. 81
[5] ibid, 91-92
[6] Dr. Kemal Kirkuki, "Kurdish National Conference: A Historic Event for the Kurds, (July 29,2013). http://rudaw.net/english/opinion/29072013
[7] McDowall, p. 108-109
[8] Oshea, p. 143
[9] Ofra Bengio, *The Kurds of Iraq, Building a State within a State,* (Boulder CO, Lynne Reiner, 2012) p. 9
[10] McDowall, p. 39, 62
[11] ibid, p. 41-42
[12] ibid, p. 49-50
[13] ibid, p. 51-52
[14] ibid, p. 53
[15] Oshea, p. 87
[16] Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire, Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone,* (Palo Alto CA: Stanford University Press, 2011) p. 22-23
[17] McDowall, p. 60-61
[18] ibid, p. 89-90
[19] Agata Wojcik, "The Texture of Turkish Nationalism in the Light of Ziya Goklap's Theory," *Hemispheres Studies on Culture and Society,* No. 26. (2011). p. 133
[20] McDowall, p.98
[21] ibid
[22] ibid, p. 104-105
[23] Robert Olson and William F. Tucker, "The Sheikh Sait Rebellion in Turkey (1925): A Study in the Consolidation of a Developed Uninstitutionalized Nationalism and the Rise of Incipient (Kurdish) Nationalism." *Die Welt des Islams,* Vol. 18. Issue 3/4. (1978) p. 200
[24] Hugh and Nicole Pope, *Turkey Unveiled: A History of Modern Turkey*, (New York, NY: Overlook TP, 2011), p. 246
[25] McDowall, p. 207

[26] Aliza Marcus, *Blood and Belief, The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence*. (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2007) p. 17
[27] Pope, p. 256
[28] Aliza Marcus, "The Kurds' Evolving Strategy: The Struggle Goes Political in Turkey," *World Affairs Journal,* Vol. 175, No. 4 (November/December, 2012) http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/kurds%E2%80%99-evolving-strategy-struggle-goes-political-turkey
[29] McDowall, 76-77
[30] ibid, 221
[31] Denise Natali. "The Persistent Boundaries of Kurdish Nationalism," *World Politics Review*. (May 9, 2012) and, *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran*. (Syracuse, NY. Syracuse University Press, 2005)
[32] Michael Axworthy, *Empire of the Mind, a History of Iran*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2010) p. 224-225
[33] McDowall, 238-239
[34] ibid, 246
[35] Hashem Ahmadzadeh and Gareth Stansfield, "The Political, Cultural and Military Re-Awakening of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement in Iran," *The Middle East Journal,* Vol. 64, No. 1 (Winter, 2010) p.15
[36] ibid, p. 17
[37] Keith Crane, Rollie Lal, Jeffery Martini, "Iran's Political, Demographic, and Economic Vulnerabilities," *The Rand Corporation,* (2008) p.48
[38] ibid
[39] ibid, p. 52
[40] Ahmadzadeh and Stansfield, p. 20
[41] Keith Crane, Rollie Lal, Jeffery Martini, p. 40
[42] Graeme Wood, "Iran, a Minority Report," *The Atlantic,* (December 1st, 2006). http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/12/iran-a-minority-report/305367/
[43] Bengio, p. 156-157
[44] Interview with Israelis who worked in Kurdistan 1970-1974
[45] Bengio p. 74
[46] ibid, p. 69
[47] ibid, p. 146-147
[48] Phillip Smyth, "Syria's 31 Percenters: How Bashar Al Assad Built Minority Alliances and Countered Minority Foes," *Middle East Review of International Affairs,* Vol.16. No.1 (March 2012). http://www.gloria-center.org/2012/04/syria%E2%80%99s-31-percenters-how-bashar-al-asad-built-minority-alliances-and-countered-minority-foes/
[49] Bengio, p.8
[50] Interview with Denise Natali. Also see, Natali "The Persistent Boundaries of Kurdish Nationalism," *World Politics Review*. (May 9, 2012), and,, *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran*. (Syracuse. NY. Syracuse University Press, 2005)
[51] Bengio, p.9
[52] Bengio, p. 304-305

