

The Policies of Non-Interference

U.S. Policies Toward Iraqi Kurds, 1963-1968

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Abstract

When President Lyndon B. Johnson entered the Oval Office in November 1963 following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, the U.S. backed Ba'ath Party in Iraq had been overthrown a few days earlier. The Johnson administration had to assess the new Iraqi government, an Iraqi nationalist regime that was relying heavily on the power of the Iraqi military. When the Kurdish War resumed, and the Iraqi Kurds kept pleading Washington for assistance, Washington witnessed that its allies, Iran and Israel were engaging in covert actions in the Kurdish mountains to destabilize Iraq. At the same time, the Johnson administration was seeking to strengthen its friendship with Iraq in order to secure its interests and prevent the expansion of the Soviet Union in the Gulf. This thesis looks at U.S. policies toward the Iraqi Kurds during the Johnson administration. It argues that the Johnson administration's policies towards the Kurds were ultimately determined by the Cold War U.S. objectives.

Acknowledgements

When I first started with this thesis in 2019, I had no visual plan for what this would turn into. I had one idea; it was that I wanted to write about the Kurds' history. I wanted to tell a story that I thought deserved to be heard. Gradually, this thesis took shape. The process has been a very inspiring one, often challenging and yet very exciting and have taught me so much; Not just about the Kurds, but also about archival documents, U.S. politics, the Middle East and the twentieth century overall. It has been incredible.

First and foremost, a big thank you to my thesis-advisor, Hilde Henriksen Waage. This thesis would never turn into what it is today without her knowledge, dedication to her field and her genuine interest in her students. With her helpful feedback, she has guided me through the whole process of shaping this thesis. I am very thankful for that.

I also want to thank my friends for their never-ending cheering and encouragement. Most importantly, I am so grateful for my family and your immense love and support. You are the best. A huge thank you to my parents for believing in me and inspiring me day by day. Without you, this would never have been possible. Lastly, to the love of my life, Hadjar - thank you for your kindness, your patience and for always bringing joy to my life.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In June 1967, the relationship between Iraq and the U.S. was changed for years after. The Lyndon B. Johnson administration had moved the Dwight D. Eisenhower- and John F. Kennedy administrations' policies of impartiality towards openly supporting Israel against the Arab states in the Six Day War. As a result, the tensions in the Middle East escalated, and many states, including Iraq, severed diplomatic relations with the U.S. Bitter towards American support for Israel, the moderate regime of Abd Al-Rahman Arif was threatened by powerful military forces in a way that Washington feared for the regime's survival. With Britain announcing its withdrawal of forces East of Suez and the Soviet Union's increasing position in Iraq, Washington became uneasy as it realized the danger this had for U.S. interests in the Middle East. With Arif unable to solve Iraq's internal conflicts, notably the Kurdish question, in July 1968, the Ba'th Party overthrew Arif in a bloodless coup.

Years earlier, in February 1963, the Kennedy administration had welcomed the Ba'th Party. Diplomatic relations were restored, and Iraq had begun receiving military supplies from the U.S. Meanwhile, the Iraqi government had launched a military offensive against the Iraqi Kurds.¹ A food embargo was put on Iraqi Kurdistan, and the borders were sealed, making sure no aid was given.² Well aware of this activity, the Kennedy administration continued its weapon supplies to Iraq to defeat the Kurds in the "Kurd campaign".³ Pleading to the U.S. for help to prevent further bloodshed, the Kurds soon found their letters and emissaries to be ignored. With the overthrow of the Ba'th Party in November 1963 and the coming of power of a nationalist regime, the Johnson administration's approach toward the Kurds remained the same as its predecessor. The objective was to build good relations with Iraq, even if this was at the expense of the Kurdish cause.⁴ However, the consequences of the Six Day War and the return of the Ba'th Party in 1968 eventually culminated in changed U.S. objectives. What was

¹ Since the Kurds are divided into four nation-states, the term *Iraqi Kurds* will in this thesis be used when referring to the Kurds that are born or residing in Iraq and are of Kurdish origin.

² The term *Iraqi Kurdistan* will in this thesis be used when referring to the mountainous Kurdish populated region in northern Iraq. It borders Syria to the West, Iran to the East, and Turkey to the north.

³ Memorandum from Komer to Kennedy. *Foreign Relations of the United States (Hereafter FRUS)*, 1961-1963, Vol: XVIII, Near East, 1962-1963. Doc.293. <https://history.state.gov/about>

⁴ The *Kurdish cause* refers to the Kurds' struggle for national rights as well as autonomy in Iraq.

welcomed by the Kennedy administration in 1963 was viewed in 1968 as a highly negative development.

This study will look at U.S. policies toward the Kurds during the Johnson administration. It will begin in the transition of power from Kennedy to Johnson in November 1963 and end in July 1968 when the Ba’th Party returned to power in Iraq. This study will aim to answer these questions: How were U.S.-Kurdish relations during the Johnson administration? How were the various regimes in Baghdad perceived in Washington? What policies did the Johnson administration implement towards the Kurds and the various Iraqi regimes, and why?

The U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East during the Cold War

In the aftermath of World War II, the traditional European world powers, Britain and France, were weakened. This led to a decline in the British empire and created an international power vacuum. After the war, the only Two Super Powers that could fill the international power vacuum were the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The Cold War emerged as these parties vied for political influence in the postwar era. From now on, any conflict in the world was brought into this rivalry.⁵

The Cold War was a global conflict that significantly affected the Middle East. As Britain’s position in the world weakened, its ability to defend the Middle East was declining. Since the U.S. was emerging in the Middle East at a time when Britain was leaving, Truman and Eisenhower “collectively made deep and enduring commitments for the security of the region”.⁶ In 1941 the U.S. had minimal political contact with Middle Eastern countries. However, after assessing the Middle East as a region of strategic importance, close proximity to the Soviet Union and an area of plentiful oil resources, the U.S. began considering the Middle East as vital to U.S. interests.⁷ By late 1956 American officials believed that the U.S. was the only power that could keep the region from falling under the control of the Soviet Union. As a

⁵ Danielsen, Helge. 2013. “USA og den kalde krigen.” I *Krig og Fred I det lange 20- århundre*. Edited by Waage, Hilde Henriksen, Tamnes, Rolf, and Hanne Hagtvedt. 43-63. Kristiansand: Cappelen Damn Akademisk; Hahn, Peter. 2005. *Crisis and Crossfire. The United States and the Middle East Since 1945*. Virginia: Potomac Books.5; Dobson, Alan P. and Steve March. 2001. *US Foreign Policy since 1945*. London: Routledge. 20.

⁶ Hahn, Peter. 2005. Caught in the Middle East: U.S. Policy Toward the Arab-Israeli conflict, 1945-1961. The University of North Carolina Press. ProQuest Ebook Central. 277-278; For more about Britain’s declining status, see Fain, Taylor W. 2008. *American Ascendance and British Retreat in the Persian Gulf Region*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.70-75.

⁷ Hahn. *Crisis and Crossfire*. 7; Hahn. *Cought in the Middle East*. 147.

result, the U.S. was “caught in the Middle East”, and the Middle East became deeply and unceasingly caught in the superpower’s rivalries.⁸

President Harry S. Truman pursued three broad objectives to the Middle East policy of the U.S. Firstly, it abandoned the traditional U.S. non-involvement in the Middle East by setting out to prevent the spread of Soviet influence in the Middle East. Secondly, it set out to protect access to Middle East oil to the West. Lastly, it endorsed the existence and the security of Israel. These objectives were “readily” accepted by successive administrations and characterized American policies in the region for much of the Cold War era.⁹

To prevent the spread of Soviet influence in the Middle East, over the next forty years, the main element of any policies implied by the U.S. toward the Soviet Union was derived from the U.S. *containment* policy, formulated by the diplomat George F. Kennan in 1947. Kennan believed that since the Soviet Union was expanding its influence in the world, a containment policy "must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies".¹⁰ According to Kennan, the U.S. should use political and economic methods to reduce Soviet expansion. Kennan's ideas became the basis of what policies each succeeding administration thereafter would conduct toward the Soviet Union.¹¹ The Baghdad Pact in 1955 and the Eisenhower doctrine in 1957 were examples of U.S. policies to thwart the Soviet threat.¹²

The second U.S. objective in the Middle East during the Cold War was to protect access to the Middle East oil. In 1956 Eisenhower stated that “Western Europe requires Middle Eastern oil and Middle Eastern oil is of importance mainly through its contribution to the Western economy”.¹³ After World War I and the "economic boom" in the 1920s, where technological progress led to mass production of goods, electrification of America, mass marketing, and

⁸ Hahn. *Caught in the Middle East*. 277.

⁹ Quandt, William B. 2005. *Peace Process. American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*. Third Edition. California: University of California Press.14; Dobson and March. *US Foreign Policy since 1945*. 94; Quandt, William B. 2001. *America and the Middle East: A Fifty-Year Overview*. In *Diplomacy in the Middle East. The International relations of regional and outside powers*. Edited by L. Carl Brown, 59-73. New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd. 59.

¹⁰ Kennan and Containment, 1947, *FRUS*, 1945-1952, Milestones. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/kennan>

¹¹ Dobson and March. *US Foreign Policy since 1945*. 23.

¹² Christison, Kathleen. 1999. *Perceptions of Palestine. Their influence on U.S. Middle East Policy*. University of California Press. 99.

¹³ Dobson and March. 2001. *US Foreign Policy since 1945*. 95.

increased employment, the oil dependency became higher than it ever had been.¹⁴ With the Middle East's gigantic oil reserves, the U.S. came to view the region as of critical importance. By 1955, oil reserves in the Middle East totaled 100 billion to 150 billion barrels, three to five times more than U.S. reserves.¹⁵ Furthermore, the marginal cost of oil barrel production in the Middle East was almost one-tenth that of the U.S.'. The U.S. realized that if it was to preserve its oil resources as long as possible, it needed to conserve the recourses during peacetime. Having its own oil recourses in wartime was important.¹⁶

The last U.S. objective in the Middle East during the Cold War era was to secure the existence of Israel. The "special American commitment to Israel" had dominated U.S. interests in the Middle East since the creation of Israel in 1948.¹⁷ The U.S. was an early supporter of the idea of a Jewish state and recognized Israel once it was established. This support was rooted in the moral commitment to the Holocaust survivors as well as to strong lobbying from the Jews.¹⁸ . Also, the Christian Zionist movement that emerged after World War II shaped the political environment.¹⁹ Israel was also viewed as a strategic U.S. partner because of its powerful military, democratic institutions, and pro-American stance.²⁰ As a result, the U.S. relationship with Israel flourished. However, since the creation of Israel and the first Arab-Israeli War, Arab states attempted to reverse the establishment of the Jewish state.²¹ The unending conflict between the Arab states and Israel left the U.S. in a difficult situation. Extending support to Israel, threatened to alienate Arab states, including the wealthiest ones with oil large reserves. This would worsen U.S. relations with the Arab world and threaten its interests.²² Therefore, the U.S. needed to find a balance. Encouraging Arab states to accept the Israeli state and seeking friendly relations with the Middle East states became important.²³

¹⁴ Halabi. *U.S. Foreign Policy*. 29

¹⁵ Hahn. *Crisis and Crossfire*. 7.

¹⁶ Halabi. *U.S. Foreign Policy*. 29-30.

¹⁷ Quandt. *Peace Process*. 13-14.

¹⁸ Quandt. *Peace Process*. 13.

¹⁹ Hahn, Peter L. 2012. "The Middle East". In *A Companion to Lyndon B. Johnson*. Edited by Mitchell B. Lerner. 439-445. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing.

²⁰ Migdal. Migdal, Joel S. 2014. *Shifting Sands: The United States in the Middle East*. Columbia University Press. 17.

²¹ Migdal. *Shifting Sands*. 6.

²² Migdal. *Shifting Sands*. 16-17.

²³ Christison. *Perceptions of Palestine*. 30.

With these objectives in mind, every American president in the Cold War era aimed to exercise global power by seeking out “strategic partnership” with key local powers.²⁴ While Truman had favored Israel over its Arab neighbors, Eisenhower and his successor Kennedy followed a policy of neutrality and evenhandedness in the region. They believed that friendship with the Arab states was essential to secure western interests and to prevent communist involvement in the Arab world.²⁵ The Eisenhower administration also sought to build a partnership with Iran. The succeeding administrations followed the same approach. Together with Israel, the Shah, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, was seen as an important U.S. ally in the Middle East. As a result, Eisenhower and the succeeding administrations armed the Shah and leaned heavily on Iran to play an active role in the Persian Gulf.²⁶

The U.S.’ extraordinary military and economic dominance in the world empowered the Super Power to obtain influence and protect its interests in the Middle East. However, the U.S. wanted to demonstrate that its approach toward the Middle East was different than the British and French imperialists – it aimed to prove that it was not their heir. Rather, Truman and the succeeding presidents wanted to demonstrate that it had progressive ideas towards the Middle East, ideas such as self-determination, economic prosperity, and the political freedom of each state.²⁷

Theoretical Perspectives: The Makings of U.S. Foreign Policy

When formulating foreign policy, the U.S. presidents and secretaries of the state usually set guidelines for their policies. According to William Quandt, several theories explain this decision-making and how these policies were laid out. The *bureaucratic politics* model describes the competition between rivaling bureaucratic agencies within a presidential administration. These bureaucrats compete with each other and may approach the area with their ideologies and beliefs which are not necessarily based on rational thinking.²⁸ The outcome of this rivaling policymaking is less predictable. Instead, one needs to look at “who is influencing whom”.²⁹ A second theory is the *domestic politics* model. This model shows how lobbying can exert influence over foreign policy. Regarding the Middle East, the pro-Israeli

²⁴ Migdal. *Shifting Sands*. 15-16.

²⁵ Hahn. *Caught in the Middle East*. 147; Christison. *Perception of Palestine*. 104.

²⁶ Migdal. *Shifting Sands*. 48-51.

²⁷ Halabi. *US Foreign Policy*. 30; Migdal. *Shifting Sands*. 20.

²⁸ Spiegel. Spiegel. Steven L. 1985. *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict. Making America’s Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 4.

²⁹ Quandt. *Peace Process*. 7.

lobby has a strong influence on the Congress. These lobbies are able to exert influence over foreign policy through budget and restrictions.³⁰ The last model, and the most relevant model for this thesis, is the *strategic* model. The model assumes that rational decisionmakers make decisions based on their understanding of national interests. In the Johnson administration, it was the president and his foreign policy advisors who were the decisionmakers of U.S. foreign policy.

When announced as president on November 22, 1963, Johnson's immediate priorities were declared as an "unconditional war on poverty in America".³¹ He focused on economic developments and the extension of civil liberties back home. Other than the Vietnam War that demanded his attention, his political experience did not extend to foreign policymaking. This area was left to the team of foreign policy advisors. Having served as the vice President under Kennedy and because of the trust Johnson had in the high caliber of the men who fulfilled their roles, Johnson decided to retain Kennedy's foreign policy team. The continuity of senior foreign advisors from 1961 to 1969 made the Kennedy and the Johnson administrations quite similar in foreign policymaking.³²

Secretary of State Dean Rusk assumed a far more important foreign policy role than he had enjoyed under Kennedy. He was Johnson's most important foreign policy advisor with whom Johnson always operated.³³ Under Johnson, the National Security Council (NSC) became an advisory body and was the White House's main institution for foreign policy decision-making. Johnson dealt directly with only a few senior NSC staff members. These were his National Security Advisors. To Johnson, the National Security Advisors had essentially administrative roles for National Security Affairs. Johnson's first National Security Advisor was McGeorge Bundy.³⁴ Bundy enjoyed a prominent role over the NSC and in determining foreign policy.

³⁰ Quandt. Peace Process. 8.

³¹ Costigliola, Frank. 2010. "U.S. foreign policy from Kennedy to Johnson." Chapter. In: *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*. Edited by Leffler, Melvyn P. and Odd Arne Westad. 112-133. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³² Costigliola. U.S. foreign policy from Kennedy to Johnson. 112-133; Colman, Jonathan. 2010. *Foreign Policy of Lyndon B. Johnson: The United States and the World, 1963-69*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. ProQuest Ebook Central 12.

³³ Dumbrell, John. "LBJ and the Cold War". In *A Companion to Lyndon B. Johnson*. Edited by Mitchell B. Lerner. 420-434. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing.

³⁴ Lazarowitz, Arlene. 2008. "Different Approaches to a Regional Search for Balance: The Johnson administration, the State Department, and the Middle East, 1964-1967." In *Diplomatic History*. Vol. 32. No 1. 25-54; Quandt. *America and the Middle East*. 63-64; Colman. *Foreign Policy of Lyndon B. Johnson*. 10-14.

Robert S. McNamara served as the Secretary of Defense and functioned as an important channel of communication between the White House and the military establishment.³⁵

Robert Komer briefly succeeded Bundy as interim National Security Advisor in March 1966 before Walt Rostow took up the post one month later and quickly became Johnson's personal "foreign-policy spokesman."³⁶ The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), which is a foreign intelligence service, also contributed to delivering intelligence briefings to the NSC. However, because Johnson had his own prejudices against the CIA, related to the lack of trust he had in its material, Johnson and the CIA rarely worked together.³⁷ Johnson conducted his administration's foreign policy among as few officials as possible.³⁸ By 1965, the "Big Three", Bundy, Rusk, and McNamara were the key decisionmakers.³⁹

Johnson and his team of foreign policy advisors, with carefully prepared staff work, would meet regularly to discuss foreign policy. These meetings became the most important forums of foreign policy discussion and reflected the good relationship between the NSC, State Department, and the Department of Defense. Recommendations from these advisors influenced the White House Middle East outlook.⁴⁰ According to Rusk, Johnson "would always accept our common conclusion. He had views of his own, but he wanted to have the best effort of his colleagues invested in the problem before the president himself came to a final result".⁴¹ Although Johnson always had the final decision in policymaking, he relied "almost exclusively on his top officials" on what policies would best suit U.S. national interests.⁴² This was the process of the makings of U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East and this fits Quandt *strategic* model well.

³⁵ Preston, Andrew. 2001. "The Little State Department: McGeorge Bundy and the National Security Council Staff, 1961-65." In *Presidential Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 31. No. 4. 635-659.

³⁶ Lazarowitz "The Johnson administration, the State Department, and the Middle East."

³⁷ Colman. *Foreign Policy of Lyndon B. Johnson*. 15-16.

³⁸ Andrew. "The Little State Department".

³⁹ Andrew. "The Little State Department".

⁴⁰ Lazarowitz "The Johnson administration, the State Department, and the Middle East."

⁴¹ Rusk quoted in Colman. *Foreign Policy of Lyndon B. Johnson*. 15.

⁴² Andrew. "The Little State Department".

According to the political scientist, Steven L. Spiegel, “the president and the chief foreign policy advisers are often guided by what they deem most important at a given time”.⁴³ Spiegel argues that American policy towards the Middle East involves three levels of decision making: the *global*, the *regional*, and the actual *area in conflict*.⁴⁴ World politics in the Johnson administration were heavily influenced by the Cold War. The two rivals, the U.S. and the Soviet Union, both had interests and ambitions to expand their sphere of influence around the world and notably in the Middle East. This affected the Johnson administration's decision-making at the *global* level. Spiegel argues that the U.S. “would involve itself anywhere and any time to contain the communist menace”.⁴⁵

At the *regional level*, which is highly relevant for this thesis, President Johnson and his foreign policy experts faced daunting challenges in the Middle East. Political dynamics among the states of the region, notably the Arab-Israeli conflict, sparked hostilities and led to the Six Day War in June 1967. The evolving nationalist movements in the Arab states challenged the power of U.S. influence and created opportunities for Soviet expansion. However, the Vietnam War and concerns at home refrained the Johnson administration from launching policy initiatives in the Middle East. Instead, it adopted a *wait and see* policy and reacted to situations and crises that erupted there.⁴⁶

Another example of the *regional level* was that the Johnson administration sought to build friendly relations with an Iraqi regime that was well disposed towards the West in order to secure U.S. national interests. When Britain announced in January 1968 that it was intending to withdraw its military forces from the Gulf, it became important to the Johnson administration that the power vacuum left by Britain should be balanced by regional powers. This resulted in the Policy of Twin Pillars that sought to build up Saudi Arabia and Iran as regional powers that would secure western interests in the Gulf.⁴⁷

⁴³ Spiegel, Steven L. 1985. *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict. Making America's Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 10.

⁴⁴ Spiegel. *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*. 3-4.

⁴⁵ Spiegel. *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*. 121,

⁴⁶ Hahn. “The Middle East.”

⁴⁷ Fain. *American Ascendance*. 173-175.

An example on the third level, the *area of conflict*, was found in President Johnson's friendship with Israel, which was not necessary because of regional or global motives.⁴⁸ Johnson had a biblically-based religious background that strengthened his sympathy toward Israel. He considered himself a friend of Israel and described it as "a country for which we [the U.S.] have great admiration and affection".⁴⁹ The coming of Johnson marked the end of Eisenhower and Kennedy's policy of impartiality and evenhandedness in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Johnson embraced a pro-Israel orientation and recognized Israel as a Cold War security partner that would promote U.S. interests.⁵⁰ He appointed a loyal Israel-supporter, Arthur Goldberg, as the new U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.⁵¹ He also told Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol that the "close and friendly relationship...between our two governments must continue".⁵²

While Johnson and his advisors shared a common foreign policy outlook, they differed in their approach to Israel. The Johnson White House and the State Department recognized Israel's strategic importance for the U.S. However, while Rusk wanted to remain on friendly terms with both Israel and its Arab neighbors, the president's Pro-Israeli outlook came to prevail the State Department. In the aftermath of the Six Day War, Johnson's sympathy for Israel was demonstrated when he made no effort to force Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories.⁵³ His friendly attitude was something that would eventually make him unpopular in the Arab world and challenge his friendship with the Arab states, notably Iraq.⁵⁴

Sources and Literature

This thesis relies primarily on sources from the Lyndon B. Johnson Library in Austin, Texas. The most important documents have been National Security Files, which are working files of Johnson's special assistants in the National Security Council, Bundy, Rostow, and their staff. Files of Robert Komer and Harold K. Saunders, both National Security Council staff assistants, have been of high importance to this thesis. Komer and Saunders were responsible, among other things, to obtain information about Iraq and the Kurds and convey to Bundy and Rostow. Much of the information they obtained about Iraq and the Kurds was through the U.S. Embassy

⁴⁸ Spiegel. *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*. 6.

⁴⁹ Johnson quoted in Spiegel. *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*. 123.

⁵⁰ Hahn. "The Middle East."

⁵¹ Spiegel. *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*. 120; Halabi, Yakub. 2009. *US Foreign Policy in the Middle East. From Crisis to Change*. Farnham, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited. 49-50.

⁵² Colman. *US Foreign Policy of Lyndon B. Johnson*. 146.

⁵³ Lazarowitz. "The Johnson administration, the State Department, and the Middle East." 63-64.

⁵⁴ Colman. *Foreign Policy of Lyndon B. Johnson*. 149; Yakub. *US Foreign Policy in the Middle East*. 49.

in Baghdad and Tehran. The Komer and Saunders collection of National Security Files from the Lyndon B. Johnson Library also contain files from the Bureau of Intelligence and Research of the U.S. State Department, an agency that worked with providing intelligence and analysis for the State Department. The file collection that have been used in this thesis contains a large variety of personal letters, reports, telegrams, airgrams and intelligence analyses, and memorandums.

This study also relies on primary source material from the *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, a digital archival series by the U.S. Department of State.⁵⁵ The *FRUS* collection presents official documentary historical records of major U.S. foreign policy decisions and significant diplomatic activity. Many of the documents in Lyndon B. Johnson library are included in this series as well as documents from the State Department records at the National Archives in Maryland.