[53] Robert Olson, *The Kurdish Question and Turkish Iranian Relations, From World War I to 1998.* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1998) p. 43-45
[54] Nicholas Eberstadt, "Kurdish Futures: Demographics," Workshop Consultation, The Hudson Institute, Washington DC, July 1st 2013
[55] United Nations Population Division Department of Economics and Social Affairs, Population Division. Population Estimates and Projections Section. World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision, 2013. http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/unpp/panel_population.htm
[56] ibid
[57] United Nations Population Division Department of Economics and Social Affairs, Population Division. World Population Prospects, the 2012 Revision, Total Fertility by Major Area, Region and Country 1950-2100, 2013. http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/dataset/fertility/wfd2012/MainFrame.html
[58] Nicholas Eberstadt, The Hudson Institute, Washington DC, July 1st 2013
[59] UNDP, Total Fertility by Major Area, Region and Country, 1950-2100, 2013. http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/dataset/fertility/wfd2012/MainFrame.html
[60] Sutay Yavuz, "Fertility Transition and The Progression to a Third Birth in Turkey," (Presentation, Institute of Population Studies, Hacettepe University). 2005. Available at http://www.demogr.mpg.de/papers/working/wp-2005-028.pdf, accessed November 23, 2011.) Quoted in Nicholas Eberstadt and Apoorva Shah, "Fertility Decline in the Muslim World: A Veritable Sea Change Still Curiously Unnoticed," *The American Enterprise Institute,* Working Paper Series on Development Policy, No. 7. (December 2011). http://www.aei.org/files/2011/12/19/-fertility-decline-in-the-muslim-world-a-veritable-seachange-still-curiously-unnoticed_103731477628.pdf
[61] Nicholas Eberstadt, Washington DC, July 1st 2013
[62] Central Intelligence Agency, The World Factbook: Turkey, 2013. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html
[63] ibid
[64] David P. Goldman, "Ankara's Economic Miracle Collapses," *Middle East Quarterly,* Vol. 19. No.1 (Winter 2012) p. 25-30
[65] Dr. Yusri Hazran, "The Shiite Community in Lebanon: From Marginalization to Ascendency," *Middle East Brief*, No. 37 (June 2009). http://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/meb/MEB37.pdf
[66] Richard Cincotta, "Minority Youth Bulges and the Future of Intrastate Conflict," *Spotlight, the Stimson Center,* (November 10, 2011). http://www.stimson.org/spotlight/minority-youth-bulges-and-the-future-of-intrastate-conflict-/
[67] Ismet Koc, Atilla Hancioglu, Alanur Calvin, "Demographic Differentials and Demographic Integration of Turkish and Kurdish Populations in Turkey," *Population Research and Policy Review,* Vol. 27, No. 4 (August 2008) p.455
[68] ibid
[69] ibid
[70] Nicholas Eberstadt, The Hudson Institute, July 1st 2013
[71] Koc, Hancioglu and Calvin, p. 451

[72] Eberstadt and Shah, *American Enterprise Institute,* December 2011
[73] UNDP, Total Fertility by Major Area, Region and Country, 1950-2100, 2013. http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/dataset/fertility/wfd2012/MainFrame.html
[74] Jamsheed Chosky and Eden Naby, "Beware the Tyranny of the Mob," *Foreign Policy Magazine,* (October 26th, 2012). http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/10/26/beware_the_tyranny_of_the_mob
[75] Fuad Hussein, Chief of Staff to Massud Barzani, "Iraqi Kurdistan: A Decade After Operation Iraqi Freedom," Workshop Consultation, Hudson Institute, March 28th 2013, Washington DC.
[76] Selig Harrison, "Tehran's Biggest Fear," *The New York Times,* (December, 27, 2009) http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/28/opinion/28iht-edharrison.html
[77] Nicholas Eberstadt, Washington DC, July 1st 2013
[78] Central Intelligence Agency, The World Factbook: Iran, 2013. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html
[79] Eberstadt, Hudson Institute, July 1st, 2013
[80] Eberstatd and Shah, *American Enterprise Institute,* December 2011
[81] Ayatollah Kahmenei, "Supreme Leader's Speech to Government Officials," (Speech, Tehran Iran, July 24th, 2007), The Center for Preserving and Publishing the Works of the Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Allah Kahmenei, http://english.khamenei.ir/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1655&Itemid=4
[82] Farzaneh Roudi, "Iran is Reversing its Population Policy," *Viewpoints, Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars,* No. 7. (August 2012).
[83] Christian Leuprecht, "The Demographic Security Dilemma," *Yale Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 5 No.2 (Spring/Summer 2010) p. 63
[84] Eberstadt, the Hudson Institute, July 1st, 2013
[85] Ben Welch, "Turkish Kurdish Energy Relations, An Assessment," *Turkey Analyst,* Vol.6 No.2 (January 30, 2013) http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/turkey/2013/130130B.html
[86] ibid
[87] Kaveh Bayat, "Iran and the "Kurdish Question," *Middle East Report,* No. 257. (Summer 2008) p. 35
[88] "Turkey to Maintain Hefty Economic Bill if Ankara Maintains Harsh Foreign Policy," *Today's Zaman,* (September 1st, 2013), http://www.todayszaman.com/news-325043-turkey-to-pay-hefty-economic-bill-if-ankara-maintains-harsh-foreign-policy.html