This study has drawn knowledge from a large amount of secondary literature as well. This has been important to gain perspective and provide historical context. The literature for this thesis contains books and articles on U.S. foreign policy toward the broader Middle East during the Cold War, on U.S.- Kurdish relations, and lastly on U.S.-Iraqi relations. There is a large amount of secondary literature that covers American Middle East policy during the Cold War. However, the literature on Johnson-Iraqi-Kurdish relations is limited, and only recently has there been made a few contributions to this field. A book that has been of high value to my thesis and contains a detailed study of the Johnson administration's policy towards Iraq and the Kurds, is a book by historian Bryan R. Gibson. His book *Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds, and the Cold War* was published in 2015 and has been a great contribution to understanding U.S. policy toward the Kurds. Based on a Cold War perspective, Gibson has used primary sources from presidential archives and *FRUS* to study U.S. policy in Iraq.⁵⁶

In 2010, Douglas Little wrote an article named “The United States and the Kurds: A Cold War Study” where he looks at U.S. relations with the Kurds throughout the whole Cold War.⁵⁷ This article has been beneficial when looking at U.S. policies toward Iraq through Cold War lenses.

⁵⁵ Foreign Relations of the U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian. <https://history.state.gov/about>

⁵⁶ Gibson, Bryan, R. 2015. *Sold Out? U.S. Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds, and the Cold War*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

⁵⁷ Little, Douglas. 2014. “The United States and the Kurds. A Cold War Story.” In *Journal of Cold War Studies*. 12, No. 4. 63-98.

Another helpful source is a doctoral degree by Hawraman Ali called *The Iraqi Kurds, The Cold War, and Regional Politics*.⁵⁸ This doctoral degree has offered a broader perspective on regional politics in the Middle East and how they influenced the situation of the Kurds, the Soviet involvement with the Kurds as well as Kurdish relations with Iran and Israel. Another important contribution is *The Kurds and US Foreign Policy: International Relations in the Middle East since 1945* by Marianna Charountaki.⁵⁹ She takes a comparative approach that looks at the case of the Kurds of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey.

To understand U.S. policies from a broader Cold War perspective, there has been used a range of secondary literature that covers U.S. interests in the Middle East during the Cold War. The most important ones are first and foremost the works of William B. Quandt. And Peter L. Hahn.⁶⁰ Other scholars worth mentioning are Steven L. Spiegel, Alan P. Dobson, and Yakub Halabi.⁶¹

As regards literature on Kurdish history and Iraq's history, the most important ones have been the works of Edgar O'Ballance, *The Kurdish Struggle* and *The Kurdish Revolt 1961-1970*, where he gives historical insight into the political, social, and military aspects of the Kurdish struggle.⁶² With the book *A Modern History of the Kurds*, David McDowall has entered the field as a prominent scholar of Kurdish history.⁶³ His book has been used to gain a greater understanding of Kurdish history, particularly during the presidencies of the Arif brothers and the Ba'th Party. Another helpful book is *Kurdish Ethnonationalism* by Nader Entessar.⁶⁴ In recent years, there has been an increasing number of books in the field of Kurdish Studies: Michael Gunter, *The Kurds. A Modern History* and Kerim Yildiz, *The Kurds in Iraq. The Past,*

⁵⁸ Ali, Hawraman. 2017. *The Iraqi Kurds, The Cold War, and Regional Politics: 1958 – 1975*. A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities.

⁵⁹ Charountaki, Marianna. 2010. *The Kurds and U.S. Foreign Policy: International Relations in the Middle East since 1945*. London: Routledge

⁶⁰ Quandt, William B. 2005. *Peace Process. American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*. Third Edition. California: University of California Press; Quandt. "America and the Middle East."; Quandt, William B. 1992. "Lyndon Johnson and the 1967 War: What Color Was the Light?" In *the Middle East Journal*; Spring 1992. Vo. 46. No. 2. ProQuest; Hahn, Peter. 2005. *Caught in the Middle East: U.S. Policy Toward the Arab-Israeli conflict, 1945-1961*. The University of North Carolina Press. ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁶¹ Dobson, Alan P., and Steve March. 2001. *US Foreign Policy since 1945*. London: Routledge; Spiegel. Steven L. 1985. *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict. Making America's Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Halabi, Yakub. 2009. *US Foreign Policy in the Middle East. From Crisis to Change*. Farnham, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

⁶² O'Ballance, Edgar. 1996. *The Kurdish Struggle. 1920-94*. London: Macmillan Press; O'Ballance, Edgar. *Kurdish Revolt: 1961-1970*. London: Faber and Faber Limited Press.

⁶³ McDowall, David. 2004. *A Modern History of the Kurds*. Third edition. New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd.

⁶⁴ Entessar, Nader. 1992. *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*. Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Present and Future have both been a great supplement in understanding the Kurds' history.⁶⁵ Important books about Iraq's history have been *A History of Iraq* by Charles Tripp and *Iraq Since 1958. From Revolution to Dictatorship* by Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Gunter, Michael M. 2017. *The Kurds. A Modern History*. New Jersey: Markus Wiener Publishers; Yildiz, Kerim. 2004. *The Kurds in Iraq, The Past, Present and Future*. London: Pluto Press.

⁶⁶ Tripp, Charles. 2010. *A History of Iraq*. Third edition. New York: Cambridge University Press; Sluglett, Marion Farouk & Sluglett, Peter. 1990. *Iraq since 1958. From Revolution to Dictatorship*. London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd.

Chapter Two: Background

*Look, from the Arab 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.
-Ehmedê Kanî, 1695.⁶⁷*

The Kurdish question in Iraq has dominated the political scene since the state's formation in 1921. Although the Kurds are the largest people in the world that are lacking a state of their own, they are an ancient people in the Middle East. They stem from Indo-European tribes that migrated to the Zagros mountain region some 4,000 years ago.⁶⁸ They have "outlived the rise and fall" of many imperial powers: The Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, and lastly, the Turks. They have their history, language, and culture, distinct from their neighbors.⁶⁹ Under the Ottoman Empire, the Kurds established semiautonomous entities in form of tribal chiefs, also called "emirates".⁷⁰ In its modern form, Kurdish nationalism developed parallel with other nationalities during the second half of the nineteenth century within the Ottoman Empire.⁷¹ Separatist activity continued at a low level up to the twentieth-century. However, only with the collapse of the Ottoman empire and the international flush of enthusiasm for self-determination at the Versailles Peace Conference did the Kurds get on the international agenda. This would determine the geographic fate of the Kurds.

⁶⁷ In his love epic the *Mem û Zîn* from 1695, the poet Ehmedê Kanî distinguishes the Kurds from Arab, Turks, and Iranians. On this epic, see Bruinessen, Martin van. "Ehmedî Xanî's *Mem û Zîn* and Its Role in the Emergence of Kurdish National Awareness." In *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*. Edited by Abbas Vali. 40-57. California: Mazda Publishers.

⁶⁸ Yildiz. *The Past, Present and Future*. 7.

⁶⁹ Edmonds, C. J. 1971. "Kurdish Nationalism." In *Nationalism and Separatism. Journal of Contemporary History*. Vol. 6. No 1.

⁷⁰ McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 47.

⁷¹ Edmonds. "Kurdish Nationalism."

Redrawing the Map and The Treaty of Sèvres

World War I began in August 1914 with the Allies; Britain, France, and Russia facing the Central Powers; Germany, Austria, and a much-reduced Ottoman Empire. By the end of the war in November 1918, the Ottoman Empire had fought against its old enemy, Russia, and was weakened as the Central Powers lost the war against the Allies. What was left of the Ottoman Empire by the end of World War I collapsed and would be divided into new pieces. The Allies began redrawing the map of the modern Middle East.⁷²

The first opportunity for the Kurds to establish an independent state came with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Based on the new international ideal of every nation's right to independence, President Woodrow Wilson announced a Fourteen Point Program for world peace on January 8, 1918. In the aftermath of World War I, this was believed to be a possible program for securing long-lasting world peace. In his points, Wilson declared that the non-Turkish minorities under the Ottoman-Empire "should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development".⁷³

In May 1919, a commission consisting of two American men, Henry Churchill King and Charles K. Crane was sent to the Middle East. They were expected to review and report the local public opinion in former Ottoman areas to see what kind of authority would best suit these people and their region. In August, King and Crane's report was sent to the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919. The report on the Kurds was that the Kurds represented a large population and claimed a large geographical area in the former Ottoman Empire. King and Crane suggested that a Kurdish state should be carved in the predominantly Kurdish inhabited area, which lies "between the proposed Armenia on the north and Mesopotamia on the south, with the divide between the Euphrates and the Tigris as the western boundary".⁷⁴ This plan was well received by the president of the Kurdish delegation at the Versailles Peace Conference, Sharif Pasha.⁷⁵

⁷² O'Ballance. *The Kurdish Struggle*. 10.

⁷³ Speech of President Wilson, January 8, 1918, *FRUS*, 1918, Supplement 1, The World War, Vol. 1; Yildiz. *The Past, Present and Future*. 10.

⁷⁴ Report of the American Section of the International Commission, Paris, August 28, 1919. *FRUS*. The Paris Peace Conference, 1919, Vol. XII; Waage, Hilde Henriksen. 2013. *Konflikt og Stormaktspolitikk i Midtøsten*. Kristiansand: Cappelen Damm. 68.

⁷⁵ Edmonds. "Kurdish Nationalism."

President Wilson's Fourteen Points and the Versailles Peace Conference resulted in the Treaty of Sèvres, signed by the allied powers, and the Ottoman Sultan on August 20, 1920. The Treaty of Sèvres provided for local autonomy for the Kurdish areas as well as for the Armenians. Article 62 and Article 64 of the treaty brought into existence the possibility that the Kurdish people might be granted independence, excluding Kurdish Persian areas.⁷⁶ Article 62 stated that the World War I winners, Britain, France, and Italy were to draft a scheme of local autonomy for the Kurdish areas east of Euphrates, south of Armenia, and north of Syria and Mesopotamia, the former Ottoman provinces of Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul. Article 64 stipulated that a referendum should be held to see if the Kurds would be interested in self-determination.⁷⁷ It said:

If within one year from the coming into force of the present Treaty the Kurdish within the areas defined in Article 62 shall address themselves to the Council of the League of Nations in such a manner as to show that a majority of the population of these areas desires independence from Turkey, and if the Council then considers that these people are capable of such independence and recommends that it should be granted to them, Turkey hereby agrees to execute such a recommendation and to renounce all rights and title over these areas.⁷⁸

The same year the Treaty of Sèvres was signed, Britain was appointed by the League of Nations as the mandate authority over the Ottoman provinces of Mesopotamia.⁷⁹ Britain had already by the end of 1918 occupied the former provinces of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul south of Anatolia.⁸⁰ The Mosul province contained the Kurdish territories, notably Sulaymaniyah and Kirkuk. In these areas British policy had favored the appointment of local leaders to administer, under the supervision of British advisers. The Kurds welcomed the British forces as they viewed them as liberators from Turkish rule. One of the most prominent local leaders was Sheikh Mahmoud Barzanji. He was appointed as Governor of the Kurdish area by the British forces. This was part of a plan of British indirect rule against Turkish expansion.⁸¹ A Kurdish rule would create a buffer between the Turks and Mesopotamia. By supporting the Kurds and maintaining a favorable Kurdish attitude towards Britain this would rapidly reduce Britain's existing military and financial commitments, while at the same time consolidate Britain's political influence in the area.⁸² When the Kurds in these areas heard of the Treaty of Sèvres,

⁷⁶ Gunter, Michael M. 1992. *The Kurds of Iraq, Tragedy and Hope*. New York: St. Martin's press. 2.

⁷⁷ Ali. *The Iraqi Kurds*. 43.

⁷⁸ Appendix of the Treaty of Sèvres. August 10, 1920. In McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 464.

⁷⁹ Yildiz. *The Past, Present and Future*. 11.

⁸⁰ Tripp. *History of Iraq*. 31.

⁸¹ Entessar. *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*. 50–51; Eskander. Saad. 2000. "Britain's Policy in Southern Kurdistan: The Formation and the Termination of the First Kurdish Government, 1918–1919." In *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. Vol. 27. No. 2. 139-163; Tripp. *History of Iraq*. 34

⁸² Eskander. "Britain's Policy in Southern Kurdistan."

they expected Britain to endorse an independent Kurdistan.⁸³ However, in the meantime, several important developments occurred that affected the status of the Kurds. The idea of an independent Kurdistan bestowed upon the Kurds was to be quickly overtaken by momentous events.⁸⁴

In Anatolia, an independent Kurdistan became increasingly unrealistic for the Kurds when General Mustafa Kemal raised a revolt in Anatolia warning against the Treaty of Sèvres. With the Greek and Italians seizing parts of Anatolia by 1921 and the Allies discussing an autonomous Armenian and a Kurdish state, concerns were raised amongst Kemal and his followers. Frightened that the Ottoman Sultan had signed a treaty that gave the Allies the right to part the Ottoman Empire in pieces, Kemal began propagating about Muslim unity and a Muslim fatherland against the Christian forces. Newspaper articles warned that speaking of Kurdish independence was to help the Armenians create a Christian state on Muslim soil. While some Kurds became sympathetic to Kemal's propaganda, others were skeptical and wanted an independent Kurdish state. These groups were collectively silenced and certain Kurds were even condemned to death for what the Kemalists viewed as treasonous statements.⁸⁵ For Kemal and his followers, the Treaty of Sèvres was for all intents and purposes "void before the ink was dry".⁸⁶ In 1922, Kemal fought a desperate battle against the Greek and Italians and swept their forces out of Anatolia. While the Allies wanted to bring Kemal to heel for violating the Treaty of Sèvres that the Allies and the Sultan had agreed to, new concerns were raised in the West about a dangerous enemy rising in the east: The Soviet Union. As a result, the Allies began viewing Turkey as a possible south-eastern counterweight against the new communist threat.⁸⁷

Thus, the Treaty of Sèvres and the Kurdish dream of a Kurdish homeland was abandoned when the allies began negotiating with Turkey. It was replaced with the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, in which there was no mention of the Kurds, nor was any Kurdish delegation invited. In this new treaty, Turkey established control over all of Anatolia. In October 1923, the National Assembly declared Turkey as a republic, and Kemal was elected president. In 1924 the

⁸³ Kelly, Michael J. 2008. *Ghosts of Halabja. Saddam Hussein and the Kurdish Genocide*. London: Greenwood Publishing Group. 17.

⁸⁴ O'Ballance. *The Kurdish Struggle*. 14; Tripp. *History of Iraq*. 54-56.

⁸⁵ McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 128-129; Randal. Jonathan C. 1998. *Kurdistan. After Such Knowledge, What Forgiveness?* London: Bloomsbury Publishing. 124.

⁸⁶ McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 137.

⁸⁷ O'Ballance. *The Kurdish Struggle*. 11

Ottoman caliphate was abolished, and the modern republic of Turkey was born. The Muslim fatherland that Kemal had famously preached about was replaced with a secular Turkish republic. David McDowall argues that Kemal's appeal about Islamic unity was to "win over tribes ignorant of the broader political picture".⁸⁸ After Kemal got rid of his enemies on Anatolian soil, notably the Greek and Italians, he soon turned on his Kurdish "allies" that had helped him against his enemies.⁸⁹ In March 1924, numerous attempts were initiated to remove the Kurdish presence in the new Turkish republic. Kemal banned the Kurdish language along with Kurdish clothing, schools, associations, and publications. This was the beginning of a policy that was based on denial, repression, assimilation, and force.⁹⁰ The government declared that Turkey has no Kurds, "only mountain Turks, who have forgotten their mother tongue".⁹¹ For the succeeding decades, this remained to be Turkey's position against the Kurds who fell within its borders.⁹²

The Kemalists had also laid claim to the Mosul province. They wanted to take authority over the whole Kurdish inhabited area because they wanted to put an end to the small Kurdish governing that Britain had given the Kurds in the Mosul province. The Kemalists feared that a Kurdish national sentiment in the Mosul province would undermine the Turkification just north of the border.⁹³ However, Britain was determined not to give up that area. While President Wilson stood firm on the belief that peace could only be achieved through self-determination, the question of a Kurdish state was bound to remain secondary for the British. They had in their interest another political settlement for the Kurds in Mesopotamia.⁹⁴

The British Colonel Sir Mark Sykes and the French diplomat Charles Francois Georges Picot had since 1915 initiated secret negotiations about how Britain and France could divide and share the former Ottoman areas. They agreed that France would get Syria and Lebanon while Britain would get Palestine, and the provinces of Mesopotamia, Baghdad, Mosul, and Basra. These provinces were to be incorporated in a modern state named Iraq. The oil-rich Mosul district was included in this state and hence, no area was left for building a Kurdish state. The Sykes-Picot agreement was in direct opposition to the principle of self-determination, which

⁸⁸ McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 127.

⁸⁹ Randal. *After Such Knowledge*. 126.

⁹⁰ Gunter. *The Kurds*. 25.

⁹¹ O'Ballance. *The Kurdish Struggle*. 16.

⁹² O'Ballance. *The Kurdish Struggle*. 14; McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 146.

⁹³ McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 143.

⁹⁴ Eskander. "Britain's Policy in Southern Kurdistan."

had gained attention in international politics, and more specifically, to Article 62 and 64 of the Treaty of Sèvres.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, Britain did hold a referendum, but not regarding autonomy for Kurds as the Treaty of Sèvres had stipulated. The referendum was held to legitimize the crowning of Amir Faisal, son of Mecca's ruler Amir Husain, as king in the new state. The Kurds either boycotted the referendum or voted against Faisal.⁹⁶

After failing to secure a nation-state of their own, the Kurds found themselves forgotten and divided into the four nation-states they are in today, Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Kurdish rebellion became common in all these states, with each state successfully repressing the Kurdish population. In an attempt to weaken Kurdish nationalist movements, military attacks by state authorities against the Kurds were combined with policies of assimilation and repression.⁹⁷ Hence, autonomy for the Kurds was "regarded now as lost, like the Treaty of Sèvres, to history".⁹⁸

The Kurds, Britain, and the Iraqi Monarchy

In 1921, Britain artificially created Iraq out of the former Ottoman province of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra. With a lot of disputes between Turkey and Britain, the Mosul province was officially given to Iraq in 1926. The new state consisted of a Shiite Arab majority of 60 percent of the population, a ruling Sunni Arab minority of 20 percent, and the Kurds, who constituted the remaining 20 percent. Iraq was to remain under British mandate under the League of Nations while its political institutions were being developed. Instead of imposing direct rule, Britain chose to administer through a traditional leadership, a Hashemite monarchy, descendants from the Prophet Mohammad.⁹⁹

The politics of ethnicity dominated from the very moment when Hashemite Faisal was crowned as the king of Iraq. The Kurds were in a constant state of revolt because the rights given to them in the Treaty of Sèvres were not implemented. In the Kurdish regions, serious opposition against the British crowning of Faisal I occurred. Although the Iraqi government issued a local language law in 1926 that stated that Kurdish, side by side with Arabic, would be an official

⁹⁵ Waage. *Konflikt og Stormaktspolitikk*. 66-67; Yildiz. *The Past, Present and Future*. 10-12.

⁹⁶ Entessar, Nader. 2010. *Kurdish Politics in the Middle East*. United Kingdom: Lexington Books. 54.

⁹⁷ Stansfield, Gareth. 2003. *Iraqi Kurdistan: Political Development and Emergent Democracy*. Taylor & Francis Group. 60-61.

⁹⁸ Ali. *The Iraqi Kurds*. 43.

⁹⁹ Gunter. *The Kurds*. 61-62.

language in Iraq and that the Kurds would have the right to print books in their language, these laws were not implemented. Little concessions and political rights were given to the Kurds. This resulted in unrest. The former Governor of the Kurds, Barzanji, claiming autonomy and even styling himself as the King of Kurdistan, began the first of several rebellions against the British powers. Britain called on his surrender, but instead, he allied himself with Turkish Kurds, declared independence, and this culminated in an all-out guerilla war against Britain. The British Royal Air Force bombed forces of Barzanji, brought down their repeated uprisings, and even sent Barzanji to exile in India.¹⁰⁰

In 1930, the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty was signed, aimed at ending the British mandate and regulating future British relations with Iraq. The treaty would give Iraq sovereign independence in 1932. The main purpose of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty was to give Britain commercial and military rights within Iraq after its independence. It Treaty ensured that Britain could maintain air bases at Habbaniya and Basra and have the right to transport troops and military supplies across Iraq.¹⁰¹ The treaty also allowed Britain to control the development of the Iraqi military. Another significant strategic factor for Britain was to secure control of Iraq's oil resources. In 1925, a seventy-five-year concession was signed with Faisal I. This became the Iraq Petroleum Company and was to be owned by Britain. Hence, Iraq became dependent on Britain.¹⁰² The discovery of oil in 1927 near Kirkuk, a Kurdish inhabited area, had acted to limit Western sympathy for any Kurdish independence. These oilfields accounted for 75 percent of Iraq's oil by the mid-1970s.¹⁰³

Similarly to the Treaty of Lausanne, not a word was mentioned about any rights to the Kurds in the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty.¹⁰⁴ The term *northern Iraq* was used instead.¹⁰⁵ This resulted in protests in the Kurdish town Sulaymaniyah. Kurdish leaders sent numerous petitions to the League of Nations, but these were brushed aside and ignored.¹⁰⁶ In the spring of 1931, Barzanji who had returned from exile in India, revolted against Britain again, this time calling for a "United Kurdistan".¹⁰⁷ Outgunned by the Iraqi army and bombed by the British Royal Air

¹⁰⁰ Gunter. *The Kurds*. 63. O'Ballance. *The Kurdish Struggle*. 19.

¹⁰¹ O'Ballance. *The Kurdish Revolt*. 39.

¹⁰² Cleveland, William L. *A History of the Modern Middle East*. 1994. Colorado: Westview Press. 194-195.

¹⁰³ Randal. *After Such Knowledge*. 125.

¹⁰⁴ Yildiz. *The Past, Present and Future*. 13; Randal. *After Such Knowledge*. 130

¹⁰⁵ Bengio, Ofra. 2012. *The Kurds of Iraq. Building a State Within a State*. Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers. 16.

¹⁰⁶ Yildiz. *The Past, Present and Future*. 13.

¹⁰⁷ O'Ballance. *The Kurdish Struggle*. 20.

Force, that rebellion, too, was repressed. Dozens of protesters were killed, and Barzanji and his followers were yet again sent to exile, where they spent their final years.¹⁰⁸ Britain was more concerned with maintaining a pro-British monarchy in Iraq than it was in any autonomy for the Kurds.¹⁰⁹

Because of the fragmentation between the Kurdish tribes during the first half of the twentieth century, the Kurds in Iraq did not represent a unified group. The Iraqi Kurds were divided into different tribal entities with the focus remaining tribal rather than national. Lacking a unified national front, resistance against the British forces and the Iraqi government became even more difficult.¹¹⁰ However, the Iraqi Kurds refused to accept an Arab administration. They never settled with the new order from Baghdad and formed their own tribal societies in northern Iraq in constant insurgence against the state authorities. As a result, the Iraqi government was not able to bring the region under effective control. This led to little government interference in Kurdish affairs, and the Kurds became more or less self-sufficient. Due to Britain abandoning the Kurds' right to independence, there remained an atmosphere of hostility against Britain.

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the Middle East gradually moved into a new stage of ideological crisis, something that was illustrated in the growing nationalistic movements. While Britain prepared for war against Nazi-Germany in 1939, anti-British nationalistic sentiments took a foothold inside Iraq. This resulted in a cycle of military coups against the pro-British Iraqi monarchy. However, British military intervention in the Anglo-Iraqi War in 1941 abruptly defeated this. As a result, Britain enforced its imperial dominance over Iraq, which remained firmly under the control of the pro-British Hashemite monarchy from the end of World War II until 1958.¹¹¹ In 1955, the Baghdad Pact was signed, which was a military alliance against the new enemy, the Soviet Union. A strategic line of states bordering the Soviet Union's southwestern frontier was established. These states had significant oil wealth, something that represented a valuable region for Western interests. With the end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War, the goal was to protect these areas from Soviet expansion and influence. Hence, this symbolized the pro-British and pro-Western orientation of the Iraqi

¹⁰⁸ Little. *The United States and the Kurds*; O'Ballance. *The Kurdish Revolt*. 24; Randal. *After Suck Knowledge*. 130.