Bibliography

Aaron, Leon. "The Political Economy of Russian Oil and Gas," *The American Enterprise Institute,* May 29, 2013. http://www.aei.org/outlook/foreign-and-defense-policy/regional/europe/the-political-economy-of-russian-oil-and-gas

Ahmadzadeh, Hashem and Stansfield Gareth. "The Political Cultural and Military Re-Awakening of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement in Iran," *The Middle East Journal*. Winter 2010. Vol. 64, No. 1 p. 11-21

Ahmed, Mohammed M.A. *Iraqi Kurds and Nation- Building.* New York. NY. Palgrave Macmillian. 2012

Axworthy, Michael. *Empire of the Mind, A History of Iran.* New York. Perseus Books Group. 2008

Bayat, Kaveh "Iran and the "Kurdish Question," *Middle East Report,* No. 257. (Summer 2008) p. 28-35

Cagaptay, Soner and Evans, Tyler. "Turkey's Changing Relationship with Iraq, Kurdistan Up, Baghdad Down," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy,* Policy Focus 122, October 2012. pp.1-15

Central Intelligence Agency, The World Factbook: Iran, 2013. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html

Central Intelligence Agency, The World Factbook: Turkey, 2013. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html

Chosky, Jamsheed and Naby, Eden "Beware the Tyranny of the Mob." *Foreign Policy Magazine.* October 26th, 2012 http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/10/26/beware_the_tyranny_of_the_mob

Cincotta, Richard. "Minority Youth Bulges and the Future of Intrastate Conflict," *The New Security Beat,* October 13, 2011

Congressional Research Service, "Iran: Ethnic and Religious Minorities." Washington DC. United States Congress. November 25, 2008

Crane, Keith. Lal, Rollie and Martini, Jefferey. "Iran's Political Economic and Demographic Vulnerabilities," *The RAND Corporation,* 2008

Dahlman, Carl. "The Political Geography of Kurdistan," *Eurasian Geography and Economics,* Vol. 43. No. 4: pp. 271-299

Eberstadt, Nicholas "Kurdish Futures: Demographics," Roundtable Discussion, The Hudson Institute, Washington DC, July 1st 2013

Eberstadt, Nicholas and Shah, Apoorva "Fertility Decline in the Muslim World: A Veritable Sea Change Still Curiously Unnoticed," *The American Enterprise Institute, Working Paper Series on Development Policy,* No.7, December 211

Finkel, Caroline. *Osman's Dream, The History of the Ottoman Empire.* New York NY. Basic Books. 2007

Goujon, Anne and Barakat Bilal, "Future Demographic Challenges in the Arab World," *The Emirates Emirates Occasional Papers*, No 75, The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2010

Grebennikov, Marat. "The Puzzle of a Loyal Minority: Why Do Azeris Support the Iranian State?" *The Middle East Journal,* Winter 2013. Vol. 67. No. 1 pp. 64-76

Gunter, Michael M. *The Kurds Ascending, The Evolving Solution to the Kurdish Problem in Iraq and Turkey*. New York, NY. 2011

Harrison, Selig "Tehran's Biggest Fear," *The New York Times.* December 27, 2009. http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/28/opinion/28iht-edharrison.html

Hazran, Dr. Yusri "The Shiite Community in Lebanon: From Marginalization to Ascendency," *Middle East Brief*, No. 37. June 2009. http://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/meb/MEB37.pdf

Hussein, Fuad. Chief of Staff to Massud Barzani, "Iraqi Kurdistan: A Decade After Operation Iraqi Freedom." Workshop Consultation. Hudson Institute. March 28th 2013, Washington DC.

International Crisis Group. "Iraq and the Kurds: The High Stakes Hydrocarbons Gambit." *Middle East Report*. April 19, 2012

Jenkins, Gareth H. "Occasional Allies, Enduring Rivals, Turkey's Relationship with Iran" *Silk Road Paper.* Washington DC. Central Asia-Caucus Institute Silk Road Studies Program. Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. May 2012

Kahmenei, Ayatollah "Supreme Leader's Speech to Government Officials." Speech, Tehran Iran, July 24th, 2007. The Center for Preserving and Publishing the Works of the Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Allah Kahmenei, http://english.khamenei.ir/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1655&Itemid=4

Klein, Janet, *The Margins of Empire, Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone.* Palo Alto CA. Stanford University Press, 2011