¹⁰⁹ Entessar. *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*. 51.

¹¹⁰ Stansfield. *Political Development*. 61-62.

¹¹¹ Cleveland. *The Modern Middle East*. 194-199; Tripp. *History of Iraq*. 106-108.

regime.¹¹² However, following the British military in 1941, there remained an amount of hostility in the Iraqi political atmosphere against British control. Peter and Marion Sluglett argue that: “the year 1941 represented a watershed in the history of the British era in Iraq, and its significance is essential in understanding...the end of the Hashemite dynasty”.¹¹³

The Birth of Kurdish Nationalism

During hostilities between the Axis Powers and the Allies throughout World War II, and the impending power struggle between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, Kurdish nationalism was born.¹¹⁴ In Iraqi Kurdistan, from the early 1940s, a new educated class of young people took up the cause of ethnic nationalism. They became aware of their history and their Kurdishness, as distinct from their Arab neighbors, and believed that the Arabs and the Kurds should have equal standing. This new generation began forming a more unified national front rather than a tribal. As a result, different national political parties were established, such as Hiwa, Komala, and Darkar, all of them fighting for the Kurdish cause. Many Kurds joined the Iraqi Communist Party when it was formed in 1934 since it supported many rights of the Kurdish. This new generation of nationalists hoped for a degree of independence, demanded educational reforms, funding of Kurdish schools, and the official use of the Kurdish language in schools and other areas of society. They even wanted a representation in Iraq’s National Assembly and a fair share of Iraq’s resources.¹¹⁵

Most significantly, the new young group of Kurdish nationalists began emphasizing the Treaty of Sèvres that had promised a homeland to the Kurds decades earlier. To them, this provided enough international legitimacy for their struggle for independence from Iraq. According to a British official in 1943, “the leaders of the Kurdish national movement regarded these clauses of the Treaty of Sèvres as a recognition by the Western European powers of the Kurdish question and they never ceased to work for Kurdish autonomy”.¹¹⁶

Hoping to exploit the rising Kurdish nationalism, a new figure began to emerge, contributing to the formation of a Kurdish national consciousness: Mulla Mustafa Barzani. He became the

¹¹² Tripp. *History of Iraq*. 140; Cleveland. *The Modern Middle East*. 307.

¹¹³ Sluglett. *Iraq Since 1958*. 22.

¹¹⁴ O’Ballance. *The Kurdish Revolt*. 38.

¹¹⁵ Stansfield. *Political Development*. 63.64; Yildiz. *The Past, Present and Future*. 15; Entessar. *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*. 74.

¹¹⁶ Bengio. *Building a State*. 10.

focal symbol in the Iraqi Kurds' national liberation movement and even inherited the mantle of Barzanji who had led the struggle of the Iraqi Kurds during the British mandate.¹¹⁷ In 1943 Barzani gained widespread support in Kurdish areas and also managed to create a Kurdish militia, *Peshmerga*, which means those who face death in Kurdish. By August 1946, they had established the Kurdish Democratic Party. Barzani began many uprisings against the pro-Western Iraqi monarchy in the 1940s. However, outnumbered and outgunned, the Peshmerga crumbled in the face of British Royal Air Force bombings and the Iraqi army. In 1946, Barzani sought refuge in the Soviet Union for the next twelve years and did not return to Iraq until the overthrow of the pro-British Hashemite monarchy.¹¹⁸ According to Kurdish sources, Barzani spent his time in Moscow consulting with Soviet experts on guerilla tactics and how to fight.¹¹⁹

The Fall of the Pro-Western Iraqi Monarchy

The 1952 Free Officers coup in Egypt had overthrown the pro-British Egyptian monarchy. This jolted the entire Middle East like “electric charge” and set the tone for the entire region.¹²⁰ Inspired by these events and feeling resentment toward Britain and its participation in the Suez Crisis in 1956, by the mid-1950s, nationalist ferment in Iraq jeopardized the long-term survival of the pro-British Hashemite monarchy. On July 14, 1958, left-wing officers led by Colonel Abdul Karim Qassim stunned Britain by seizing power in Baghdad, murdering the royal family. He then declared the establishment of the Republic of Iraq and turned to the Soviet Union for support.¹²¹

As regards the Kurds, the regime of Qassim declared that Iraq was a country of two nations, the Kurds were one and the Iraqis another. When the provisional constitution was published, it claimed: “Arabs and Kurds are partners in the Homeland, and their national rights are recognized within the Iraqi entity”.¹²² Four months later Qassim invited Barzani to return to Iraq.¹²³ To the Kurds, it was believed that a new era of Kurdish-Arab understanding had been reached. Barzani returned to Iraq, where he quickly regained his former tribal prominence.¹²⁴

¹¹⁷ Bengio. *Building a State*. 11; Gunter. *Tragedy and Hope*. 3.

¹¹⁸ McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 289. Ali. *The Iraqi Kurds*. 44.

¹¹⁹ Randal. *After Such Knowledge*. 134-137.

¹²⁰ Migdal. *Shifting Sands*. 7.

¹²¹ Sluglett. *Iraq Since 1958*. 48-50; Entessar. *Kurdish Politics*. 60.

¹²² McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 302.

¹²³ Little. “The United States and the Kurds.”

¹²⁴ Gunter. *The Kurds*. 47; Yildiz. *The Past, Present and Future*. 16.

Qassim announced that the Kurds and the Iraqis have equal status and should be granted cultural rights and self-rule. Qassim also legalized the Kurdistan Democratic Party, making Barzani the head of the party. As a result of the legalization, the party supporters increased. For the first time in Iraq's history, the Iraqi government appointed several Kurds to senior positions in the government and allowed the publication of Kurdish materials as well as the teaching of Kurdish in schools.¹²⁵ This was the beginning of a short-lived honeymoon phase between the Kurds and the Iraqi government.

In the new Iraqi republic, the first sign of trouble for the Kurds arose from the tension between the Kurds and the Arab nationalists. In February 1958, the United Arab Republic was established by Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser and was a political union between Egypt and Syria. Nationalists like Abd al-Salam Arif increased pressure on Qassim to make Iraq part of this union. They opposed Qassim's pro-Kurdish and pro-communist attitude. The Kurds were, on the other hand, opposed to this move, reasoning that in a union based on Arab nationalism, the Kurds' national demands as a minority would be undermined.¹²⁶ Qassim himself was a socialist and had no intention to bow to Arab nationalists. Opposing Iraqi membership in the United Arab Republic, this led Qassim to work closely with both the Kurds and the communists. Qassim decided that Barzani and the Iraqi communists could work as a counterweight against the nationalists who wanted Iraq to join the United Arab Republic. If Barzani could support Qassim's policies, Qassim would in return give the Kurds regional autonomy.¹²⁷

However, the good relationship between Barzani and Qassim turned out to be temporary and relations between the Kurds and the Government of Iraq deteriorated rapidly.¹²⁸ Barzani's increased domination in Iraqi Kurdistan upset the Arab nationalists and the Iraqi communists. They pressed Qassim to put an end to Barzani's hegemony. As a result, Qassim cut back on his support for Barzani and the promises he had given him. When Barzani realized that Qassim did not intend to keep his old promises, Barzani and the Kurdistan Democratic Party began demanding Qassim to grant the Iraqi Kurds autonomy. Qassim was unwilling to meet this demand since it would have meant giving the Kurdistan Democratic Party control over the oil

¹²⁵ McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 307-310; Little. "The United States and the Kurds."

¹²⁶ Entessar. *Kurdish Politics*. 61.

¹²⁷ McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 305-308.

¹²⁸ Entessar. *Kurdish Politics*. 73-74.

fields near Mosul and Kirkuk. This would result in an economic loss for Iraq. With pressure from the Arab Nationalists and the Iraqi military, Qassim changed his policies to one where he put Iraq first and embraced Iraqi nationalism. The Kurdistan Democratic Party was banned, and Qassim began speaking of treating the Kurds as “an indistinguishable as well as indivisible part of the Iraqi people”, which contradicted the idea of equal status or autonomy. This also prevented implementing any meaningful educational reforms in the Kurdish areas.¹²⁹

When relations between Barzani and the Government of Iraq deteriorated, Barzani turned to the Soviet Union for assistance in January 1961. He visited Moscow and was met by high ranked but unnamed Soviet officials. These officials agreed to provide financial aid to the Kurds to buy weapons from the black market. Supporting national self-liberation movements around the world was part of a strategy in the Soviet Union approved by Nikita Khrushchev in the summer of 1961.¹³⁰ Between March and September 1961, Barzani and his followers were preparing for war. The first Kurdish War broke out in the fall of 1961.¹³¹

The Kurdish revolt, which began in 1961, was to dominate the Iraqi scene for the next fourteen years. Undoubtedly, the most active Kurdish nationalist group and movement operated in Iraq; a movement that would in the years that followed, take every opportunity to fight for their cause. The Kurdish rebellion under the leadership of Barzani would continue to cause concerns among the policymakers in Baghdad.¹³² Autonomy became the declared objective of the Kurds.¹³³ With the end of British influence in Iraq following the overthrow of the pro-British monarchy in 1958, the U.S. assumed the primary responsibility of safeguarding Western interests in Iraq.

¹²⁹ McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 308; Entessar. *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*. 74.

¹³⁰ Ali. *The Iraqi Kurds*. 59; O'Ballance. *The Kurdish Revolt*. 74-75.

¹³¹ The First Kurdish War was a series of five military offensives against Iraqi Kurdistan, lasting from 1961-1969. The first one began in 1961 under President Qassim, the second under the Ba'th Party in 1963, the third under President Abd al-salam Arif in 1965, the fourth in 1966 under President Abd al-Rahman Arif, and the last one in 1969 under the Ba'th Party. During this period relations between the Kurds and Iraqi leaders alternated between ceasefire and hostilities.

¹³² Bengio. *Building a State*. 16; Cleveland. *The Modern Middle East*. 310.

¹³³ The Kurds' struggle for Autonomy during Barzani's rebellion was not a struggle for independence or a Kurdish state. Rather, it was a struggle for an autonomous territory with an autonomous administration in the Kurdish region.

Chapter Three: From Kennedy to Johnson and the Revolutionary Iraq

"In need, you get to know both your friends and your enemies."

– Kurdish proverb.¹³⁴

On November 22, 1963, President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. Four days earlier, a new military coup in Iraq had overthrown the Ba'th Party in Iraq. In Washington, with Kennedy's presidency coming to an abrupt end, the power was given to the new successor, Lyndon Bines Johnson.¹³⁵ With the growing Arab nationalism and the communist threat, the presidencies of Kennedy and Johnson maintained the foreign policy focus on Middle East stability. The discontent with to spread of conflicts in the region, the security of oil flow to the West, and strong friendly relations with allies, Iran and Israel, continued to shape the orientation of U.S. foreign policy.¹³⁶ The new Johnson administration also had to assess the new Arab nationalist regime in Iraq led by Abd al-Salam Arif.

The Legacy of Kennedy

The Kennedy administration came to power in January 1961 with the ambition to ensure an even-handed policy towards the Middle East and the aspiration to deal with the area's problems in a fair and friendly manner as possible.¹³⁷ In Iraq, the overall objective of the Kennedy administration's policy was to achieve internal stability and prevent the Soviet Union from gaining a foothold in the region.¹³⁸ Initially, the Kennedy administration maintained President Eisenhower's *wait and see* approach in Iraq even though it was not satisfied with the internal developments in Iraq. The regime of Abdul Karim Qassim had seized power in Baghdad by murdering every member of the entire U.S. allied royal Hashemite monarchy in 1958. The regime then gradually turned to the Soviet Union for support, reduced its trade with Western countries, and moved Iraq away from a capitalist economic model and toward a state-centered

¹³⁴ O'Ballance. *Kurdish Revolt*. 99.

¹³⁵ Gibson. *Sold Out?* 83.

¹³⁶ Charountaki. *The Kurds and U.S. Foreign Policy*. 132.

¹³⁷ Yakub. *U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East*. 39.

¹³⁸ Gibson. *Sold Out?* 80.

economy. It was worrying to Washington that Qassim even took Iraq out of the Central Treaty Organization, also known as the Baghdad Pact. The Kennedy administration was also not satisfied with the considerable amount of freedom of activity Qassim had allowed Iraq's Communist Party. It was even worrying to Washington that Iraq, being an earlier Western ally and a key supplier of oil to the West, was now changing its foreign policy orientation and moving towards the Soviet Union.¹³⁹

Immediately after the Ba'th coup in Iraq on February 8, 1963, Robert W. Komer, Senior Staff of the National Security Council (NSC), informed Kennedy that the coup seemed to have been successful. Komer believed that the outcome of the coup seemed to be in the favor of the U.S.¹⁴⁰ The Kennedy administration was pleased with the outcome of the Ba'th coup primarily since it replaced the Qassim regime. Qassim's pro-communist approach had been disliked in the West. The new Ba'th Party of February 1963 was anti-communist and was mainly led by young, educated Arab nationalists.¹⁴¹ As a result, U.S.-Iraqi relations warmed considerably. The U.S. hoped that the Ba'th Party could work as a counterbalance against Egypt's charismatic President Nasser, who embraced Arab nationalism and was supported by the Soviet Union.¹⁴² In the new government, General Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr was appointed to be prime minister, Abd al-Salam Arif, who was not a member of the Ba'th, became the President and Ali Salih al-Saidi Deputy Prime Minister. The new regime was determined to crush Iraq's Communist Party, arrest its members and get the Soviet's influence out of Iraq. Hence, the Cold War calculus turned to Washington's favor, and the Kennedy administration welcomed the new regime.¹⁴³

Before the coup, the Ba'thists had promised the Kurdish leader Mulla Mustafa Barzani, autonomy for the Kurds in the northern region of Iraq in return for his help with weakening his earlier friend, Qassim. In the wake of the coup, the Ba'th Party declared that it was willing to negotiate and meet some of Barzani's demands. However, it was quickly revealed that the new regime did not plan to meet any of the promises it had made to the Kurds. In June 1963, the

¹³⁹ Little, "The United States and the Kurds.;" Matthews, Weldon C. 2019. "The Kennedy Administration and Arms Transfers to Ba'thist Iraq." In *Diplomatic History*, Vol: 43, Issue 3. 469-492; Jacobsen, Eric. 2013. "A Coincidence of Interests: Kennedy, U.S. Assistance, and the 1963 Iraqi Ba'th regime." In *Diplomatic History*, Vol: 37, Issue 5. 1029-1059.

¹⁴⁰ Ali. *The Iraqi Kurds*. 76.

¹⁴¹ Little. "The United States and the Kurds.;" Matthews. "Arms Transfers to Ba'thist Iraq."

¹⁴² Matthews. "Arms Transfers to Ba'thist Iraq."

¹⁴³ Gibson. *Sold Out?* 57-61.

government launched another military offensive against the Kurds. This time, the military offensive was more devastating than the first one led by Qassim in 1961. Villages were burnt to the ground, and an embargo on food and trade was put on the Kurdish civilians. The Ba'ath Party made sure that even the Iranian and the Turkish borders were closed, so no aid was given.¹⁴⁴

At the same time, the diplomatic relation between the U.S. and Iraq was restored. The *wait and see* approach that Kennedy had towards Iraq was replaced with weapon supply agreements when the U.S. slowly started arming the Iraqi government. The U.S. agreed to sell Iraq everything from helicopters to light tanks up to \$15 million.¹⁴⁵ The U.S. defense, intelligence and diplomatic establishments during the presidential administration of Kennedy were well aware of the mass killings of both the communists in Iraq and the Kurds. Despite this, the administration continued to transfer military equipment and weapons to the Iraqi government. These weapons were used against the Iraqi Communists and the Kurds in the ongoing war.¹⁴⁶ This is the first indication that the Kennedy administration was giving Iraq weapons to defeat the Kurds in the "Kurd campaign," as Komer put it in a memorandum to President Kennedy.¹⁴⁷

After the brutal campaign against the communist and the Kurds, the Soviet Union made multiple attempts for the Kurdish issue to be heard. The Soviets tried several times to send emergency aid to the Kurds, but the Iraqi government kept denying such deliveries. In August 1963, the Soviet Union sent letters to the United Nations, accusing Iraq of 'extermination' on its inhabitants and wanted support from the Central Treaty Organization. Moscow was also behind a resolution made by the Republic of Mongolia, blaming Iraq for genocide in the United Nations 18th session General Assembly that was about to be held in September that year. The U.S. Foreign Policy Department was placed in a tough position and accused of supporting Iraq in its military campaign against the Kurds. To save themselves from being held internationally accountable for this in the U.N.'s General Assembly, the U.S. rapidly tried to motivate Iraq to engage in establishing a ceasefire. Luckily for the U.S., just in time before the General Assembly, Washington got the surprising news that Mongolia had removed the genocidal appeal from its request. There is no clear evidence as to why Mongolia did this, but it was a

¹⁴⁴ U.S. Consulate in Tabriz to the U.S. State Department. January 26, 1965, LBJL, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq-Kurds, December 1964-March 1966, doc.4e; Ali. *The Iraqi Kurds*. 83-86.

¹⁴⁵ Memorandum from Saunders to Bundy. *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Vol: XVIII, Near East, 1962-1963. Doc. 204.

¹⁴⁶ Matthews. "Arms Transfers to Ba'athist Iraq."

¹⁴⁷ Memorandum from Komer to Kennedy. *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Vol: XVIII, Near East, 1962-1963. Doc.293.

great relief for the U.S. However, with the accusation of a genocide being put away, U.S. interest in an Iraqi-Kurdish ceasefire had gone with it. It turned out that the Kennedy administration was more interested in its reputation internationally than actually engaging in any means of negotiation and peace agreements between the Iraqi government and the Kurds. Unfortunately for the Kurds, the Kurdish War continued, and so did the U.S. weapon supply.¹⁴⁸

Meanwhile, with the fighting still ongoing, Barzani had turned to and asked the U.S. to play the role of intermediary in implementing potential negotiations with the Iraqi government in Baghdad. In the letters, Barzani asked Kennedy for American help to prevent further bloodshed. Replies were proposed by the U.S. embassy in Tehran, where the letters were handed in, and then by the State Department. None of them thought it was necessary for President Kennedy to answer himself. American diplomats dreaded that a presidential reply could be detrimental to Iraqi-U.S. relations. State Department gave Barzani an oral response that implied that the U.S. sympathizes with legitimate Kurdish aspirations, but that the U.S. would not intervene in Iraq's affairs.¹⁴⁹ Hence, Barzani's letters fell on deaf ears. The war continued.

The Kennedy administration sought to cultivate friendly relations with Iraq through military and economic assistance to make Iraq a U.S. ally. When the Soviets tried to back the Kurds, the Kennedy administration sought to reach a ceasefire between the Iraqi government and the Kurds. Immediately after the genocidal appeal was put off the Soviet agenda, every talk of U.S. negotiation for a ceasefire was gone. Within the Ba'th Party, the second half of 1963 made visible the party's internal rivalries and divisions. The tensions between the socialist and the nationalist faction increased and escalated into numerous coup attempts. In November 1963, this had led to internal fighting within the central committee of the Ba'th Party. It was the nationalist military wing of the party led by al-Bakr and President Arif against the socialist wing led by al-Saidi. The internal power struggle surprised U.S. policymakers as they had only focused on external threats like the Soviet Union and failed to recognize the schism within the Ba'th Party.¹⁵⁰ Internal political conflicts did not have apparent implications for U.S. regional

¹⁴⁸ Jacobsen. "Kennedy, U.S. Assistance."; Ali. *The Iraqi Kurds*. 76-78.

¹⁴⁹ Ali. *The Iraqi Kurds*. 79-81.

¹⁵⁰ Jacobsen. "Kennedy, U.S. Assistance."

interests and the Cold War. Hence, by the time the Ba’th Party had collapsed internally, the Kennedy administration could not do much other than observe from the sideline.¹⁵¹

From Kennedy to Johnson and the Coup of Abd al-Salam Arif

The rapid transition of power from Kennedy to Johnson went smoothly, mainly because the new President decided to retain Kennedy's foreign policy team: The “Big Three,” namely, Bundy, Rusk and McNamara.¹⁵² On November 23, 1963, Philips Talbot, Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, which is an office within the Bureau of Intelligence and Research that conducts research and analysis on Middle east, sent Rusk a Memorandum informing about a new coup in Iraq: “Although it is too early to be sure, the new regime in Iraq seems to have established itself as an Iraqi nationalist...moderate Baathist government relying heavily on the power of the Army”.¹⁵³ President Arif had taken advantage of this split amongst the Ba’thists and mobilized army units within the Ba’th Party. By attaining support from the army, Arif managed to weaken the already fragmented party and put himself in the lead. Then, Arif and the nationalists managed to achieve what Robert Strong, the U.S. ambassador to Iraq, referred to as “internal unity” by uniting the nationalists and sending al-Sa'di to exile away from Iraq and its policies.¹⁵⁴ At dawn on November 18, Arif occupied the radio station in Baghdad, announcing that the Ba’th Party was no longer in power.¹⁵⁵

Early in December, Strong sent Komer, Johnson’s top Middle East advisor in Washington, a personal letter where he claimed it was “unlikely that stability had been achieved” in Iraq by Arif’s coup.¹⁵⁶ Strong explained to Komer that there was a prospect of further violence and a possibility for the Ba’th Party to mobilize its strength for action in the not too distant future and plan to coup against Arif. He explained that it was too early to draw any conclusions and that the U.S. embassy in Iraq would keep a close eye on how the regime stood in terms of communism. Nevertheless, Strong was convinced that if the new regime in Iraq could maintain

¹⁵¹ Jacobsen. “Kennedy, U.S. Assistance.”; Gibson. *Sold out?* 76-81; Tripp. *A History of Iraq*. 173-174.

¹⁵² Andrew. “The Little State Department”; Gibson. *Sold Out?* 83.

¹⁵³ Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, Talbot to Rusk, November 23, 1963, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Vol: XVIII, Near East, doc.371.

¹⁵⁴ Strong to Komer, December 12, 1963, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, Box28, Folder: Iraq, December 1963-March 1966, Doc.31; Tripp. *A History of Iraq*.174-176.

¹⁵⁵ O’Ballance. *The Kurdish Revolt*. 113.

¹⁵⁶ Strong to Komer, December 12, 1963, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, Box28, Folder: Iraq, December 1963-March 1966, Doc.31.

a non-communist position, the United States would reach an agreement and common ground with the new Iraqi regime.¹⁵⁷

On December 9, 1963, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, circulated a memo assessing the future of Soviet-Iraqi relations. It concluded that although Soviet and Iraqi communists before the coup had conspired to overthrow the fragmented Ba'th regime, neither the Iraqi communist nor the Soviets could influence Iraq's developments. The agency argued that the Soviet Union was cautious towards the new Arif regime and had taken time to assess Arif's political orientation. However, the agency added, since the regime of Arif did not include any leftists, "Soviet forbearance may be short-lived".¹⁵⁸

Arif remained President and commander in chief of the armed forces, being well aware of the importance of personal bonds of trust with the army units in establishing power. He openly trusted the establishment of systems of patronage, relationship and links with the army units to strengthen the core of his power in the armed forces and secure their loyalty towards himself. Arif was concerned with whose loyalty he could rely on upon through his personal and clan-networking. The new president chose wisely whom to keep and whom to throw out from the regime. In the first few months following his coup, Arif used his knowledge and learned lessons to dismantle the Ba'th. He removed senior military Ba'thists from positions of power, first and foremost, by removing Vice President Ba'thist al-Bakr in February 1964. The removal was essential because Al-Bakr had been prime minister and consequently an influential figure in the previous regime. Hence, this cut the Ba'th entirely off the power in the new government.¹⁵⁹ These steps made Arif an effective and popular president while he kept on creating a new regime "more in his image" by rapidly getting rid of potential opponents that could threaten his power and kept those who would stay loyal to him.¹⁶⁰

The Johnson administration positively viewed the Arif regime, mainly because of its anti-communist outlook, its support from the Iraqi military, which could provide the country's safety, and because of the regime's potential to achieve internal stability. In a letter from Dean

¹⁵⁷ Letter from Strong to Komer, December 12, 1963, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, Box28, Folder: Iraq, December 1963-March 1966, Doc.31.

¹⁵⁸ Memorandum, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Thomas L. Hughes to Rusk. December 9, 1963, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box28, Folder: Iraq, December 1963-March 1966. doc. 33.

¹⁵⁹ January 5, 1964." Iraqi Vice President is Removed." In *the New York Times*.

¹⁶⁰ O'Ballance. *The Kurdish Revolt*. 113; Tripp. *A History of Iraq*. 176-178.

Rusk to the Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs, Subhi Abd al-Hamid, Rusk informed that the Johnson administration maintained a keen interest in the stability and progress of Iraq and that the administration would continue to conduct the even-handed, impartial policy pursued by President Kennedy.¹⁶¹

The Kurdish Question and the February Agreement

Although the new regime in Iraq was no better disposed towards the Kurdish question in Iraqi Kurdistan than its predecessor, it sought a ceasefire with the Kurds. The war against the Kurds had been unpopular, costly, and a military failure. With a long history of military conspiracy behind him, a lot had to do with his close ties to the military and his opposition to Qassim's early pro-Kurdish attitude, Arif was well aware of the importance of personal bonds of trust in establishing power. Once installed as president, Arif had announced in the wake of the coup that he wanted to end the war in Iraqi Kurdistan by peaceful means. After two and a half years of fighting, a ceasefire agreement was installed between the Kurdish leader Barzani and the Iraqi government on February 10, 1964.¹⁶²

Deputy Director George C. Denney in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research informed Rusk that it had been Arif who had turned to the Kurds and offered Barzani a negotiated agreement. The agreement included concessions on the recognition of Kurdish national rights within the framework of the Iraqi people in one national unity.¹⁶³ Arif also offered the release of prisoners, the re-establishment of government administration, the lifting of the economic blockade against Iraqi Kurdistan, the rehabilitation of the economy in the north, reconstruction, and peace and security to be re-established.¹⁶⁴

However, in the aftermath of the agreement between Barzani and Arif, disagreements occurred between various Kurdish leaders regarding the ceasefire. Ibrahim Ahmad and Jalal Talabani opposed Mulla Mustafa Barzani, all of them senior Kurdistan Democratic Party officials. Ahmad and Talabani denounced the agreement for failing to provide self-administration for

¹⁶¹ Letter from Secretary of State, Rusk to Minister of Foreign Affairs, al-Hamid, May 7, 1964. *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East, Doc.164; Gibson. *Sold out?* 85.

¹⁶² Background Paper Prepared in the Department of State, Washington, April 6, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc.3; McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 170-172.

¹⁶³ Memorandum, Denney to Rusk, April 5, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq-Kurds, December 1963-March 1966, Doc. 9

¹⁶⁴Memorandum, Denney to Rusk, April 5, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq-Kurds, December 1963-March 1966, Doc. 9; Gibson. *Sold out?* 85.

the Kurds. They accused Barzani of voluntarily putting his name on an agreement that omitted any mention of self-administration and autonomy in northern Iraq, the core of the whole Kurdish question.¹⁶⁵ This divide eventually split the party into two competing factions.¹⁶⁶ Barzani had a stronger position in the Kurdistan region and was seen by the Kurds as their legitimate leader. Arif threatened to use force against any opponents of Barzani, whereas the latter warned that resistance against the Iraqi regime would constitute a declaration of war against himself. Arif and Barzani were now on the same side, and Barzani began receiving arms and money from Arif.¹⁶⁷

For a short time, the ceasefire with Barzani proved to the U.S. that Arif was capable of restoring Iraq's stability and finding a solution to the Kurdish problem. However, as time passed by, the true nature of the ceasefire was revealed. In a study of the Kurdish situation in Iraq in April 1965, Denney showed how the ceasefire was turning into a failure.¹⁶⁸ Denney argued that since the ceasefire of February 10, 1964, there had been ineffectual attempts between the government of Iraq and the Kurds to find a mutually acceptable plan for a settlement of the Kurdish-Iraqi problem. The period from February to April was a period of no violence marked by intervals of negotiations. Denney added that because of the absence of large scale fighting between the government and the Kurds, “[t]he Government of Iraq has diverted its attention from the situation” and developed “a false sense of security” from the situation, leaving the problem unsolved.¹⁶⁹ Besides, the split within the various factions within the Kurdistan Democratic Party, which led to Barzani’s sole domination in the north, led Arif to believe that he may have secured stability in the north.

¹⁶⁵ McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 316.

¹⁶⁶ Gibson. *Sold out?* 85; Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Iran, September 3, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc.166.

¹⁶⁷ McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 316.

¹⁶⁸ Memorandum, Denney to Rusk, April 5, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq-Kurds, December 1963-March 1966, Doc. 9

¹⁶⁹ Memorandum, Denney to Rusk, April 5, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq-Kurds, December 1963-March 1966, Doc. 9; Background Paper Prepared in the Department of State, Washington, April 6, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc.3; Pelletiere, Stephan C. 1984. *The Kurds. An Unstable Element in the Gulf*. Westview Special Studies on the Middle East. Boulder and London: Westview Press. 137.

Likelihood of Unity with Gamal Abdul Nasser

With stability in the north, Arif could now focus on reforming Iraq. With the 1960s climate of growing Arab nationalism and the influence the Egyptian President Nasser was spreading, concerns spread in the West. While Washington had appreciated that Arif had negotiated with the Kurds, the regime in Iraq raised new concerns with the signs of rapprochement towards Egypt. The prospect of Nasser to exercise more substantial influence in the Gulf region caught the attention of not only Washington, but also its closest allies, Britain, Iran, and Israel.¹⁷⁰

Nasser was the chief spokesman of Arab nationalism, an idea about a united Arab nation that sought to be the ideological basis for a nation-building process. For most of the Arab world, this nationalist ideology represented an almost sacred belief, emphasizing the united nature of the Arab world. Nasser famously said: "We shall all of us defend our nationalism and Arabism, and we shall all work so that the Arab homeland may extend from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf."¹⁷¹

With the awakening of Arab nationalism throughout the Arab world, the dislike for Nasser and its propaganda increased likewise in the West. When it came to Iraq, it was alarming to U.S.'s closest allies Britain, Israel, and Iran that President Arif had gotten close contact with the Egyptian President. Already on November 18, 1963, Washington got a memorandum from the Deputy Director of Defense Intelligence Agency William W. Quinn about Arif. Quinn assumed that Arif's coup might lead to a resurgence of Nasser's influence in the Arab world since Arif seemed to be a lukewarm supporter of Nasser.¹⁷² While President Johnson disliked and "did not display as much patience" toward Nasser, he was more concerned by Soviet expansion in the Middle East than of Nasser's growing influence.¹⁷³ Also, the NSC and State Department kept reminding Johnson of the importance of "impartiality" toward the Middle East and maintaining good relations with the Arab states to avoid them cooperating with the Soviet Union. Johnson agreed.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Gibson, *Sold out?* 85.

¹⁷¹ Neff, Donald. 1981. *Warriors at Suez. Eisenhower takes America into the Middle East*. New York: The Linden Press /Simon & Schuster. 270.

¹⁷² Memorandum, From the Deputy Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency to Secretary of Defense, McNamara, November 18, 1963, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Vol: XVIII, Near East, doc. 363.

¹⁷³ Lazarowitz "The Johnson administration, the State Department, and the Middle East."

¹⁷⁴ Lazarowitz "The Johnson administration, the State Department, and the Middle East."

Arif's regime weighed heavily in favor of not only Nasserists but also Arab nationalists. Even though the regime was coherent to the extent that most of its members were nationalists or Nasserists, personal and ideological differences existed internally inside the regime, especially over Iraq's relations with Egypt. Some senior members of the regime continued to be committed to the idea of unification with Egypt and aspired Iraq to follow the model of Nasser's Egypt, both politically and economically.¹⁷⁵ While Arif had earlier admired Nasser and his progression in Egypt, he had quickly after the coup abandoned his earlier enthusiasm for immediate union with Egypt. He had begun to see Nasser entering a too radical and too socialist phase, which arose fear amongst the Iraqi middle classes, who were owners of industries and possessions. However, Arif could not risk being seen acting in vigorous opposition to those committed to the idea of Arab unity and socialist reforms. In the February coup of 1963, Arif had opposed Qassim precisely for his rejection of Arab unity.¹⁷⁶ Although Arif had moved away from his earlier interest in Arab unity, he had to prove else wise to the Iraqi society by showcasing interest in unity with Egypt and the potential of becoming a part of the United Arab Republic. Because of this, it appeared to the West that Arif was supporting Nasser's domination in the Arab world.

In May 1964, a new provisional constitution was circulated in Baghdad, which asserted the Arab character of the Iraqi people and stressed the aim of Arab unity with admiration of Nasser's Egypt. Arif aimed to create similar institutions of that of Nasser's Egypt and started some socialist reforms in the summer of 1964. On May 26, Arif and President Nasser signed an agreement in Cairo to set up a joint military command and discuss the potential unity of the two governments. During the summer, Arif also gradually nationalized several private enterprises similar to Egypt. On top of that, Arif declared that he was going to establish a political party that ought to be similar to Egypt's Arab Socialist Union.¹⁷⁷ Early in September 1964, Iraqi security forces intended a plot to return the Baath party to power and depose Arif. Former Brigadier Ba'hist al-Bakr was connected to the unsuccessful plot. As a consequence, Arif ordered a crackdown on the Ba'ath party, which led to every conspirator, over a thousand people, to be arrested, including al-Bakr. When this plot occurred, Arif was grateful for Nasser's support, which included dispatched Egyptian troops to Baghdad to help with the backing of the

¹⁷⁵ Sluglett. *Iraq Since 1958*. 94.

¹⁷⁶ Sluglett. *Iraq since 1958*. 94-95.

¹⁷⁷ Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Iran, *FRUS*, September 3, 1964, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc. 166; Tripp. *History of Iraq*. 178-179.

Iraqi regime. To Nasser's advantage, this plot made Arif appoint more Nasserist elements in his regime by publicly rewarding Nasserists with additional seats in the cabinet. Britain, Israel, and Iran viewed this as a highly unfavorable development.¹⁷⁸

The Collapse of the February Ceasefire

After having undertaken numerous reforms, Arif understood that Iraq's situation was different from that of Egypt. Arif was reminded of the massive difference between Iraq and Egypt when unrest in northern Iraq was renewed once again in the summer of 1964. Indeed, there were many differences between Egypt and Iraq, both in terms of society and history. Nonetheless, Iraq had to deal with one specific aspect, which Egypt did not, and that was that Iraq had the continuing issue of the Kurds in the north.¹⁷⁹

Throughout the fall of 1964, the adverse effects of Nasserist policies and nationalist measures were becoming apparent to the Kurds. To them, the Socialist decrees Arif had started were alarming, and a new constitution that asserted the Arab character of the Iraqi people was something that Barzani could not accept. The policies also seemed to show their effects on the economy, but not in a positive way for the Kurds. Their villages were still damaged from the wars, and the reconstruction in which Arif promised in the February ceasefire did not seem to be implemented. Once again, a reconciliation between Barzani and Talabani had taken place where both parties had lost trust in Arif and were skeptical about the outcome of Arif's nationalistic measures in Iraq.¹⁸⁰

As a result of the Arabization of Iraq, on October 4, 1964, Barzani made new demands centered on the call for autonomy. Barzani held a congress that decided that, as the government had done nothing to fulfill its promises to the Kurds as they said they would in the February ceasefire, the Kurds themselves would take practical steps in forming an autonomous territory with an autonomous administration. By the end of October 1964, Barzani established a 43-member Legislature, a council of the Revolutionary Command, and an Executive Committee

¹⁷⁸ Gibson. *Sold out?* 87; Tripp. *History of Iraq*. 180; September 11, 1964. "Iraq Said to Foil Coup, Executing 5." *In the New York Times*.

¹⁷⁹ Airgram from Embassy in Baghdad to the State Department, Kurdish Situation Report, January 8, 1965, LBJL, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq-Kurds, December 1964-March 1966, doc. 4f; Sluglett. *Iraq Since 1958*. 93-96; Tripp. *History of Iraq*. 172.

¹⁸⁰Memorandum, Denney to Rusk, April 5, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq-Kurds, December 1963-March 1966, Doc. 9; O'Ballance. *The Kurdish Revolt*. 122-124.

of 11 members.¹⁸¹ He then sent a personal letter to Arif, accusing the government of failing to implement the February ceasefire conditions. In Barzani's note to Arif, documented by the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Barzani argued how "the seeds of confidence were sown, but they did not sprout," referring to how the government of Iraq turned their back against the Kurds.¹⁸²

The February agreement between Arif and Barzani had been ignored by Baghdad. The Bureau of Intelligence and Research addressed this by bringing forward evidence that other than talks of negotiation, there was no obvious move by the government of Iraq to meet any of the Kurds' demands.¹⁸³ The Bureau argued how the government of Iraq had abandoned agreements with the Kurds, such as reconstructing damages that came as a result of the wars. Only a few thousand Iraqi dinars were spent on the damages of the original 5 million allocated to this purpose. What else was spent was only used to rebuild police stations and military roads, ignoring the villages completely. Furthermore, Kurdish villages in Erbil and Kirkuk, regions of Iraqi Kurdistan were evacuated and given to Arab tribes with offers of protection and money, with the goal of Arabizing the area. In the oil-producing districts, such as Kirkuk and Khaniqin, Kurdish families were expelled from their homes and directly replaced by Arabs. In Barzani's call for autonomy, he accused the government of Arabizing oil-rich Kurdish cities, like Kirkuk and Khaniqin. He was determined that these cities should be returned back into an autonomous Kurdish region.¹⁸⁴

On October 23, 1964, the Iraqi Minister of State Mas'ud Mohammad told Ambassador Strong that the government of Iraq had approved the following presentation to the Kurds: That the government was ready to make the first move by releasing all Kurdish prisoners, removing Arab tribes and returning Kurds to their occupied villages, and returning Kurdish government employees to their former positions. Barzani responded to these talks by demanding that Kurdish rights should be defined in the original context of the February 10, 1964 ceasefire agreement that Arif promised, emphasizing Kurdish self-rule and national rights. Barzani

¹⁸¹ O'Ballance. *The Kurdish Revolt*. 123.

¹⁸² Memorandum, Denney to Rusk, April 5, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq-Kurds, December 1963-March 1966, Doc. 9

¹⁸³ Memorandum from George C. Denney to the Acting Secretary, *The Kurdish situation in Iraq*, April 5, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq-Kurds, December 1963-March 1966, Doc. 9; Pelletiere. *An Unstable Element in the Gulf*. 137.

¹⁸⁴Memorandum, Denney to Rusk, April 5, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq-Kurds, December 1963-March 1966, Doc. 9; McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 317.

demanded the official language in the Kurdish region to be Kurdish and Arabic as the second. Additionally, Kurdish officials should be appointed in the government and be responsible for governing Iraqi Kurdistan sideways with the Arabs. With a few reluctant attempts on a settlement and President Arif fully occupied with the balancing of his political assets at home and maintaining his place in the Arab world, the Kurds were left yet again without an answer.¹⁸⁵

Once again, in the middle of January 1965, when no answer was given from Baghdad, a new delegation came from the Kurds, indicating that they were prepared to give up demands for self-rule and equal division of oil income. What they now requested was the maintenance of a Kurdish military force consisting of 3000 to 4000 men. It appeared that Baghdad did not even attempt to answer this request. The U.S. embassy in Baghdad believed that this fairly decent proposal that was ready to give up the Kurds' key element, self-rule, was made perhaps to be in a better position to make their case internationally. The U.S. embassy was aware that the Kurds at the same time had sent an emissary to visit several capitals to explain the Kurdish position. The Bureau of Intelligence and Research conveyed that it appeared that the U.S. could do nothing in an advisory role, which could head off a clash between the government and the Kurds or get the parties together toward a negotiated settlement. With pressure from different senior officers in the Iraqi regime, Arif even denied the latest requests from Barzani, although Barzani was prepared to give up his ambitious demands for self-rule. This shows how little interest the government of Iraq had in negotiating a settlement or even a compromise with its Kurdish inhabitants. Hence, when spring came, severe fighting once again broke out in Iraqi Kurdistan.¹⁸⁶

Differences Among Allies

In the second half of 1964, the U.S. policies in Iraq were at odds with its closest allies Britain, Iran, and Israel. The interests of all three parties coalesced around two central mutual points. Firstly, a mutual hatred for Nasser, who had gained influence in Baghdad. Secondly, the use of the Kurds as a useful coercive tool to overthrow the Arif regime, destabilize it, and thus make it uninteresting for Nasser.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, October 26, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, XXI, Near East, doc. 167 Memorandum from Denney to Rusk, April 5, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq-Kurds, December 1963-March 1966, Doc. 9.

¹⁸⁶ Memorandum from Denney to Rusk, April 5, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq-Kurds, December 1963-March 1966, Doc. 9.

¹⁸⁷ Gibson. *Sold Out?* 86.

Ambassador Strong first documented the turn in British interests and policies in Iraq in October 1964 in informal letters he sent to both Talbot and Komer, warning them of British covert activities in Iraq. This type of suspicion was not new. The break in the classic Anglo-American relations had already begun to surface and Britain had initiated actions, such as the Suez-crisis, without even informing Washington. Strong informed Komer that it seems like Britain was engaging in covert actions against the Iraqi regime, "perhaps through Israel in Iran".¹⁸⁸ Strong also attached a memorandum to the letters that, in August 1964, a British official approached the CIA station chief at the U.S. embassy in Baghdad. This official was seeking, on a personal basis, to enlist U.S. support in a campaign intended to plot against Nasser and the Egyptian-Iraqi unity. The officer even said Britain could not live with Nasser and his influence in the Gulf because it threatened British interests in the area. To achieve this plot and sustain British interest in the Gulf, the officer said they needed support from their American allies. Furthermore, the memo also reported that the British embassy's first secretary, Stephan Egerton, had met with a group of Kurds and urged them to renew military action against the government of Iraq to take a robust anti-Nasser line. In return, Egerton assured, they would get British support through Iran.¹⁸⁹ This memorandum shows that Britain was working with Iran to use the Kurds to increase pressure on the Iraqi regime, stagnate their military in war, and disrupt efforts at further unification with Egypt.

In the letters that Strong sent to both Komer and Talbot, he addressed that the U.S. must not confront the United Arab Republic and Iraq like Britain was doing. In Strong's views, the U.S. must stress relations with each Arab entity based on mutual interests, avoiding any hints of confrontation against them. Strong added that Britain should do likewise and act based on "cold logic rather than emotional hatred".¹⁹⁰ By the U.S. officials' negative attitude towards the British anti-Nasser actions, it seems clear that they were opposed to them. In another report, Strong informed Washington that the British diplomat John Robey appeared to have called on him to learn U.S. views on Iraq. In the meeting with Strong, Robey kept emphasizing the degree to which the British agreed with U.S. officials' views, but he repeatedly referred to the harmful

¹⁸⁸ Strong to Komer, October 15, 1964, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq, December 1963-March 1966, doc.22; Strong to Komer, October 17, 1964, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq, December 1963-March 1966, doc.23.

¹⁸⁹ Memorandum U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, October 15, 1964, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq, December 1963-March 1966, Doc.23a.

¹⁹⁰ Strong to Talbot, October 17, 1964, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq, December 1963-March 1966, doc.23.

nature of Nasser's activity and the need to take action to protect Western interests. Robey was open about the negative views on Iraq and Nasser in the British embassy, although not sharing their views entirely. However, most of the time, Robey said that Britain agreed with Strong's views of good relations and avoiding confrontations.¹⁹¹

Covert Action in the Kurdish Mountains

In October 1964, along with British covert actions in Iraq, Washington learned that its two regional allies in the Middle East were conspiring against Baghdad. This time it seemed that these allies had involved themselves directly with the Kurds. Strong raised the issue with Talbot in a letter that indicated foreign activity inside Iraqi-Kurdistan. In the letter that was sent to Talbot, Strong wrote:

Israel plays an important role in Iran and is known to be supporting the Iraqi Kurds. Britain shares with Israel and the Shah a deep antipathy for Nasser. A British Conservative Government undertook the Suez campaign in partnership with Israel and France. It requires little imagination to conceive that, given the depth of British hostility to Nasser and the importance of the Gulf to Britain, the British may well engage in covert cooperation with Iran and Israel against a Nasserist dominated Iraqi regime as well as against Nasser elsewhere.¹⁹²

In the autumn of 1964, the Israelis developed an interest in establishing contact with the Kurds of Iraq. Being slightly over a decade old, Israel had already managed to establish its position in the Middle East, but not in a friendly manner towards its neighboring countries. With no friends in the area, Israel realized that it had become an isolated state in a sea of Arab states. Since breaking the circle of Arab enmity appeared impossible, Israel developed a belief in reaching out to the non-Arab states in the region. According to the historian, Trita Parsi, Ben-Gurion wanted to achieve peace with the surrounding non-Arab states in a policy known as "Peripheral Strategy".¹⁹³ The potential allies Ben-Gurion had in mind were Iran, Turkey, Ethiopia, and other minorities such as the Kurds and Lebanese Christians. This became Israel's strategic thinking foreign policy until the end of the cold war.¹⁹⁴

The Israelis hoped that a Kurdish rebellion would keep the Iraqi armed forces tied down and prevent Arif from any command directed against the Jewish state. The Israeli intelligence

¹⁹¹ U.S. Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, October 13, 1964, LBJL, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq, December 1963-March 1966, doc.23c.

¹⁹² Memorandum from U.S. Embassy in Baghdad to Department of State, October 15, 1964, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, Box 28, Folder: Iraq, December 1963-March 1966, Doc. 23a; Gibson. *Sold Out?* 90.

¹⁹³ Parsi, Trita. 2007. *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the U.S.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. 21.

¹⁹⁴ Cockburn, Andrew & Cockburn, Leslie. 1991. *Dangerous Liaison: The Inside Story of the U.S.-Israeli Covert Relationship.* New York: HarperCollins. 99-103.

service, Mossad, had such confidence in the Kurdish Peshmerga that one of the Mossad operatives recalled later: "Put a Kurd atop a mountain with a rifle, pita bread, and onions, and he will stop a column of troops for you".¹⁹⁵ Eliezer Tsafir, who was in charge of Israel's Mossad intelligence service in Iraqi Kurdistan, said that Israel's relationship with the Kurds began when one of Barzani's representatives in Paris approached the Israeli embassy and made an appeal for support in the autumn of 1964. Israel, who already wanted to weaken Baghdad and prevent Arif from any assault against Israel, considered the request to be very appealing. The Kurds were provided with everything, from guns to mobile field hospitals. In return, Israel received access to intelligence the Kurds gathered on Baghdad. As Tsafir described: "We told the Kurds [that] whatever they do, we are supporting them – in war and in peace".¹⁹⁶

Together with Israel, Iran also shared the idea of using the Kurds to keep the Iraqi forces preoccupied with internal challenges, thus preventing Iraq from exerting pressure on Iran's border regions so Iran could find a way to retake the Shatt al-Arab waterway.¹⁹⁷ In January 1964, the Shah sent a letter to President Johnson informing that "if negotiations between the government in Baghdad and the Kurds should fail to reach an understanding, we have reason to expect that the fighting will flare up again in the spring".¹⁹⁸ On December 16, 1964, Barzani's representatives informed the U.S. embassy in Baghdad that the Shah had been urging them to resume fighting against the government. The embassy responded by telling them that they should avoid entangling themselves in the interests of others.¹⁹⁹ According to David McDowall, a specialist on the Middle East, Iran was arming the Kurds with modern weaponry and assistance to wreck the Iraqi regime, Iran's biggest enemy.²⁰⁰ By 1966, at least 20 percent of Barzani's requirements were supplied by Iran. In return, Barzani was expected to deny Iraqi Kurdistan to Iranian Kurdish militants, preventing the Iranian Kurds from teaming up with the equipped Iraqi Kurds and possibly forming a rebellion against the Shah.²⁰¹ Paradoxically, in the logic of the Shah, while he was supporting a Kurdish rebellion outside of his border, he was also making sure to eliminate his own by rounding up Kurdish leaders and rebels, fearing

¹⁹⁵ Little. "The United States and the Kurds."