Koc, Ismet, Hancioglu, Attila and Calvin, Alanur. "Demographic Differentials and Demographic Integration of Turkish and Kurdish Populations in Turkey," *Population Research and Policy Review*, Vol. 27. No. 4 .August 2008. pp. 447-457

Lawrence, Quil. *Invisible Nation: How The Kurds Quest for Statehood is Shaping Iraq and the Middle East.* New York, NY. Walker Publishing, 2008

Leuprecht, Christian. The Demographic Security Dilemma," *Yale Journal of International Affairs*, Spring/Summer 2010

Marcus, Aliza. *Blood and Belief, the PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence.* New York NY. NYU Press. 2009

Marcus, Aliza "The Kurds' Evolving Strategy: The Struggle Goes Political in Turkey," *World Affairs Journal,* Vol. 175, No. 4 .November/December, 2012.

McDowall, David. *A Modern History of the Kurds.* New York, NY. IB Taurus. 1996

McKiernan, Kevin. *The Kurds, A People in Search of their Homeland.* St. Martin's Press. New York, NY. 2006

Meiselas, Susan. *Kurdistan, In the Shadow of History.* University of Chicago Press. Chicago IL. 2008

Natali, Denise. "The Persistent Boundaries of Kurdish Nationalism," *World Politics Review*, May 9, 2012

Natali, Denise. *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran*. Syracuse. NY. Syracuse University Press.2005

Natali, Denise. *The Kurdish Quasi-state: Development and Dependency in Post-gulf War Iraq*. Syracuse NY. Syracuse University Press. 2010

Ofra, Bengio. *The Kurds of Iraq, Building a State Within a State.* Boulder CO. Lynne Reiner Publishers. 2012

Olson, Robert. *The Kurdish Question and Turkish-Iranian Relations*, *From World War I to 1998*. Costa Mesa, CA. Mazda Publishers, 1998

Olson, Robert and Tucker, William F. "The Sheikh Sait Rebellion in Turkey (1925): A Study in the Consolidation of a Developed Uninstitutionalized Nationalism and the Rise of Incipient (Kurdish) Nationalism." *Die Welt des Islams.* Vol.18. Issue ¾. 1978. pp. 195-211

Olson, Robert, *Turkey's Relations With Iran, Syria, Israel and Russia 1991-2000*. Costa Mesa CA. Mazda Publishers, 2001.

O'Shea, Maria T. *Trapped Between the Map and Reality, Geography and Perceptions of Kurdistan*. New York, NY. Routledge Publishers, 2004

Parker, John W. *Persian Dreams,* Potomac Books. Washington DC. 2009

Pope, Nicole and Hugh. *Turkey Unveiled, A History of Modern Turkey.* Overlook Press. New York, NY. 2011

Primakov, Yevgeni *Russia and the Arabs,* trans. Paul Gold. New York. Perseus Books Group. 2009

Roudi, Farzaneh "Iran is Reversing its Population Policy," *Viewpoints, Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars,* No. 7. August 2012. http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/iran-reversing-its-population-policy

Sassoon, Joseph. *Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party.* New York, NY. Cambridge University Press. 2012

Smyth, Phillip "Syria's 31 Percenters: How Bashar Al Assad Built Minority Alliances and Countered Minority Foes," *Middle East Review of International Affairs,* Vol.16. No.1 .March 2012. http://www.gloria-center.org/2012/04/syria%E2%80%99s-31-percenters-how-bashar-al-asad-built-minority-alliances-and-countered-minority-foes/

Streusand, Douglas. *Islamic Gunpowder Empires, Ottomans, Safavids and Mughals*. Perseus Books Group. Bolder CO. 2010

United Nations Population Division Department of Economics and Social Affairs, Population Division. World Population Prospects, the 2012 Revision, Total Fertility by Major Area, Region and Country 1950-2100, 2013. http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/dataset/fertility/wfd2012/MainFrame.html

United Nations Population Division Department of Economics and Social Affairs, Population Division. Population Estimates and Projections Section. World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision, 2013. http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/unpp/panel_population.htm

Weitz, Richard. "Russian Turkish Relations: Steadfast and Changing." *Mediterranean Quarterly.* Summer 2010, Vol. 21 No. 3 pp. 61-85

Welch, Ben "Turkish Kurdish Energy Relations, An Assessment," *Turkey Analyst,* vol.6 no.2, January 30, 2013

Wojcik, Agata. "The Texture of Turkish Nationalism in Light of Ziya Gokalp's Theory," *Hemispheres, Studies on Cultures and Societies.* No. 26. 2011. pp. 132-145

Wood, Graeme "Iran, a Minority Report," *The Atlantic.* December 1st, 2006. http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/12/iran-a-minority-report/305367/