¹⁹⁶ Parsi. *Treacherous Alliance*. 53; Little. "The United States and the Kurds."

¹⁹⁷ Telegram from the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, January 20, 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc.179; Entessar, *Kurdish Politics*. 162.

¹⁹⁸ Shah to President Johnson, January 7, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol. XXII, Iran, doc. 2.

¹⁹⁹ U.S. Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State, December 16, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XXI, Near East. Doc. 171.

²⁰⁰ McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 320.

²⁰¹ McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 320.

their irredentist behavior.²⁰² The Department of State believed that Kurdish participation in any scheme to overthrow the Iraqi government would worsen the Kurdish position in Iraq and that there was “a good chance that the government of Iraq already knew about this activity”.²⁰³

As early as December 1964, Iraqi Foreign Minister, Naji Talib, conveyed his discontentment for the Kurds' progress to the U.S. Secretary of State Rusk. The minister said that the Kurdish problem fundamentally dominated the Iraqi scene and that the Iraqi government was preoccupied with this issue to the point that they did not have time or energy to focus on other issues. The minister went on to say that he could not understand some aspects of the Kurdish problem. "The Kurds are poor people, and their landmass has been damaged by war. Where are they getting money from to buy staple foods, arms, and equipment?"²⁰⁴ Talib said that he did not want to suggest that the Johnson administration was supporting the Kurds, but he did want to emphasize that his government was aware of “the maneuvers of some mysterious unidentified forces” which were supporting the Kurds.²⁰⁵

By the start of 1965, serious disputes had broken out in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Kurds saw little point in negotiating with a government that was intent on Arab unity and on submerging the Kurds in the Arab identity of the state.²⁰⁶ With a new war between the Kurds and Baghdad impending, Nasser became concerned that this would threaten his position in Iraq and disrupt his unification plans. According to historian Edgar O'Ballance, Nasser wanted the Kurdish problem over and done with, and on February 22, he sent Barzani a letter in where he urged him to surrender. This warning was not taken seriously, and in March 1965, the truce had broken down.²⁰⁷

The Iraqis attacked all across Iraqi Kurdistan with 40, 000 troops, dispersing their forces and diluting the strength of their attacks. They advanced along the roads with armor out in front, and the Kurds trapped them all the way. For this, the Iraqis retaliated by burning and bombing

²⁰² Irredentist: A person who favors or seeks to claim or reclaim an occupied territory that once was part of his or her country or from their nation's past. For the Kurds under the Shah, see McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 250-259.

²⁰³ Department of State to U.S. Embassy in Iraq, December 14, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, XXI, Near East; Arabian Peninsula, doc. 170.

²⁰⁴Memorandum, Talib to Rusk, December 10, 1964, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, Box 28, Folder: Iraq, December 1963-March 1966, doc.18a.

²⁰⁵ Memorandum, Talib to Rusk, December 10, 1964, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, Box 28, Folder: Iraq, December 1963-March 1966, doc.18a.

²⁰⁶ Tripp. *History of Iraq*. 174

²⁰⁷ Gibson. *Sold Out?* 91; O'Ballance. *The Kurdish Revolt*. 125.

nearby Kurdish villages. Still, the Kurds fought hard, stopping the army in its tracks. The government offensive went on until September 1965, and the Kurds were not the ones losing the war this time.²⁰⁸ For the first time, the Iraqi Foreign Minister, Talib, directly accused Iran of giving material to the Kurds as both their fighting skills and their equipment were highly improved. Talib identified that material assistance to the Kurds was transported into Iraqi soil from the Iranian government. In a telegram to Washington, Ambassador Strong informed that Talib knew the truth and therefore it was useless to pretend to Iraq that their neighbor, Iran, was not helping the Kurds.²⁰⁹

The renewal of the Kurdish War in Iraqi Kurdistan put the U.S. in a position where it could not do much other than observing in order not to break ties with any of its friends or allies. On the one hand, the overriding objective of the U.S. policy towards Iraq was to maintain friendly relations with the Arif regime and to prevent Soviet influence on Iraq's sovereignty. On the other hand, the war guaranteed that America's two closest regional allies, Iran and Israel, would continue to help the Kurds against the government of Iraq. Additionally, Britain was also believed to be supporting the two other allies in actions to overthrow Arif.²¹⁰ In a letter from Strong to Komer, Strong said that it is unlikely that "we either are willing or able to persuade the British and the Shah to knock off".²¹¹

Not long after the renewal of the war, Secretary of State, Rusk, traveled to Tehran for a Central Treaty Organization meeting to meet the Shah of Iran. Rusk asked him about Iran's relations with Iraq. As an answer, the Shah reiterated his public concern over the Iraqi leader's aspirations of unity with Nasser and pointed out that Iran wanted Iraq to be truly independent. When asked about the Kurds, The Shah described the Kurds as "a trump card" and did not want to abandon them as long as Arif maintained close relations with Nasser.²¹² The Shah said: "We are not going to let the Iraqi Kurds down until a national government is established in Baghdad".²¹³ By this statement, the Shah seemed to be helping the Kurds because of

²⁰⁸ Pollack, Kenneth M. 2002. *Arabs at War. Military Effectiveness, 1948-1991*. A Council on Foreign Relations Book. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press. 162; O'Ballance. *The Kurdish Revolt*. 125.

²⁰⁹ Telegram from the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State, April 30, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East. Doc. 173.

²¹⁰ Gibson. *Sold Out?* 91.

²¹¹ Strong to Komer, October 15, 1964, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq, December 1963-March 1966, doc.22

²¹² Rusk to the Department of State, April 8, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXII, Iran, doc. 75.

²¹³ Rusk to the Department of State, April 8, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXII, Iran, doc. 75.

strengthened Arab unity in the Gulf and what consequences this could have for the Iranian neighbor. There is no evidence that Rusk encouraged Iran to do otherwise.

The Problem is an “Internal” Iraqi Problem

Meanwhile, with no national rights nor any representation in Iraqi politics, the Kurds did not hesitate to improve their case internationally. In 1965, several letters and emissaries were sent to different capitals to explain the Kurdish position and to reach out for assistance. Barzani sent numerous letters pleading the Kurdish case to President Johnson himself. In 1965, two letters were sent to the American Ambassador by Shamsuddin Mofti, Barzani’s liaison agent in Tehran. The letters asked the U.S. to assist the Kurds financially and militarily in their struggle against the Iraqi regime. When Mofti had gone, the embassy decided that they saw “no advantage in a written response or acknowledgment of Barzani's letter”.²¹⁴

In another letter to the NSC, the Middle East expert Harold H. Saunders informed that an Iraqi Kurd, Ismet Sharif Vanli, was in Washington to give a letter to the President from Barzani.²¹⁵ Saunders stated that the U.S. has maintained a strict hands-off policy towards the Kurdish rebellion and strictly declared it an internal Iraqi affair. He urged that the Kurds' aspirations in politics would not be officially received in Washington and that Vanli should be turned away politely.²¹⁶ As Saunders insisted, the NSC did not receive Mr. Vanli. Instead, they told him to put the letter he had for President Johnson in the mail. The Council added that the State Department should refuse to receive emissaries like Vanli, representing the Kurdish case. “The Iraqi embassy here in town is watching this fellow like a hawk, so we cannot afford to have anything to do with him,” the NSC concluded.²¹⁷

On October 30, 1965, Ambassador Strong presented an analysis of the Kurdish problem where he concluded that a high degree of autonomy or independence for the Kurds could be disruptive to Iraq’s stability and could potentially be harmful to U.S. interests. Strong concluded that neither the Kurds nor the government of Iraq appeared to force any permanent negotiated

²¹⁴ U.S. Embassy in Tehran to the Department of State, March 12, 1966, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq-Kurds, December 1963-March 1966, doc. 6b; Saunders to Komer, March 23, 1966, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq-Kurds, December 1964-March 1966, doc.5; U.S. Embassy in Iran to the Department of State, April 12, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc. 172.

²¹⁵ Memorandum, Saunders to Bundy, April 29, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq-Kurds, December 1963 – March 1966, doc. 3.

²¹⁶ Memorandum, Saunders to Bundy, April 29, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq-Kurds, December 1963 – March 1966, doc. 3.

²¹⁷ Memorandum, Bundy to Saunders, April 30, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq-Kurds, December 1963 – March 1966, doc. 2.

solution for the immediate future. Strong believed that the "Kurdish problem is long-term".²¹⁸ Due to this, the Ambassador believed that the current U.S. policy stance was the most suitable: "That the problem is an internal Iraqi [problem]...for which a negotiated political solution is desirable".²¹⁹ For the Johnson administration, U.S.-Kurdish interactions were determined by the objectives of the U.S. Cold War foreign policy. Helping the Kurds in their struggle against Baghdad and risking U.S.-Iraqi friendship was none of Washington's interests in the Middle East.

Friendship Has to Be Proven

To strengthen U.S. position in Iraq, the U.S. had to convince Iraq that it was not its enemy. In a political-economic assessment by the U.S. embassy in Baghdad, the embassy conveyed ways in which the U.S. could improve relations with Iraq. The embassy expressed that since Iraq carried hostility towards Israel, the U.S. position in Iraq is weakened by their close ties to Israel. Hence, measures that would demonstrate American goodwill would help improve the U.S.-Iraqi relationship. These measures include the encouragement of contact between Iraq and the U.S., primarily professors and other specialists. Another way of improving relations was to respond to Iraqi requests for cooperation in the country's economic and social developments. A third strategy was training programs for Iraqi officers. Such matters would prove to Iraq that the U.S. was neutral in the Middle East. The embassy expressed that the U.S. policy of correct but reserved friendliness must be continued and continue to convince Iraq that the Johnson administration kept its hands off the Kurdish problem.²²⁰

Back in Iraq, the government took a turn that would improve the U.S.-Iraqi friendship. At the start, Arif's regime was divided over different forms of Arab nationalism, chiefly between Nasserists and other Arab nationalists. As a way of including these groups into the regime, Arif appointed commander of the air force, Arif Abd al-Razzak, as both prime minister and minister of defense. He was a prominent Nasserist and a critic of Arif's slow unification with Egypt and the implementation of socialism. Arif also wanted to balance this by appointing the western-oriented lawyer Abd al-Rahman Bazzaz. The lawyer was moved from his position as an Iraqi

²¹⁸ U.S. Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, October 30, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq-Kurds, December 1963-March 1966, doc. 4.

²¹⁹ U.S. Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, October 30, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq-Kurds, December 1963-March 1966, doc. 4.

²²⁰ U.S. Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, May 19, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq, December 1963-March 1966, doc. 3m.

ambassador in London and became deputy prime minister and foreign minister in Baghdad.²²¹ However, before Arif's new regime could be settled for full, Razzak tried to coup against Arif in September 1965. However, Razzak was quickly caught, causing Arif to force him to leave the country. This opened a way for Arif to break ties with the Nasserist elements inside Iraq. Arif then moved towards an "Iraq first" position, away from any plans of Arab nationalist unity.²²²

The new Iraqi Prime Minister, Abd al-Rahman Bazzaz, anticipated for democratic changes in Iraq. He was preferred and supported by many Iraqis who did not like the control the military had over the Iraqi government. As could be expected, he was not very popular amongst the military forces who kept pushing Bazzaz for war against the Kurds. Bazzaz himself did not see war as an appropriate solution and wanted to solve the Kurdish problem peacefully. Back in Washington, the Johnson administration seemed to be positive about the outcome of the development and the selection of a civilian to lead the government. President Johnson and President Arif started exchanging letters of kind diplomatic gestures to each other²²³ The Johnson administration's friendly attitude toward Iraq was further improved in June 1965 when Arif sought to reverse Qassim's nationalization of the Iraqi Petroleum Company.²²⁴

However, on August 11, 1965, while the third offensive against the Kurds was still ongoing, the U.S. embassy in Baghdad, by the request of the Iraqi government, asked Washington to urge Iran to cease the arming of the Kurds. The embassy informed Washington that Iraq had information about Iranian assistance in Iraqi Kurdistan. To maintain good relations with Iraq, the embassy believed that Washington should express concerns about the Kurdish problem. The State Department answered that the U.S. embassy in Baghdad might inform the U.S. embassy in Tehran to raise the matter with the Iranian government. Besides this advice, Washington never urged Iran to stop sending equipment to the Kurds.²²⁵

²²¹ Penrose, E. F. & Penrose, Edith Tilton. 1978. *Iraq: International relations and National Development*. London & Boulder: E. Benn & Westview Press. 328-329.

²²² Tripp. *History of Iraq*. 176.

²²³ President Johnson to Arif, July 13, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq, December 1963 – March 1966, doc. 26; U.S. Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, August 26, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq, December 1963–March 1966, doc. 3i; President Johnson to Arif, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq, December 1963 – March 1966, doc. 3k.

²²⁴ The Department of State to U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, June 12, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq, December 1963-March 1966, doc. 3i; Gibson. *Sold Out?* 94.

²²⁵ The Department of State to U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, May 6, 1965, *FRUS*, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc. 174.

For the first time in Iraq's history, being the first Iraqi politician to visit Washington., Bazzaz visited New York for the United Nations General Assembly in October 1965. In New York, he met Secretary of State Rusk and Vice President Hubert Humphrey. At the meetings, Bazzaz said that he wanted changes in Iraq and to solve the Kurdish problem peacefully. Bazzaz said that the Iraqi government respected the Kurds and their rights as civilians of Iraq, but that the present situation had no justification. When discussing Iran, Bazzaz stated: "We think our neighbor Iran is not behaving the way it should".²²⁶ He also wanted the U.S. to do something about Iran smuggling weapons into Iraqi Kurdistan and to help solve the Kurdish problem peacefully.²²⁷ Rusk expressed positive views over news that Iraq had gotten its first civilian prime minister. Rusk said that the U.S. was ready to explore ways to assist the developments in Iraq, like improving the University in Baghdad.²²⁸ The Department of State meant that assistance in improving the university would also serve to improve U.S.-Iraqi relations and strengthen U.S. cultural and political influence.²²⁹ Humphrey did not even comment on the Kurdish issue. The Johnson administration continued to persuade Iraq of its goodwill and wish to strengthen U.S.-Iraqi friendship. However, when it came to the Israeli and Iranian covert actions in the Kurdish mountains, the Johnson administration did not take direct action to stop either of their allies. Rather, it was "a passive observer".²³⁰

Although it was the Iraqi military who had lost against the Kurds in the military offensive in Iraqi Kurdistan in the Spring of 1965, the military had become greatly encouraged by their military failure. The Iraqi regime now understood that the most vulnerable matter to the Kurds, and the matter that could easily be used as a tool against them, was the Iranian border. The government realized that sealing the border to Iran and blocking supplies from Iran to Iraqi Kurdistan was crucial to defeating the Kurds. In the winter, the snow closed many of the

²²⁶ Memorandum, Rusk to the Twentieth Session of United Nations General Assembly, October 8, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq, December 1963 – March 1966, Doc.8

²²⁷ Memorandum, Rusk to the Twentieth Session of United Nations General Assembly, October 8, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq, December 1963 – March 1966, Doc.8; The Department of State to U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, October 26, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, Box 28, Folder: Iraq, December 1963 – March 1966, doc. 3f; Memorandum, 15, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, Box 28, Folder: Iraq, December 1963 – March 1966, Doc.5.

²²⁸ The Department of State to the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, October 26, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XXI, Near East, doc. 176.

²²⁹ The Department of State to the U.S. Embassy in Iraq, December 13, 1965, LBJ, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, Box 28, Folder: Iraq, December 1963 – March 1966, Doc. 3a.

²³⁰ Cooley, John K. 2005. *An Alliance Against Babylon : The U.S., Israel, and Iraq*. London: Pluto Press. ProQuest Ebook Central. 84.

mountain passes, limiting the routes available to the Kurds to move men and supplies over the Iraq-Iranian border. In January 1966, the Iraqis captured villages near this border and secured the territory to prevent the Kurds from accessing the routes that were open in the winter. Hence, with supplies from Iran, being the most vulnerable matter to the Kurds, out of the picture, the Iraqi regime began making plans for a more ambitious operation in the spring of 1966.²³¹

However, just when the Iraqi regime was planning a fourth offensive against the Kurds, in the evening of April 13, 1966, a helicopter that carried Arif and a group of close advisors, crashed. Arif and all other passengers were killed. Although rumors leaked that the crash might be a part of a planned plot against Arif, the crash still appears to be an accident that took place due to a strong sandstorm.²³² The accident, a big shock to everyone, brought new troubles and power struggle to the surface. Denney informed Washington that Arif's brother Abd al-Rahman Arif might try to take Arif's position. However, Denney said that his chances were small, and if he unexpectedly succeeded to power, "it will be as a weak figurehead masking a further power contest".²³³ Still, to Denney's disbelief, Abd al-Rahman Arif emerged as Iraq's new President on April 17, 1966.²³⁴

²³¹ Pollack. *Arabs at War*. 162.

²³² Denney to Rusk, April 14, 1966, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc.53.

²³³ Denney to Rusk, April 14, 1966, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc.53

²³⁴ Here and after Abd al-Rahman Arif will be referred to as only 'Arif.'

Chapter Four: Johnson and Turbulent

Times in the Gulf

*“If the Persian Gulf produced broccoli instead of oil,
the wars might not have occurred”.*²³⁵

After a few days of internal debate, on April 17, Arif was succeeded by his older brother, Abd al-Rahman Arif, who became the third president of Iraq. Like his brother, Arif was a moderate, non-communist, and a nationalist who wanted to establish an Iraq-first regime. Ambassador Strong described Arif as well-disposed “towards the U.S.”.²³⁶ The U.S. was pleased with Arif becoming the new president as he was one of the more moderate candidates for the presidency. The Johnson administration hoped that Arif could become a stabilizing element in Iraq, something that was of high importance to the U.S. interests in the region, including oil companies that were growing rapidly.²³⁷

New President and New Possibilities for Washington

In his two years in office, Abd al-Salam Arif had managed to establish good relations with the U.S. The U.S. foreign policy of reserved but correct friendliness did not cease to exist with late Arif. ²³⁸ Throughout the second half of 1966 and the first half of 1967, the U.S. foreign policy of friendliness towards Iraq remained essential to U.S. foreign policymakers. This policy would demonstrate American goodwill and prove to Iraq that the U.S. was neutral in the Middle East.

²³⁵ Quote in Welch, David A, Nye, Joseph S. 2013. *Understanding Global Conflict & Cooperation: Intro to theory & History*. Ninth edition. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited. 287.

²³⁶ Memorandum, Rusk to President Johnson, January 20, 1967, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box: 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc.44.

²³⁷ Denney to Rusk, April 14, 1966, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc.53; Memorandum, Rusk to President Johnson, January 21, 1967, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box: 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc. 43.

²³⁸ U.S. Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, May 19, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq, December 1964-March 1966, doc. 3m.

After Arif was elected as the new president in Iraq, Johnson and his team continued to stay in touch regularly with Iraq through diplomatic channels.²³⁹

The diplomatic relationship between the U.S. and the new president developed. In January 1967, five Iraqi generals, at Arif's request, traveled to Washington to meet President Johnson. Both Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Walt Rostow, who took over McGeorge Bundy's position as National Security Advisor, suggested that President Johnson welcome these generals. Rusk agreed with Rostow, because Iraq was entering a "critical decision period" about the future of the country and Arif had been trying to build up an "Iraq-firster" regime, welcoming the Iraqi generals would be an excellent opportunity for the U.S.²⁴⁰ Rostow believed that due to this gesture of President Arif, it seemed as if he was reaching out to strengthen the relationship with the U.S. If the president himself welcomed these generals, Rostow thought, this would be an opportunity to try and "stiffen" Arif's morale and in the long run, strengthen the U.S-Iraqi diplomatic relations.²⁴¹ President Johnson agreed, and at noon on January 25, the Iraqi generals were welcomed to the White House, where they met the president.²⁴²

The Johnson administration viewed Arif as "one of the few forces of moderation within his country" and managed to maintain a relatively good degree of diplomatic friendliness with him.²⁴³ Washington feared influence from the radical Arab nationalist states such as the United Arab Republic and Syria. Therefore, the Johnson administration hoped that Arif's government could make an important contribution to the stability in the region and avoid being absorbed into the more radical movements that caused the U.S. "and Israel" so much trouble.²⁴⁴ Most importantly, Arif's regime was anti-communist, which was important to U.S. foreign policymakers. Rostow reminded Johnson that the objective of the U.S. policy towards the

²³⁹ For the various contacts: The Department of State to U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, December 31, 1966, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box: 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc. 45; The Department of State to U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, July 7, 1966, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box: 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc. 46; U.S. Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, November 30, 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc. 187;

²⁴⁰ Memorandum for the President, January 20, 1967, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box: 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc.44

²⁴¹ Memorandum for the President, January 20, 1967, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box: 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc.44

²⁴² Memorandum For the President, January 20, 1967, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box: 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc.44; Memorandum From Rostow to President Johnson, January 21, 1967, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box: 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc. 43;

²⁴³ Gibson. *Sold Out?* 98-99.

²⁴⁴ Memorandum from Rostow to President Johnson, Washington, January 21, 1967, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc. 188.

Middle East was “to encourage governments like Arif’s to stand on their own”.²⁴⁵ This encouragement would be to assist Arif’s government economically by providing help in reconstruction and in developing oil fields.²⁴⁶ Also, Washington feared the radical militarists and Ba’thists that had attempted several coups against late Arif. Therefore, the Johnson administration believed that if the moderates like Arif maintained power in Iraq, it would also make an important contribution to the U.S. position in Iraq, which was important to U.S. interests in the region, especially the American oil companies.²⁴⁷

New Peace Prospect in Iraqi Kurdistan?

After having lost the war against the Kurds in 1965, the Iraqi regime began making large plans for an even more ambitious military operation against the Kurds at the beginning of 1966.²⁴⁸ Prime Minister Abd al-Rahman Bazzaz, whom Washington had a favorable impression of, was one of the few Iraqi authorities who had a genuine interest in peacefully resolving the Kurdish problem. He did not believe in war as a solution to the Kurdish problem and was convinced that as long as it remained unsolved, Iraq would not emerge as a stable and prosperous country. In the spring, Prime Minister Bazzaz reached out to the Kurds to prevent another war. He also kept insisting that the military should not launch any offensive towards the Kurds, but the army generals overruled Bazzaz. As a result of his nonviolent approach, the hostility from the military towards Bazzaz increased.²⁴⁹

In the wake of the new presidency in Iraq, the Kurdish leader Barzani announced a one-month ceasefire to allow the new regime "to ponder Kurds’ demands”.²⁵⁰ Upon entering the presidency, Arif issued a statement declaring that under his administration, the Kurds would finally be granted self-rule. However, this statement did not make Arif popular in the eye of the radicals who were opposed to any rights given to the Kurds. As a result, Arif gave way to the militarists and denounced Bazzaz’s peaceful approach to the Kurdish problem. He made a

²⁴⁵ Memorandum from Rostow to President Johnson, Washington, January 21, 1967, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc. 188.

²⁴⁶ The Department of State to U.S. Embassy in Iraq, Washington, April 5, 1967, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East. Doc. 190.

²⁴⁷ Memorandum, Rusk to President Johnson, January 20, 1967, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box: 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc.44

²⁴⁸ Pollack, Kenneth M. 2002. *Arabs at War. Military Effectiveness, 1948-1991*. A Council on Foreign Relations Book. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press. 162; O’Ballance. *The Kurdish Revolt*. 162.

²⁴⁹ Entassar. *Kurdish Politics*. 87.

²⁵⁰ McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 318.

new statement, making it clear that “no autonomy will ever be granted to the Kurds”.²⁵¹ Thereafter, he mobilized the army for yet another offensive in Iraqi Kurdistan.²⁵²

The Role of Israeli Special Forces in the Kurdish War

Since the autumn of 1964 Israeli special forces and Mossad had trained and armed Kurdish fighters, the Peshmerga.²⁵³ Most of the training had occurred inside Iran for months before the war outbreak. Barzani consolidated his position with Iranian assistance and Israeli aid, funneled to Iraqi Kurdistan via Iran.²⁵⁴ When the Kurdish War resumed, the Kurds, with the help of a greater force that certainly knew warfare methods, were fully prepared to triumph.²⁵⁵

On May 2, 1966, the Iraqi government launched its fourth offensive against the Kurds, using 40,000 troops against Barzani’s small force of 3,500 Peshmerga.²⁵⁶ The government tried to seize the road from Ruwanduz to the Iranian border to block supplies and assistance from the Iranian frontier.²⁵⁷ The air force used napalm and chemical weapons. This was the largest and most concentrated offensive so far and centered around a mountain called Mount Handren.²⁵⁸ However, despite the army’s large number and heavy artillery, the Iraqi army made a crucial mistake of setting their camp in the captured mountains’ valley. While leaving the surrounding heights unprotected, where hundreds of Kurds waited, the army set the scene for a bloodbath. The army suffered the worst defeat ever in the wars against the Kurds. In two days, the Kurds, helped by their Israeli friends, crushed the Iraqi army, killing 2,000 men.²⁵⁹

Ceasefire Reached After Five Years of Offensives

The Mount Handrin disaster brought the 1966 offensive to an abrupt end. The fourth offensive’s failure strengthened the hand of Bazzaz and other supporters of a peaceful settlement with the Kurds. Still, factions remained in Iraq that were opposed to this view and still wanted to continue the violent physical encounters, especially in the military.²⁶⁰ Stunned by the debacle,

²⁵¹ McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 318.

²⁵² McDowall. *A Modern History of the Kurds*. 318; Little. “The United States and the Kurds.”; Entessar. *Kurdish Politics*. 87.

²⁵³ Mamikonian, “Sargis. 2005. Israel And the Kurds (1949-1990).” In *Iran & Caucasus*. Vol. 9. No. 2. 381-399; Parsi. *Treacherous Alliance*. 53; Little, “The United States and the Kurds.”

²⁵⁴ Entessar. *Kurdish Politics*. 87-88.

²⁵⁵ Cockburn. *Dangerous Liaison*. 104-106.

²⁵⁶ O’Ballance. *The Kurdish Revolt*. 136.

²⁵⁷ McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 320.

²⁵⁸ O’Ballance. *The Kurdish Revolt*. 137.

²⁵⁹ Pollack, Pollack. *Arabs at War*. 163; Gibson. *Sold Out?* 97; McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 318.

²⁶⁰ O’Ballance. *Kurdish Revolt*. 139.

Arif agreed to a ceasefire and accepted Bazzaz's nonviolent solution. Bazzaz announced that he was willing to recognize national rights for the Kurds. Baghdad once again resumed negotiations with the Kurds, to which Barzani welcomed. A few weeks later, Bazzaz publicly announced a Twelve Point Plan for peace with Kurds on June 29. The plan recognized the bi-national character of Iraq and the Kurds' particular cultural and linguistic identity. Since the plan met nearly all Kurdish demands, the following day, the plan was accepted by Barzani. After five years of offensives, Iraq was finally ready to meet the Kurds' demands with the most far-reaching attempt ever made.²⁶¹

The U.S. was pleased that the Iraqi government and the Kurds finally reached an agreement, which led to a strengthened view of President Arif in Washington. Rostow described Arif as having a steady hand and real courage in seeking peace with the Kurds.²⁶² The Johnson administration congratulated the government of Iraq on its political peace program for the Kurds.²⁶³ According to a memorandum by Rostow for Johnson, Rostow even asked the president to encourage Iraq to provide help and aid to the Kurdish villages.²⁶⁴

The Johnson administration also proposed to sponsor a food program for the Kurdish areas.²⁶⁵ Rostow believed that with the way the U.S. had dealt with Barzani's previous messages, the continuing flow of food would remind the Kurds of the U.S. humanitarian interest in the Kurds.²⁶⁶ However, a report from the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs indicated that U.S. sudden humanitarian help for the Kurdish areas originated in fear of Soviet threats in the Kurdish areas. The Johnson administration feared that since the Kurds were a minority that had been previously approached by Soviet agents, there was a possibility that Soviet agents might act again. The U.S. policymakers believed that if the U.S. did not attempt to give the Kurds assistance, then the Soviets would. Humanitarian help to the Kurds was necessary if the U.S.

²⁶¹ Tripp. *History of Iraq*. 187-188; Gibson. *Sold Out?* 97; McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 318.

²⁶² Memorandum, Rostow to President Johnson, November 25, 1966, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc. 19.

²⁶³ U.S. Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State, July 2, 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol XXI, Near East, doc. 182.

²⁶⁴ Memorandum, Rostow to President Johnson, February 20, 1967, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc. 38a.

²⁶⁵ Memorandum, Saunders to Ernest Goldstein, Johnson's Assistant in the White House, March 1968, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc. 6.

²⁶⁶ Memorandum, Rostow to President Johnson, For the President, February 20, 1967, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc. 38a; Memorandum, Rostow to President Johnson, February 20, 1967, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc. 14a.

wished to “offset Soviet influence in the Kurdish area”.²⁶⁷ Because of the Cold War, American officials worried that any political instability and economic underdevelopment in the Middle East would lead to Soviet influence. Since U.S. policymakers worried that the Soviet Union would exploit such factors to enhance its position in the area, the U.S. needed to provide security to the Middle East.²⁶⁸

The Iraqi Regime’s Internal Problems and Power Struggle

When Arif became president in April 1966, he had several escalating and uneasy issues to solve. The Iraqi regime was fragmented with moderates and radicals. Al-Salam Arif had managed to control and stabilize the regime by personal patronage, loyalties, and networking. His followers admired him, and in the aftermath of his death, the feeling of obligation and loyalty towards him led to the election of his brother, Abd al-Rahman Arif, as a compromise among the regime’s rivaling factions.²⁶⁹ Even though Abd al-Rahman Arif continued his brother’s policies and attempted to rule like him, his grip on politics was less confident. He was less popular, and the personal networks, consisting of loyalty and good relations with the officers that his brother had, were mostly absent. Denney of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research had the impression that he was also weakly regarded in the military.²⁷⁰

When the ceasefire between the Kurds and the Iraqi government was reached in June 1966, Bazzaz immediately took steps to implement the Twelve Point Plan that he had prepared. These steps implied a massive rehabilitation program, lifting the economic blockade and releasing hundreds of Kurdish prisoners. However, the following month Bazzaz found his position undermined. Many officers became alarmed that the Kurds had triumphed and pressed Bazzaz to dismiss the Twelve Point Plan.²⁷¹ By August 1966, the hostility towards Bazzaz in the officer corps had reached a point that Arif felt obligated to dismiss him. He removed Bazzaz and appointed a former member of the Free Officers, Naji Talib on August 6, 1966. The new prime minister assured in a meeting with Ambassador Strong on August 19 that the government of Iraq would fully implement the plan Bazzaz had given the Kurds. However, the Twelve

²⁶⁷ Memorandum, Near Eastern affairs meeting, November 1, 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc. 185.

²⁶⁸ Hahn. *Caught in the Middle East*. 156-157.

²⁶⁹ Gibson. *Sold Out?* 96.

²⁷⁰ Denney to Rusk, April 14, 1966, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc.53

²⁷¹ Ali. *The Iraqi Kurds*. 104-105.

Point Plan that Bazzaz promised the Kurds were entirely shelved as he left office. The situation with the Kurds returned to an armed truce, that was pending and unresolved.²⁷²

The Johnson administration watched Arif as he gradually became politically weakened as the militant elements of Iraq's military became more prominent. Gradually, Washington saw that Arif became easy to sway by the military. The military took authority over the policymaking. His removal of the successful, peace-oriented Prime Minister Bazzaz, who was well viewed in Washington, was an example of his politically weak leader position. Pressured, Arif eventually gave way to the military.²⁷³

Prelude of the Six Day War

Throughout the first half of 1967, tensions between the Arab states and Israel escalated.²⁷⁴ As tensions grew, the new Iraqi Foreign Minister Adnan Pachachi traveled to the different Arab states and lastly to Washington to seek to stem the crisis. By the time he had reached Washington, Rostow had recommended President Johnson that he should consider seeing Pachachi. Rostow added that since the U.S. was seen in the Arab states as completely committed to Israel, a meeting with Pachachi would be "healthy" if the U.S. Administration wished to save any of its "Arab interest in this crisis".²⁷⁵ Rostow believed that Johnson should express his goodwill for Arabs to Pachachi so that he could perceive an impression that the U.S. was neutral in the crisis. On June 1, 1966, Pachachi met both Rostow, Rusk, and later, Johnson. The president emphasized the U.S.'s desire to avoid hostiles between Israel and the Arab states and achieve a resolution to the crisis. Johnson expressed his interest in keeping friendly relations with the Arab states and his support of all Middle East countries' territorial integrity, including Iraq.²⁷⁶

²⁷² The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, August 19, 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc. 183; Tripp. 182. McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 319; Charountaki. *The Kurds and U.S.* 133; Gibson. *Sold Out?* 98.

²⁷³ Gibson. *Sold Out?* 99.

²⁷⁴ Pollack. *Arabs At War*. 56

²⁷⁵ Memorandum, Rostow to President Johnson, May 31, 1967, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box: 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc.33

²⁷⁶ The Department of State to the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, June 2, 1967, *FRUS*, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc. 193; Memorandum, Rostow to President Johnson, May 31, 1967, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box: 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc.33; Memorandum, Rusk to President Johnson, for the President, June 1, 1967, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box: 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc. 32a; Gibson. *Sold Out?* 100.

In Iraq, several factors prevented the country from participating in the war. Firstly, the Israeli attack unfolded so quickly that Iraq could not mobilize to reach the front lines in time. Secondly, the Mount Handren defeat had crushed the army so badly that the army was in poor shape. Lastly, the Iraqi government feared attack from the Kurdish Peshmerga if the army diverted its attention to Israel. The Israelis had continued to send Barzani more weapons on the eve of the Six Day War.²⁷⁷ According to a report from Thomas L. Hughes, Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, an Israeli agent had visited Barzani to arrange some action to tie down the Iraqi military inside Iraq, preventing them from participating in the Six Day War.²⁷⁸ Other reports said that just before the Six Day War outbreak, an Iraqi military delegation asked the Kurds for a united front against Israel. A “guerrilla” on the Kurdish side spoke up and denounced the notion.²⁷⁹ The report claimed that he was, in fact, one of the Israeli advisers. Hence, it was important to the Iraqi government to keep their army intact in a potential Israeli-backed Kurdish attack.²⁸⁰

The Aftermath and Break in Relations

Whatever relations that had been made between Iraq and the U.S. during Arif’s presidency, was ruined by the U.S. stance in the Six Day War. Johnson moved the U.S. policy decisively from impartiality towards openly supporting Israel against the Arabs. In a military campaign on June 5, 1967, the Israelis inflicted a humiliating defeat upon the Arab states. In the aftermath of the war, the State Department was astonished by Israel's plan to keep its occupied territories. Although Secretary Rusk had repeatedly told the Israelis that it would matter who opened fire, it was not clear that Johnson shared this view. While Rusk and the NSC strongly advised against siding openly with Israel, the White House eventually sided with its Israeli friend.²⁸¹

According to Quandt, "Johnson never blamed Israel for starting the war".²⁸² Being an early supporter of Israel, Johnson did not attempt to force Israel to withdraw from the newly occupied territories. He believed that an immediate withdrawal would not resolve the conflict in the Middle East as long as the Arabs refused to recognize the Jewish state. Israel was strengthened by their victory in the Six Day War and the strong support it was given from President Johnson.

²⁷⁷ Little. “The United States and the Kurds.”

²⁷⁸ Thomas Hughes to Rusk, September 1, 1967, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc. 197; Pollack. *Arabs At War*. 167.

²⁷⁹ Cockburn. *Dangerous Liaison*. 105.

²⁸⁰ Cockburn. *Dangerous Liaison*. 105.

²⁸¹ Lazarowitz “The Johnson administration, the State Department, and the Middle East.”

²⁸² Quandt, William B. 1992. “What Color Was the Light?”

Johnson's Middle East policies in the aftermath of the Six day War prevailed over those of the State Department.²⁸³ Johnson's failure to compel Israel to withdraw from occupied territories elevated tensions in the region to new heights. This had consequences that were beyond repairable.²⁸⁴

In the aftermath of the Six Day War, Arif's regime seemed to be threatened by powerful forces. Even though Iraq was not a front-line state in the war and suffered nothing as a result, the American support for Israel made Iraq feel bitter towards the U.S. The U.S. diplomat Enoch S. Duncan, who was in Baghdad while Ambassador Strong was home on vacation, warned the State Department that an internal Iraqi political confrontation was mounting in Baghdad.²⁸⁵ The war had led radicals to completely hijack what was left of the Arif regime's moderate elements, leading it to a series of impulsive decisions. Pressured by the regime's militants, Arif felt compelled to appoint yet another military officer, Taher Yahya, as prime minister in July 1967.²⁸⁶ Earlier militant plotters such as Arif Abd al-Razzaq and Subhi Abd al-Hamid, who both had conspired against late Arif, were released from prison. These took a strong anti-western position. Since Arif could not please these militants, this led to a critical situation that could lead to a "major blow-up" in Duncan's view.²⁸⁷

More significantly, the Six Day War led to another major decision by the Iraqi government that drastically changed Iraqi-U.S. relations. On the morning of June 7, 1967, Iraq decided to break off diplomatic ties with the U.S. and Britain. Duncan informed Washington that Pachachi had contacted the embassy and said that Iraq had broken diplomatic relations with the U.S. as a consequence of American support for Israel.²⁸⁸ In Baghdad, the American Embassy had to be evacuated in a hurry, and every American employee in the capital was expected to leave.²⁸⁹ In a memorandum from the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs to Rusk on September 21, 1967, Rusk learned that Pachachi was in Washington and had expressed his discontent. He had expressed

²⁸³ Lazarowitz "The Johnson administration, the State Department, and the Middle East."

²⁸⁴ Yakub. *U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East*. 49-53; Quandt. "America and the Middle East."

²⁸⁵ The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, June 8, 1967, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc. 195

²⁸⁶ Tripp. *History of Iraq*. 188.

²⁸⁷ The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, June 8, 1967, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc. 195; Gibson *Sold Out?* 105.

²⁸⁸ The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, June 6, 1967, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc. 194.

²⁸⁹ The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, June 8, 1967, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc. 195.

that before the outbreak of the Six Day War, the Arab states had been uncertain about the U.S. position in the Arab-Israeli conflict.²⁹⁰ After the war, they knew. When Ambassador Strong ran into Pachachi in New York on June 29, Pachachi expressed that the U.S. had shown a lack of concern for the Arabs and fully taken the Israeli side. He stated that he could only hope that in time the U.S. would realize that its interests require a better balance and that "improvement in relations can then occur".²⁹¹

In addition, Iraq implemented an oil boycott against the states that had supported Israel.²⁹² American intelligence analysts believed that the Arab oil embargo would pose serious economic difficulties not only for the U.S. but also for the UK. The Persian Gulf produced one-third of the world's production of oil and possessed two-thirds of the world's known reserves. 85 percent of U.S. naval requirements in Southeast Asia were supplied from the Persian Gulf. The CIA estimated on June 7, 1967 that the denial of Arab oil to the UK could cut its supplies of oil to 85 percent during the embargo's first six months. This could lead to a sharp decline in industrial production and produce "severe economic depression".²⁹³ On June 10, the Johnson administration declared an oil emergency and reformed the Foreign Petroleum Supply Committee. The Committee had been created during the Iranian crisis in 1951-1953. The U.S. increased its production of petroleum to fill the shortage caused by the Arab oil embargo.²⁹⁴

Similarly to the Suez Crisis in 1956 that resulted in the closing of the Suez Canal, Egypt again closed the Suez Canal following the Six Day War. This disrupted Middle Eastern shipping to the West. Although the U.S. was not as dependent on the Suez Canal as its European allies, its closing would lead to tremendous economic difficulties for Britain. By 1966, Britain had relied on the canal for 25 percent of its supplies. The closing of the canal reduced British exports and cost Britain approximately \$200 million, a sum that was equal to 20 percent of the country's total reserves.²⁹⁵ While the Suez Canal was closed for one year in 1956, this time the canal remained closed for shipping from 1967 to 1975.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁰ Memorandum, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs to Rusk, September 21, 1967, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc. 30a.

²⁹¹ Memorandum, Strong to the U.S. State Department, New York, June 29, 1967, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc. 196.

²⁹² Gibson. *Sold Out?* 105-106.

²⁹³ Fain. *American Ascendance*. 164.

²⁹⁴ Fain. *American Ascendance*. 164.

²⁹⁵ Fain. *American Ascendance*. 164.

²⁹⁶ Waage, Hilde Henriksen. 2013. *Konflikt og Stormaktspolitikk I Midtøsten*. Kristiansand: Cappelen Damn. 205-206; Cleveland. *The Modern Middle East*. 319.

Soviet Union in Better Position Than the U.S.

On July 17, 1967, the Special State-Defense Study Group undertook a study to develop a standpoint on how the U.S. best could promote its long-term national interests in the region now that the Arab-Israeli problem was at center stage again. The Study Group Director Julius C. Holmes decided that the U.S. interests in the region were first and foremost to prevent the Soviet Union from securing a predominant position in the Middle East and getting access to oil. Other U.S. interests in the region were to prevent the states from falling under Soviet control, preserving the free world access to oil supplies, marketing for U.S. trade, and preserving the independence of Israel. However, the study concluded that because the Middle East was undertaken by widespread social opposition to "Western imperialism", the Soviet Union was in a better position than the U.S. to secure its position in the region.²⁹⁷

After Iraq broke relations with the U.S., the Iraqi government soon established closer relations with the Soviet Union, and the Soviet Union continued to show increasing interest in the Gulf.²⁹⁸ In the study prepared by the Special State-Defense Group, Holmes believed that the Soviets used Arab hatred towards Israel to advance their interests and strengthen its foothold in the region. Holmes believed that since the waves of anti-western rhetoric had undertaken the Middle East, the Arabs, on the other hand, also used the Soviet presence to further their objectives. By establishing closer relations with the Soviet Union, the Arabs attempted to demonstrate their anti-western position and discontent of the U.S. support of Israel. According to Quandt, American support for Israel drove the Arabs "into the arms of Moscow".²⁹⁹ The consequence of this was a situation that Holmes believed was "damaging" and "dangerous" for U.S. interests in the Middle East.³⁰⁰

In Iraq, the Soviet Union became an important part of helping the country develop new oil fields.³⁰¹ On a memorandum on January 15, 1968, Hughes informed Rusk that the Soviet Union

²⁹⁷ Report Prepared to the Special State-Defense Group, Washington, July 17, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc. 22.

²⁹⁸ Memorandum, "The Issue of British Withdrawal," LBJL, Administration History of the Department of State, Box: 2, Vol: 1, The Persian Gulf.

²⁹⁹ Quandt, "America and the Middle East."

³⁰⁰ Report Prepared to the Special State-Defense Group, Washington, July 17, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc. 22.

³⁰¹ Tripp. 2000. *A History of Iraq*. 188.

had signed an agreement with Iraq's National Oil Company on Soviet assistance for the development of Iraq's oil resources. The assistance implied prospecting and drilling, as well as the marketing of the Iraqi oil.³⁰² On April 2, 1968, the U.S. also learned that the Soviets had signed a major oil deal with another Iraqi oil company, Iraq's Petroleum Company. The agreement also implied technical help, including everything from exploration to marketing.³⁰³ Additionally, on February 1, 1968, the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs informed in a State Department meeting that the Soviet Union had been sending military advisors to Iraq and had been assisting the Gulf region with Soviet weapons.³⁰⁴ In late April, the Iraqi government announced that Soviet naval vessels would visit Iraqi ports at the head of the Gulf, the first Russian naval presence in the Gulf since 1903.³⁰⁵ The Johnson administration viewed these developments with deep anxiety. Iraq gave the Soviet Union advantages in the Gulf, including leverage in the Arab oil business and a stronger economic foothold in the region.

British Withdrawal from the Persian Gulf

In the morning of January 11, 1968, British Foreign Secretary George Brown informed Rusk that Prime Minister Harold Wilson intended to withdraw British military forces from the Persian Gulf.³⁰⁶ The British forces consisted of air and naval units and a number of ground troops, approximately between 6,000-7,000 men.³⁰⁷ These were to be removed by the end of 1971. The main reason for this decision was the decline in Britain's imperial power after the end of World War II. Britain had, for a long time, found its imperial economic and military position in the world to be weakened. As a result, this affected its ability to defend the Middle East. The Arab oil embargo and the closing of the Suez Canal in 1967 stagnated the British economy. Britain was no longer able to bypass the three-week journey around the Horn of Africa, which increased the shipping cost for oil and goods. The U.S. ally realized that it could no longer afford its empire and had to withdraw its military forces from the Gulf.³⁰⁸

³⁰² Memorandum, Hughes to Rusk, January 15, 1968, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders. Box: 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc. 29.

³⁰³ Memorandum, Foster to the U.S. Department of State, April 2, 1968, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box: 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc. 5.

³⁰⁴ Memorandum, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, February 1, 1968, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc. 131.

³⁰⁵ Memorandum, "The Issue of British Withdrawal," LBJL, Administration History of the Department of State, Box: 2, Vol: 1, The Persian Gulf.

³⁰⁶ Fain, Taylor W. 2008. *American Ascendance*. 163-164.

³⁰⁷ Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, January 25, 1968, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold. H. Saunders, Box: 29, Folder: Persian Gulf. April 1, 1966-January 20, 1969, doc. 12b.

³⁰⁸ The Issue of British Withdrawal, Administration History of the Department of State, LBJL, Administration History, Box: 2, Vol: 1, The Persian Gulf.

Rusk and other foreign policy advisors became uneasy. They viewed the British declaration as a warning that the central structure of the western security system east of Suez would be dismantled.³⁰⁹ Rusk informed Brown that a total withdrawal of British military forces in the next few years would undermine the Western position in the Gulf since the Western position in the Persian Gulf was almost entirely dependent on the British presence.³¹⁰ The central problem with the British withdrawal was how to maintain a regional balance of power in the Gulf. Since the British withdrawal created a power vacuum in the region, both the U.S. and Britain were concerned that this would destabilize the regional balance in the Persian Gulf.³¹¹

In May 1968, the CIA undertook a study of Iraq's last ten years after the monarchy's overthrow. The CIA believed that Iraq's main interest in the Persian Gulf was its claim to Kuwait. With the impending British departure from the Persian Gulf, the CIA believed that Iraq would probably demonstrate its legitimate role. Since most Iraqis believed that Kuwait belonged to Iraq, the CIA feared that Iraq would seek to promote its claims to Kuwait and probably try to seize it when Britain would withdraw its forces.³¹² Likewise, the CIA believed that the Shah would also try to assert his dominance over the region. The Arab monarchs of the lower Gulf would on the other hand not allow Iranian dominance.³¹³ Because the U.S. had its hands full with the Vietnam War, it was neither desirable nor achievable for the U.S. to "replace" the British presence in the Persian Gulf.³¹⁴ The Johnson administration realized that the power vacuum left by Britain had to ultimately be balanced by regional powers.

The Policy of the Twin Pillars

On January 25, 1968, the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs prepared a study of the effect of the British withdrawal. The Bureau said that two states dominated the Middle East scene. These states were notably, Iran and Saudi Arabia, two pro-Western Gulf states in which the U.S. had significant interests. According to the Bureau, only these two states in the Gulf had the real

³⁰⁹ J.C. Hurewitz. 1972. "The Persian Gulf: British Withdrawal and Western Security." In *the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. America and the Middle East*. Vol. 401. 106-115.

³¹⁰ Memorandum, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs to Rusk, January 9, 1968, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc. 122.

³¹¹ Gibson. *Sold Out?* 109.

³¹² Memorandum, Central Intelligence Agency, May 22, 1968, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold. H. Saunders, Box: 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969. Doc. 25.

³¹³ Gibson. *Sold Out?* 109-110.

³¹⁴ Paper on "Effect of British Withdrawal". Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, January 25, 1968, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold. H. Saunders, Box: 29, Folder: Persian Gulf. April 1, 1966-January 20, 1969, doc. 12b.

capacity to extend political influence beyond their borders. Iran had the strongest military capacity in the Gulf and was thus a powerful state in the region. Saudi Arabia, under the leadership of King Faisal, could bring the Gulf sheikhdoms gradually into closer contact with Saudi Arabia and pursue diplomacy to improve the Saudi position within the individual states.³¹⁵

The Shah had already in 1965 predicted that British influence in one way or another would be withdrawn. When that was to happen, the Shah had expressed to the State Department that Iran would remain the "single constructive free world power capable of protecting commerce and peace in Gulf area".³¹⁶ The Shah wanted Iran to fill the gap left by Britain and therefore continued to press its territorial claims in the Gulf until the official British withdrawal. Since the U.S. was not prepared to allow Iran dominance in the whole region, it sought to build up Saudi Arabia and Iran as "twin pillars". This policy was designed to prevent the Soviet Union from filling the power vacuum and to create a power balance in the Gulf so that no Gulf states would become significantly stronger than the others.³¹⁷ The CIA believed that as long as Saudi Arabia and Iran were balancing the power in the Gulf on each side of the Gulf, this would also oppose Iraq's territorial claims on Kuwait. Any action from Iraq to seize Kuwait would probably not be likely to happen, the CIA believed.³¹⁸

The Bureau concluded that the most important U.S. interest in the Gulf after the British withdrawal was to see that the oil remained available to Western powers. The second most important interest was to see that no threat was posed on western-oriented U.S. allies, Iran and Saudi Arabia.³¹⁹ Good relations with the Shah and Faisal were necessary to keep things under control.³²⁰ Most importantly, the American interests in Iran and Saudi Arabia required the U.S. to continue to play a leading role in those countries.³²¹ By building up the Twin Pillars as U.S.

³¹⁵ Paper on "Effect of British Withdrawal". Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, January 25, 1968, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold. H. Saunders, Box: 29, Folder: Persian Gulf. April 1, 1966-January 20, 1969, doc. 12b.

³¹⁶ U.S. Embassy in Iran to the U.S. Department of State, Tehran, November 25, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXII, Iran, doc. 108.

³¹⁷ Gibson. *Sold Out?* 104.

³¹⁸ Memorandum, CIA, May 22, 1968, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold. H. Saunders, Box: 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969. Doc. 25.

³¹⁹ Paper on "Effect of British Withdrawal". Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, January 25, 1968, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold. H. Saunders, Box: 29, Folder: Persian Gulf. April 1, 1966-January 20, 1969, doc. 12b.

³²⁰ Memorandum, Rostow to President Johnson, January 31, 1968, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box: 29: Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc. 11.

³²¹ Memorandum, Interdepartmental Regional group Meeting, February 1, 1968, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box: 29: Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc. 8.

allies in the Gulf, the U.S. avoided any perception that western powers were withdrawing from the region. This would, in the long run, avoid the logistical and financial difficulties of policing the region.³²²

Kurdish Insurgencies and the Return of the Ba'th

According to a meeting Ambassador Strong had had with Arif on April 8, 1967, the U.S. had proposed to assist Iraq in the reconstruction of Iraqi Kurdistan. This assistance would be the reconstruction of villages as well as the development of agriculture. Arif had expressed gratitude.³²³ Unfortunately, along with other things, like the U.S. food program for the Kurdish areas, the break in relations between the U.S. and Iraq had put an end to these plans as well.³²⁴ A report from the Bureau of Intelligence and Research from September 1, 1967 informed Rusk that the Kurds were becoming restless. Because of the Arab oil embargo against states supporting Israel, Iraq and mainly the Kurds had suffered economically. Their villages were still wrecked by Baghdad's fourth military offensive, and the reconstruction that Arif's regime had promised, had not taken place. In the aftermath of the Six Day War, powerful forces that were bitter that Iraq was unable to participate in the war, developed strong hostilities towards the Kurds. The relationship between the Kurds and the Iraqi government deteriorated as a consequence. In an interview with Saunders from the NSC on March 12, 1968, one of Barzani's representatives Shafiq Qazzaz claimed that the Twelve Point Plan for the Kurds had been totally ignored. Qazzaz said that the Kurds seemed to have lost hope in reaching a peaceful settlement with the Iraqi government.³²⁵

Several times, Barzani's representatives, including Qazzaz, asked the State Department for humanitarian help and medical assistance. However, the department ignored Barzani's appeals to not "upset the Iraqi government".³²⁶ State Department intelligence chief Thomas Hughes believed that now that the Kurds were becoming restless, Israel and Iran might use this opportunity to pressure the Kurds to renew the insurgencies. In 1966, the Iraqi Defense

³²² The Issue of British Withdrawal, Administration History of the Department of State, LBJL, Administration History, Box: 2, Vol: 1, The Persian Gulf.

³²³ The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, Baghdad, April 8, 1967, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol:XXI, Near East, doc. 191.

³²⁴ Memorandum, Saunders to Goldstein, March 1968, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold. H. Saunders, Box 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc. 6.

³²⁵ Memorandum, Saunders to Goldstein, March 12, 1968, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold. H. Saunders, Box 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc. 7.

³²⁶ Memorandum, Saunders to Goldstein, March 13, 1968, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, box 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc.6.

Minister Abd al-Uqayli blamed the Kurds for seeking to establish “a second Israel” in the Middle East and claimed that the West was behind this.³²⁷ “Should any Israeli or Iranian involvement become known”, Hughes warned Rusk, “Arab radical propaganda would no doubt claim that this is a new ‘plot’ against the Arabs instigated by the U.S.”³²⁸

During the spring of 1968, the Israelis decided to improve their Kurdish connection.³²⁹ According to Tsafirir, the head of Mossad's operations inside Iraq during the 1960s and a Kurdish Jew named Magid Gabai, the Israeli government invited Barzani to Israel. In the spring of 1968, Barzani traveled in secret to Israel and used an Israeli Air Force plane, which had just delivered weapons to the Kurds. In Jerusalem, Barzani met Israeli officials, including Israel's president, prime minister, and the ministers of defense and foreign affairs. The subjects that were discussed focused on how Israel could strengthen its relationship and humanitarian support to the Kurds.³³⁰ There was a good chance that the Iraqi regime knew about this activity. In May, 1968, the CIA reported that: “the bulk of the Iraqi army is in the North watching the Kurds”.³³¹

On May 22, 1968, the CIA raised concerns about the stability of Arif regime's in a study called "Iraq: The Stagnant Revolution".³³² The CIA described Arif's regime as “ineffective and fumbling”.³³³ Many important political and economic matters, such as settling the Kurdish problem, were ignored by the government. There were several unsuccessful coup attempts against Arif, which Ambassador Strong believed were primarily related to the Kurdish problem.³³⁴ Arif was eventually incapable of dealing with the country's domestic problems to the point that the CIA feared the regime's survival. At dawn July 17, 1968, American fears about the stability of the Arif regime came true when John W. Foster of the NSC informed

³²⁷ Bengio, Ofra, 2014, “Surprising Ties between Israel and the Kurds.” In *Middle East Quarterly*. Vol: 21, Issue 3.

³²⁸ Thomas Hughes to Rusk, September 1, 1967, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc. 197, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East. Doc. 197; Little. “The United States and the Kurds.”

³²⁹ Gibson. *Sold Out?* 110.

³³⁰ Interview with Magid Gabai, Kurdish Jew living in Israel. In Meiselas, Susan. 2008. *Kurdistan: In the Shadow of History*. Second Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 262; Bengio. “Ties between Israel and the Kurds.”

³³¹ Memorandum, CIA, May 22, 1968, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold. H. Saunders, Box: 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969. Doc. 25.

³³² Memorandum, CIA, May 22, 1968, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold. H. Saunders, Box: 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969. Doc. 25.

³³³ Memorandum, CIA, May 22, 1968, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold. H. Saunders, Box: 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969. Doc. 25.

³³⁴ The U.S. Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State, July 2, 1966, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol XXI, Near East, doc. 182; Sluglett. *Iraq Since 1958*. 104.

Washington of a new coup in Baghdad.³³⁵ The Ba'th Party, working with radical elements of the military, overthrew Arif in a bloodless coup. Arif was put on a plane and brought out of the country, being the first Iraqi president to leave office alive. The Ba'thists had returned to power for the second time.³³⁶

³³⁵ Memorandum, Foster to Rostow, Washington, July 17, 1968, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc. 199.

³³⁶ Sluglett. *Iraq Since 1958*. 114-116; Tripp. *A History of Iraq*. 190-192; Gibson. *Sold Out?* 112-113;

Chapter Five: Conclusion

In time of war you will need us. Look at our strategic location on the flank of any possible Soviet advance into the Middle East through the Caucasus and remember that, whether as guerrillas or as regulars, we are the best soldiers in the Middle East.

- Mustafa Barzani³³⁷

U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, Robert C. Strong had in October 1965 claimed that, “*the central conclusion from the standpoint of the United States is that a high degree of autonomy or independence for the Iraqi Kurds would be disruptive of area stability and inimical to our interests in the long run*”.³³⁸ It is evident that autonomy for the Iraqi Kurds was perceived as inconvenient to U.S. interests, but how did the U.S. foreign policymakers come to this conclusion? This thesis has aimed to answer the following questions: How were U.S.-Kurdish relations during the Johnson administration? How were the various regimes in Baghdad perceived in Washington? What policies did the Johnson administration implement towards the Kurds and the various Iraqi regimes, and why?

Baghdad’s Stance in the Cold War Determines Washington’s Policies

Since the overthrow of the pro-western Iraqi monarchy in 1958, U.S. officials had been worried about Soviet involvement in Iraq. By the time President John F. Kennedy came to power in January 1961, the new Iraqi President Abdul Karim Qassim had turned to the Soviet Union for support. He had also given the Iraqi communists a lot of influence, taken Iraq out of the Baghdad Pact, and reduced trade with Western countries. At the same time in 1961, the first Kurdish War had broken out, and the Kurds were constantly seeking U.S. assistance. The Kennedy administration viewed Qassim’s actions on nurturing a close relationship to the Soviet Union and allowing the Iraqi Communist Party the amount of freedom to increase their

³³⁷ Barzani quoted in Meiselas. *Kurdistan: In the Shadow of History*. 246.

³³⁸ The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad to the Department of State, October 30, 1965, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq-Kurds, December 1964-March 1966, doc. 4.

activities as dangerous developments. As soon as the Ba'athists overthrew Qassim on February 8, 1963, crushed Iraq's Communist Party, and got rid of Soviet Union's influence in Iraq, the Kennedy administration immediately viewed this as a highly beneficial outcome. As a result, U.S.-Iraqi diplomatic relations were reinstated, and the Kennedy administration sought to cultivate friendly relations with Iraq.

Only nine months later, the Ba'ath Party was overthrown by Abd al-Salam Arif, an Iraqi nationalist that had strong support from the military. After assessing the new regime and concluding that it had an anti-communist outlook, the Johnson administration, similarly to the Kennedy administration, concluded that Iraq had finally formed a government capable of stabilizing the country. The reason was not so much related to the Ba'ath Party itself or the internal aspects, but primarily due to the regime's stance in the Cold War. Immediately after the Ba'ath coup of February and the nationalist coup of November, Washington continuously analyzed whether these regimes would turn toward the Soviet Union or to the U.S. This was the main objective of the Johnson administration as it had been of Kennedy before him.

In the aftermath of the nationalist coup, Arif promoted relations with Egypt's charismatic President Gamal Abdul Nasser and started several socialist reforms to create similar institutions to those of Egypt. The potential of Iraq becoming a part of the United Arab Republic and the prospect of Nasser exercising a substantial influence in the Gulf caused concerns amongst U.S.'s closest allies, Britain, Israel, and Iran. They viewed Nasser as a threat in the Gulf and wanted to hinder him from gaining influence. Differing from its allies, the Johnson administration was not so concerned by Nasser's influence in the Gulf and as a result, for the second half of 1964, the U.S. policies in Iraq were at odds with its closest allies. Since Nasser could not be regarded as a communist threat in Iraq, the U.S. was not interested in intervening. As long as the Soviet Union was not involved, the Johnson administration did not oppose Arab nationalism as its allies did. Johnson's foreign policy advisors argued that the U.S. should not act like its allies but rather prove its goodwill in the Middle East by avoiding any confrontations with the Arab states.

The Johnson administration was pleased that Iraq had elected its first civilian Deputy Prime Minister, Abd al-Rahman Bazzaz, in September 1965. He had been a western-oriented ambassador in London and aimed to create institutions in Iraq similar to that of the west. In the Cold War calculus, this was considered to be very positive, not least by U.S. Secretary of State

Dean Rusk. After the death of Arif and the coming of power of Arif's brother, Abd Al-Rahman Arif in April 1966, the Johnson administration quickly assessed Arif on where he stood in terms of the Cold War. After Washington found him moderate, non-communist, and well-disposed towards the U.S., the Johnson administration was pleased and congratulated him on becoming Iraq's president. This illustrates how the Cold War determined Washington's attitude toward various Iraqi regimes.

A Policy Based on Friendliness Toward Baghdad

The Johnson administration's foreign policy in Iraq during the regimes of Abd Al-Salam Arif and Abd Al-Rahman Arif can best be described as a policy based on correct but reserved friendliness. As the Johnson administration decided to shift the U.S. policies away from Kennedy's open support for Ba'th Party back to its traditional *wait and see* policy, relations between the U.S. and Iraq remained moderately friendly during this period as they had been under the previous Ba'th government.

Prior to the outbreak of the Six Day War, the relationship between the U.S. and Iraq had undergone a period of growth and improvement with occasional exchanges between the governments through diplomatic channels. In October 1965 Deputy Prime Minister Abd al-Rahman Bazzaz visited New York for the United Nations General Assembly, being the first Iraqi politician to meet Secretary of State Rusk and Vice President Hubert Humphrey. In January 1967, five Iraqi generals traveled to Washington where they met President Johnson. Both Rusk and the National Security Advisor Walt Rostow viewed these developments as an excellent opportunity to strengthen the U.S.-Iraqi relations, something that was of strategic importance to U.S. interests in Iraq, especially to American oil companies, which were expanding their activities in Iraq.

Historians Peter Sluglett and Marion Farouk Sluglett argue how the period from Abd al-Salam Arif's death in 1966 until the Ba'th takeover in 1968 was a period of a power vacuum.³³⁹ From the overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy, Iraq had entered a revolutionary phase with numerous coups and military takeovers. Abd al-Salam Arif was a prominent leader figure and with his political skills, he had managed to control and stabilize the country. Abd al-Rahman Arif was a politically weaker alternative to his late brother. With a lack of personal and political

³³⁹ Sluglett. *Iraq Since 1958*. 107.

authority, he was not highly regarded in the Iraqi military. As a result, the military was continuously pressing him, leading to a situation where Washington feared for the regime's fall. Washington also feared influence from radical Arab nationalist states such as Syria. Hence, viewing Arif as “one of the few forces of moderation within his country”, Rostow argued to Johnson that they needed to support moderate regimes like Arif's.³⁴⁰ The Johnson administration hoped that Arif's government could make an important contribution to the stability in Iraq as well as in the region. Hence, the Johnson administration believed in good relations with Baghdad.

The Enemy of My Enemy is My Friend

In October 1964, Washington learned that Israel and Iran had been urging the Iraqi Kurds to rebel against Baghdad. Through Israel's “peripheral” strategy, Israel had established links with some non-Arab states, as well as minorities, such as the Kurds.³⁴¹ Israel feared Arab nationalism, which had thrived since the 1940s. Therefore, any group that opposed Arab nationalism, “the primary enemy of the Jewish people,” was viewed as an ally.³⁴² The uprisings of the Iraqi Kurds against the central authority in Iraq had caught the attention of the Israeli intelligence. The Kurds, being geographically and politically isolated in the Middle East, having been denied help by the U.S., saw this as a great opportunity. Facing wars and a strong Arabization policy in their villages during the regime of Abd al-Salam Arif, the Kurds' leader, Barzani, welcomed any assistance he could get, regardless if it was from Iraq's enemy, Israel.

The Shah of Iran, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, had concluded with Israel that the Kurds were valuable strategic allies who could be exploited to keep their mutual enemy, the Arab nationalist regime in Baghdad, and its large military, tied down. Not only was Israel a valuable ally to the shah, in whom he could sell a large quantity of oil, but also an ally who saw the situation in the Middle East through the same lenses as he did. Troubled by the threat of a militant Iraq, the allies agreed that sponsorship of a Kurdish insurgency in Iraq would be useful. Acting according to the principle of *the enemy of my enemy is my friend* the allies found common ground on a shared agenda of wanting the Iraqi regime tied down with domestic

³⁴⁰ Memorandum, Rusk to President Johnson, January 20, 1967, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold H. Saunders, Box: 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc.44

³⁴¹ Cockburn. *Dangerous Liaison*. 99.

³⁴² Mamikonian. “Israel and the Kurds (1949-1990).”

problems, incapable of hindering Israel and Iran in their regional ambitions. This laid the groundwork for Israel's and Iran's long relationship with the Iraqi Kurds.

Their agenda involved the use of the Kurds as a tool on cross-border activities to revolt against Baghdad. With the Kurds remaining as a constant source of instability inside Iraq, Iraq's central authority could weaken. To achieve this, Iran and Israel provided the Kurds with economic support and cross-border supplies of weapons and military training. In Israeli intelligence agency, known as Mossad, Israel became the primary source of military training for the Kurds in their fight against the Iraqi regime. Iran served as the channel for Israeli intelligence and Mossad operations to Iraqi Kurdistan. In October 1964 U.S. Ambassador in Baghdad, Robert C. Strong had documented evidence that Britain was linked to Israel and Iran's covert action against Baghdad. Initially, Britain shared with its allies, Iran, and Israel a mutual dislike for Nasser and his influence in Iraq, and as a result, wanted to destabilize the Iraqi-Egyptian partnership. However, after Arif broke ties with the Nasserist elements inside Iraq in 1965, Britain was no longer connected to these covert operations.

The effect of Iran and Israel's support became visible when the Kurds triumphed over the Iraqi forces in two large military offensives that were carried against Iraqi Kurdistan in the spring of 1965 and again, one year later. With the help of Israeli special forces, that certainly knew warfare methods, the Peshmarga's fighting skills had improved. As a result, even though the Iraqi army was significantly larger in number than the Kurdish Peshmerga, the Iraqi army suffered defeat after defeat in the wars against the Kurds. Baghdad was quick to demonstrate its discontent of the "maneuvers of some mysterious unidentified forces" that were helping the Kurds.³⁴³ In 1966, the Iraqi Defense Minister al-Uqayli blamed the Kurds for seeking to establish "a second Israel" with the help of the West.³⁴⁴

The Israeli and Iranian covert action in Iraqi Kurdistan put the U.S. in a difficult position. While it was important to the Johnson administration to maintain friendly relations with Baghdad, it was also important not to antagonize its two important regional allies in the Middle East. Ambassador Strong suggested that it was useless to pretend that the Kurds were not getting any outside help since Baghdad already knew about this activity. Whenever Iraqi Prime Minister

³⁴³ Memorandum, Iraqi Foreign Minister Talib to Rusk, December 10, 1964, LBJL, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, Box 28, Folder: Iraq, December 1963-March 1966, doc.18a.

³⁴⁴ Bengio. "Ties between Israel and the Kurds."

Bazzaz repeatedly brought up with either Strong or Rusk that weapons were smuggled into Iraqi Kurdistan and asked them to do something about it, Strong and Rusk never denied or confirmed Baghdad's assumptions about the outside assistance. The usual answer given to the prime minister was that the U.S. supported the territorial integrity of Iraq. Overall, there is no evidence to prove that the Johnson administration with its foreign policy experts directly confronted its allies or let alone intervened in their covert actions in the Kurdish mountains. Johnson soon found out that he could not stay on friendly terms with both Israel and Iraq at the same time.

Friendship with Israel Has its Price

Whatever progress that may have been achieved in the U.S.-Iraqi relationship during the Johnson administration, was ruined in the aftermath of the Six Day War in June 1967. The Johnson administration's absence of any measures to hinder its allies in their covert operations inside Iraqi Kurdistan as well as Johnson's open support for Israel in the Six Day War had major consequences. Johnson's "special relationship with Israel" and the fact that he made no attempts to force Israel to withdraw from the newly occupied territories, quickly cost him his relationship with Iraq.³⁴⁵ Bitter that it was unable to deploy forces in the Six Day War because of its military tied down in Iraqi Kurdistan against Israeli and Iranian operations, Iraq decided to break diplomatic relations with the U.S. and implement an oil embargo on the states that had supported Israel.³⁴⁶

At the start of 1968, Washington learned that the Soviet Union had gained influence in Iraq. When Washington later witnessed that the moderate regime of Abd al-Rahman Arif was threatened by anti-western military forces hostile to the U.S., Israel, and also to the Kurds, the Johnson administration could not do anything other than observing from the sideline. With Britain announcing in January 1968 that it was planning on withdrawing its forces from the Persian Gulf, the U.S. decided to build up Iran and Saudi Arabia as western allies in the Gulf. This so-called twin pillar policy would balance the regional power in the Gulf, thwart the Soviet influence in the power vacuum left by Britain, and secure U.S. interests in the region.

³⁴⁵ Lazarowitz. "The Johnson administration, the State Department, and the Middle East."

³⁴⁶ For the oil embargo see Fain. *American Ascendance*. 163-164.

A Policy of Non-Interference Toward the Kurds

Throughout Johnson's term, Barzani attempted to cultivate the U.S. as an ally. His attempts initially involved sending letters to Washington evoking U.S. values such as freedom and human rights. When these letters remained unanswered, Barzani sent emissaries to the American Embassy in Tehran and even to Washington. Barzani's appeals usually contained a "for the sake of peace" plead for U.S. support in helping the Kurdish cause.³⁴⁷ He argued that the Kurds' constitutional rights corresponded with U.S. values and asked Johnson to use his influence to prevent the supply of arms to the Iraqi government. However, his appeals fell on deaf ears. Either they went unnoticed or he was answered that this was an internal Iraqi problem in which Washington did not wish to interfere in any way.

The absence of any substantial U.S.-Kurdish relationship during the Johnson administration can best be explained by the U.S. foreign policy approach of non-interference in the Iraqi-Kurdish problem. The U.S.-Kurdish relation was characterized by contacts, essentially unilateral attempts made by the Kurds to gain U.S. support. However, the Johnson administration kept arguing that support to the Kurds of Iraq was against U.S. regional interests. Regardless of what was happening in Iraqi Kurdistan, as long as the Soviets were not gaining from it, it was not sufficiently important or directly affecting American interests. Although Barzani gained military support from the Soviet Union while in exile at the time of the Iraqi monarchy, the Soviet Union was neither interfering in internal affairs in Iraqi Kurdistan during the regimes of the Arifs. Hence, as long as the Soviets stayed away, the U.S. ignored the Kurdish cause.

The Johnson administration had virtually no interest in supporting Kurdish national aspiration. In fact, the U.S. was not interested in supporting any autonomist movements as that could lead to negative consequences for the stability of the region. Washington believed that Kurdish autonomy might be used by the Soviet Union as a tool to infiltrate the Gulf. In this context, the U.S. preoccupation with minority issues was limited, and it was motivated to maintain a non-interference policy.

³⁴⁷ The U.S. Embassy in Tehran to the Department of State, March 12, 1966, LBJ, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, box 28, Folder: Iraq-Kurds, December 1964-March 1966, doc. 6b.

Nevertheless, the Johnson administration did believe in a peaceful solution to the Kurdish problem. Whenever Baghdad and the Kurds would reach a ceasefire, the Johnson administration's view of the Iraqi regime strengthened, and it congratulated the Iraqi regime on the peace with the Kurds. Several times, the Johnson administration even asked the Iraqi regime to provide help and aid to the Kurdish villages. However, the Johnson administration viewed Iraq's Kurdish problem as a domestic problem where Baghdad was the decisionmaker. Under successive Baghdad regimes, relations between the Kurds and Baghdad alternated between ceasefires and wars. Washington did not wish to intervene in Baghdad's decisions concerning the Kurdish problem regardless of its decisions either involved war or truce. Ambassador Strong suggested that the U.S. could listen to the Kurds and watch from the sideline, but ultimately support Iraq. This illustrates how the Johnson administration, with its foreign policy experts, ultimately had no interest in helping the Kurds against any offensives that were taken by the Iraqi government.

Overall, this thesis has argued that the Johnson administration understood Iraq almost exclusively through the lens of the superpower competition between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The administration's foreign policy decisionmakers cared little for regional dynamics and internal conflicts other than what interested them in the context of the Cold War. This context explains the administration's interest in the stability in Iraq, and why Washington's foreign policy experts were steadfast on the Kurdish cause being an internal matter in which the U.S. did not wish to interfere in. U.S. Kurdish relations were conditional and only determined by the objectives of the U.S.' Cold War policies. This thesis has argued that the Johnson administration perceived relations with Iraq as far more important than its sympathies for the Kurdish cause. Washington was ultimately concerned about the survival of a pro-western Iraqi regime. This objective also explains why the Ba'th Party of 1968 would be perceived so differently than that of 1963 and how a few contacts between the U.S. and the Kurds in the Johnson era would transform into a covert relationship in the 1970s. This was something that Johnson's successor, Richard Nixon, had to deal with.

Chapter Six: Epilogue

“Nothing in this world is certain except
death, taxes and America
betraying the Kurds.”
- Jon Schwarz.³⁴⁸

In a memorandum for Rostow on July 17, 1968, John W. Foster of the NSC informed Washington that the new regime in Baghdad, who were Ba’thists, “would be more difficult than their predecessors”.³⁴⁹ The new government had already taken an anti-Zionist and anti-imperialist position, something that did not look promising to U.S. In the domestic sphere, the government spoke up for economic reforms.³⁵⁰ Also, the new government declared that, “the resolution of the Kurdish question in a peaceful manner” was among its main goals.³⁵¹

A Period of Insecurity

A week later, Foster learned that the new regime consisted of both Ba’thists and non-Ba’thists.³⁵² Initially, the new regime consisted of the former prime minister of the Ba’th Party of 1963, Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr, as the new prime minister, al-Rahman al-Dawud as defense minister, and Abd al-Razzaq al-Nayif held the position as interior minister. However, as Charles Tripp pointed out, since neither the Ba’thist nor the non-Ba’thist elements of the regime wanted to share power, their coalition would not last long.³⁵³ With the memories of the Ba’thist repression by Abd al-Salam Arif and the nationalists still fresh in his mind, this time al-Bakr would consolidate his hold on power.³⁵⁴ On July 30, while al-Dawud was out of the country, al-Bakr managed to mobilize the Republican Guard by appointing over 100 officers with Party loyalists. Al-Nayif, like Arif before him, was put on a plane out of the country. Ba’thist al-Bakr

³⁴⁸ Jon Schwarz. October 7, 2019, “The U.S. is Now Betraying the Kurds for the Eight Time.” In *the Intercept*.

³⁴⁹ Memorandum from Foster to Rostow, Washington, July 17, 1968, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Vol: XXI, Near East, doc. 199.

³⁵⁰ Memorandum, Foster to Rostow, July 17, 1968, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold. H. Saunders, Box: 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc. 3.

³⁵¹ Quoted in McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 324.

³⁵² Memorandum, Foster to Rostow, July 22, 1968, LBJL, NSF, Files of Harold. H. Saunders, Box: 16, Folder: Iraq, April 1966-January 1969, doc. 2.

³⁵³ Tripp. *History of Iraq*. 191-192.

³⁵⁴ Tripp. *History of Iraq*. 198.

proclaimed himself president and commander in chief of the armed forces. Saddam Hussein was appointed deputy minister. This was the beginning of a regime that would ruthlessly maintain its grip on power until driven out by force in 2003.³⁵⁵

The Ba'th Party's seizure of power was followed by a period of intense insecurity in Iraq. Just as President Johnson was departing from the White House in January 1969, Al-Bakr and Hussein had begun to lay the foundations for a ruthless dictatorship.³⁵⁶ The new Iraqi regime had quickly moved to improve its relationship with the Soviet Union and released many communists and leftists from prison. Hundreds of others were sentenced to lengthy prison terms. A harsh line was set towards Israel by publicly executing Iraqi Jews. Other Iraqis, in cases where their loyalty was called into question, were given the same punishment. The Ba'th Party intended to remind Iraqis of the fate that awaited anyone who dared oppose the regime.³⁵⁷

Initially, the Ba'th Party announced that it wanted to solve the Kurdish question in a peaceful manner.³⁵⁸ However, the dialogue between the Iraqi government and the Kurds quickly dissolved, and the new regime opted for a new military solution similar to the 1966 campaign. On January 3, 1969, a force of 60 000 men was sent to Iraqi Kurdistan. Just as in 1966, the Iranian border was sealed and mountains were occupied. Once more, Iran and Israel were assisting the Kurds against their mutual Iraqi enemy.³⁵⁹ However, the bad winter weather precluded the war, and the Iraqi forces withdrew from the mountains. The first Kurdish War ended in June 1969.³⁶⁰

President Richard Nixon had entered the Oval Office in January 20, 1969. During his first term, Washington showed little interest in dealing with the stream of Kurdish representatives who approached the State Department asking for assistance. National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, who dismissively referred to the Kurdish issue as the "Kurdish thing," told these representatives to seek Iranian assistance instead.³⁶¹ With regard to British withdrawal from the Persian Gulf, the Twin Pillars policy had given Iran a dominant position in the Gulf.³⁶² By

³⁵⁵ Gibson. *Sold Out?* 113.

³⁵⁶ Gibson. *Sold Out?* 113; Little. "The United States and the Kurds."

³⁵⁷ Cleveland. *The Modern Middle East*. 364; Gibson. *Sold Out?* 113-114.

³⁵⁸ McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 324.

³⁵⁹ Pollack. *Arabs at War*. 163-164; Gibson. *Sold Out?* 113; Mamikonian. "Israel and the Kurds (1949-1990)."

³⁶⁰ O'Ballance. *The Kurdish Revolt*. 152.

³⁶¹ Charountaki. *The Kurds and U.S. Foreign Policy*. 137.

³⁶² Charountaki. *The Kurds and U.S. Foreign Policy*; Gibson. *Sold Out?* 112-114.

giving Iran a green light to be in charge of regional policies, Nixon could focus his attention on the Vietnam War. Under the Nixon administration, the friendship between the Shah and the U.S. gradually improved. Nixon and Kissinger remained committed to the American-Iranian partnership, particularly because they considered Iran to be the best Middle East client to function as the dominant regional power in the Gulf, “the policeman of the Gulf.”³⁶³ The Shah intended to use this partnership to destabilize Iraq, exercise his dominance in the Gulf, and gain sovereignty over the Shatt al-Arab waterway. In order to achieve this, the Shah had to maintain his Kurdish connection.³⁶⁴

In Late December 1969, the Ba’th realized that the Kurds were unlikely to accept anything less than autonomy. Al-Bakr wanted to put an end to covert activities in the Kurdish mountains. He believed that to neutralize the constant external threats from Iran and Israel in Iraqi Kurdistan, a “solution” to the Kurdish problem was required.³⁶⁵ Al-Bakr sent his deputy, Hussein, to negotiate with the Kurds. Negotiations between Hussein and Barzani led to a peace agreement in March 1970 that promised the Kurds that the government of Iraq intended to implement the Bazzaz declaration of 1966. Essentially, Hussein promised that the Kurdish language would be taught in all schools and universities in Iraqi Kurdistan, the Kurdish celebration *Newroz* would be declared as an official holiday, and the Kurds' rights to preserve their nationality would be recognized. This was to go into effect no later than 11 March 1974.³⁶⁶

However, the trust between Barzani and the government quickly began to weaken when Baghdad reneged on several promises. The central issue was Baghdad's brutal approach to the demographic question. On June 1, 1972, Iraq nationalized its oil facilities. This caused concerns amongst the Kurds as Baghdad resumed Abd al-Salam Arif's 1964 Arabization policy of Kirkuk and Khanaqin, two major oil-producing Kurdish inhabited cities. Baghdad claimed authority over these cities, expelled Kurdish families, and pushed them further north. Arabs were resettled in these areas.³⁶⁷ When Iraq began receiving arms shipments from the Soviet Union that included, reportedly, chemical weapons, the trust between Barzani and the Ba'th Party disintegrated completely. On September 5, 1973, Barzani's representative Qazzaz informed the U.S. State Department that "the Kurds are very disturbed over reports that the

³⁶³ Molavi, Afsan. October 28, 2010. “Iran Primer: Iran and the Gulf States” In *Frontline*.

³⁶⁴ Little. “The United States and the Kurds.”; Hahn. *Crises and Crossfire*. 70.

³⁶⁵ Yildiz. *The Past, Present and Future*. 17.

³⁶⁶ McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 326.

³⁶⁷ Sluglett. *Iraq Since 1958*. 155-166. Meiselas. *In the Shadow of History*. 240.

Iraqi military has received shipments of ‘poison gas’ from the Soviets”.³⁶⁸ When the oil crisis of 1973 hit the U.S. economy, the Nixon administration became far too busy to pay much attention to these warnings.

“Covert Action Should Not Be Confused With Missionary Work”

Even though Nixon had not been involved with the Kurds since entering the White House, 1972 marked, for the first time, the start of the U.S. relationship with the Kurds. When Iraq decided to sign a fifteen-year "Treaty of friendship and cooperation" with the Soviet Union on April 9, 1972, it quickly caught the attention of the White House.³⁶⁹ The Nixon administration viewed this as a threat to regional and territorial stability. Due to the deteriorating U.S.-Iraqi relations after the 1967 War, the U.S. could not directly hinder this. Under pressure from Iran and Israel, who feared that the Soviet was plotting with Iraq against them, Nixon and Kissinger visited the Shah in Tehran in May 1972.³⁷⁰

In Tehran, Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah expressed concerns about Moscow's influence in Iraq and the fear of Iraq's potential hegemony in the Gulf. Nixon promised Iran that he “would not let down [his] friends" as he offered Iran weapons intending to destabilize Iraq.³⁷¹ The Shah convinced Nixon that the Kurds had proved to be crucial against the Iraqi government and suggested that “Iran can help with the Kurds”.³⁷² Before returning home to Washington, Nixon and Kissinger had agreed to a risky covert operation to intervene in Iraq by providing the Kurds with military assistance to bring down the Ba’th Party.³⁷³ From October 1972 until 1975, the CIA provided the Kurds with 16 million dollars in arms shipments.³⁷⁴ According to Kurdish sources, Kissinger had assured Barzani that the Shah would remain faithful to his Kurdish allies. The Kurds’ fate rested in the Shah’s hands.³⁷⁵

³⁶⁸ Little. “The United States and the Kurds.”

³⁶⁹ Charountaki, *The Kurds, and US Foreign Policy*. 135; Little. “The United States and the Kurds.”

³⁷⁰ Charountaki. *The Kurds and US Foreign Policy*. 137; Gibson. *Sold Out?* 124-127.

³⁷¹ Little. “*The United States and the Kurds*”

³⁷² Romano, David. Rowe, Stephen, and Hussein, Rikar. 2017. “The United States and the Kurds of Iraq: Strange Allies.” In *Between state and Non-State. Politics and Society in Kurdistan and Palestine*. Edited by Gülistan Gürbey. 177-1991. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 180; Little. “The United States and the Kurds.”

³⁷³ Cooley, John K. 2005. *An Alliance Against Babylon*; 87-88.

³⁷⁴ Charountaki. *The Kurds and US Foreign Policy*. 137.

³⁷⁵ Alvandi, Roham. 2014. *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.112; Ali. *The Iraqi Kurds*. 171.

However, 1975 was the year that Kurdish aspirations, dependent on the Shah's faithfulness, were to be buried.³⁷⁶ In early 1975 Kissinger, who remained Secretary of State under Nixon's successor Gerald Ford, informed the new president that the Shah was planning on meeting Hussein, the deputy minister of Iraq. On March 5, 1975, The Shah and Hussein met in Algiers. In the agreement, known as the Algiers Accord, Iraq negotiated with Iran to end Iranian support for the Iraqi Kurds in exchange for a settlement of the Shatt Al-Arab waterway disputes in Iran's favor. The Shah agreed to these terms, cut the supplies for the Kurdish movement, and left the Kurds defenseless while Iraq was preparing to launch yet another attack into Iraqi Kurdistan.³⁷⁷ When Iranian Prime Minister Asadullah Alam reminded the Shah of his promises to the Kurds, the Shah replied to Alam that, "both the Kurds and the Iraqis knew that it was all an act and that the Iraqis had every intention of taking over Kurdistan".³⁷⁸ A couple of days later the Shah was accused in *the New York Times* for leaving the Kurds to be "obscurely hanged".³⁷⁹

In the aftermath of the Algiers Accord, the U.S. and Israel abruptly had to withdraw their support of the Kurds. Israel could no longer use Iran's land to deliver supplies to the Kurds.³⁸⁰ The Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin complained to Kissinger that the Shah had "sold out the Kurds".³⁸¹ Consequently, the head of Mossad's intelligence service in Iraqi Kurdistan, Eliezer Tsafir, and other Israeli agents, had to quickly flee across the border into Iran to avoid being captured by the Iraqis. Tsafir later recalled, "I was cursing Iran all the way to Tehran. I was terribly disappointed".³⁸² Barzani sent a letter to Kissinger on March 10, pleading the Secretary of State to help the Kurds, "Our movement and people are being destroyed in an unbelievable way with silence from everyone".³⁸³ The letter went unanswered.

On March 13, Baghdad called on Barzani to surrender and announced a ceasefire before the Iranian border closed on April 1. Iranian forces were quickly withdrawn, and supplies were suspended.³⁸⁴ On March 23, Barzani's resistance crumbled, and the Peshmerga decided to abandon the fight. At the end of the month, Iraqi forces pushed with maximum force north into

³⁷⁶ Charountaki. *The Kurds and US Foreign Policy*. 140.

³⁷⁷ Alvandi, Roham. 2014. *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah*. 114; Kelly. *Ghosts of Halabja*. 18; Little. "The United States and the Kurds."

³⁷⁸ Alvandi. *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah*. 114-115.

³⁷⁹ C. L. Sulzberger. March 12, 1975. "To Be Obscurely Hanged." In *the New York Times*,

³⁸⁰ Manikonian. "Israel and the Kurds."; Romano, Rowe, and Hussein. "The United States and the Kurds."

³⁸¹ Rabin quoted in Alvandi. *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah*. 117.

³⁸² Tsafir quoted in Alvandi. *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah*. 115.

³⁸³ Barzani's letter quoted in Little. "The United States and the Kurds."

³⁸⁴ Bulloch and Morris. *No Friends But the Mountains*. 138.

the heartland of Kurdish areas for the first time since 1961. By April 1, around 100 000 Kurds had fled to Iran. Villages were destroyed. Thousands had surrendered to Iraqi forces. Thousands were imprisoned, with many being killed by Iraqi forces. Thousands more were relocated to the southern parts of Iraq, and many more were still forced away across the borders into Iran. After 14 years of Kurdish resistance against the Iraqi regime, the Kurdish rebellion was brought to an immediate end in late March 1975.³⁸⁵

After Barzani's resistance collapsed, the casualties in Iraqi Kurdistan were heavy. The Kurds near the Turkish border suffered the most, as the Turkish government refused to open the border for refugees or even a free flow of food and medical assistance. Their living conditions were terrible. As a result, many Kurds suffered from hunger and diseases.³⁸⁶ For Barzani, after nearly three decades since his exile in 1946, he found himself defeated for the second time and in exile in Iran as a "guest of the man [the Shah] who betrayed him".³⁸⁷ He spent his last years as a refugee in another state, who abandoned him, and put politics before the lives of his people, the U.S. Barzani was hospitalized with lung cancer and died in Virginia on March 1, 1979.³⁸⁸

In the summer of 1975, Congressman Otis Pike was selected to lead a congressional committee on an investigation into the CIA's assistance of the Iraqi Kurds during the Nixon administration. On November 1, 1975, the report leaked to the media, providing valuable information that revealed how the U.S. had been secretly engaging in a covert action with Iran to arm the Kurds against Baghdad. In the congressional hearings, the Pike Committee noted that evidence of Nixon and Kissinger's covert action was shown to Kissinger, and he was questioned about U.S. responsibility for 300 000 desperate Kurdish refugees in camps within Iran. "Covert action," he defensibly said to the Pike Committee, "should not be confused with missionary work".³⁸⁹

Renewed Diplomatic Relations and the Road to Genocide

Upon entering the presidency in January 1977, President Jimmy Carter put his attention on Arab-Israeli peace negotiations, something that overshadowed tensions in the Gulf.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁵ Mcdowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 338; O'Ballance. *The Kurdish Struggle*. 98-99; Alvandi. *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah*. 119.

³⁸⁶ Mcdowall. *Modern History of the Kurds*. 338-339.

³⁸⁷ Bulloch and Morris. *No Friends but the Mountains*. 141.

³⁸⁸ Bulloch and Morris. *No Friends but the Mountains*. 141.

³⁸⁹ Kissinger quoted in Bulloch and Morris. *No Friends but the Mountains*. 139-140; Gerald K. Haines. 1999. "The Pike Committee Investigations and the CIA." In *Studies in Intelligence*. No. 5. 42-84; Litte. *The United States and the Kurds*;

³⁹⁰ Quandt. *Peace Process*. 177.

However, in early 1979 the focus in Washington shifted when the Iranians were raising protests against the regime of the Shah. On February 16, the conservative Muslim cleric Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini overthrew the Shah of Iran and put an end to the 2500-year-old Persian monarchy. The Shah was sent into exile. In the neighboring country, on July 16, 1979, Hussein achieved his ambition of becoming the head of state (replacing al-Bakr who was sick). Hussein consolidated his power all over Iraq.³⁹¹ The Carter administration became uneasy as it witnessed that Hussein was turning himself into a ruthless dictator and that the U.S. had now lost its old ally, the Shah. The rapid deterioration of the situation in the Gulf following the Iranian Revolution sparked renewed U.S. interest in the Gulf and dictated a need for an alliance with Iraq.³⁹²

When Iran was in turmoil following the Iranian revolution, and the new Iranian regime was too busy consolidating its grip on power, Hussein sought to take advantage of the unrest in Iran. He wished to fill the geopolitical vacuum created by the collapse of the Shah's regime and most importantly, seek to retake the Shatt Al-Arab waterway.³⁹³ Even though Iraq and Iran had settled their border issues following the Algiers Accord in 1975, Hussein never supported the settlement of border territory on the Shatt Al-Arab waterway in favor of Iran. To Hussein, the agreement was not valid as the intention was only to end Iranian support to the Kurds. Hence, with political unrest and an Iranian military tied down in its internal affairs, Hussein invaded Iran on September 9, 1980. This ignited an eight-year-long war that would financially exhaust Iraq and leave it bankrupt.³⁹⁴

Although the Carter administration regarded Hussein as the aggressor in the war, it adopted a policy of neutrality. While Ronald Reagan entered the Oval Office in January 1981 convinced that neutrality was the best course, he eventually sided with Iraq. Officials in Washington nervously monitored a series of episodes in which Iranian agents attempted revolutionary activities in Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Yemen. Adhering to the principle that *the enemy of my enemy is my friend*, Reagan quickly began to perceive Iraq as a useful barrier against Khomeini's expansion and influence in the Gulf.³⁹⁵ The Reagan administration realized that although Hussein was a ruthless dictator, the "export" of Iran's Islamic revolution was no doubt

³⁹¹ Tripp. *History of Iraq*. 222-224.

³⁹² Little. "The United States and the Kurds."

³⁹³ Ismael, Tareq Y, and Ismael Jacqueline S. 2015. *Iraq in the Twenty-First Century. Regime Change and the Making of a Failed State*. New York: Routledge. 16.

³⁹⁴ Kelly. Ghosts of Halabja. 21; Ismael. *Iraq in the Twenty-First Century*. 16.

³⁹⁵ Little. "The United States and the Kurds."; Charountaki. *The Kurds and US Foreign Policy*. 145-147.

a bigger concern.³⁹⁶ Most importantly, following the 1973 oil crisis, that did not negatively impact the Iraqi economy, due to the country having nationalized its oil a year earlier, Iraq was by the end of the 1970s the world's second-largest oil exporter. Thus, it was also of economic interest to rebuild relations with Iraq. In December 1983, Reagan sent his special Middle East envoy, Donald Rumsfeld, to Baghdad to meet Hussein. At the meeting, the two parties found common grounds on a shared interest in preventing Iranian expansion. They agreed that Iraq would get support from the U.S.³⁹⁷ The Reagan administration provided financial assistance, which alleviated the severe economic strains under which the Iraqi regime was operating due to the cost of the war. The diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Iraq were officially restored on November 26, 1984.³⁹⁸ According to Geoffrey Kemp, the top Middle East expert in the Reagan Administration, "It wasn't that we wanted Iraq to win the war, we did not want Iraq to lose".³⁹⁹

Comparably to the Kennedy administration with the Ba'th Party of 1963, Washington again officially tilted toward Baghdad against a mutual enemy. Back then it was the Soviet Union. Now it was Iran. As in 1963, this had alarming results for the Kurds.⁴⁰⁰ Nothing illustrated the perceived danger to Hussein's regime more than the increasingly violent repression of the Kurdish civilian population in Iraq. In 1987, Iran opened a second front in Iraqi Kurdistan through the mobilization of several Kurdish rebels.⁴⁰¹ The reprisal and revenge taken by the Iraqi government were brutal. In March 1987, Hussein tasked his Military Commander Ali Hassan Al-Majid to handle what was referred to in Iraqi documents as the "saboteurs".⁴⁰² The counterinsurgency against the Kurds became a campaign of destruction.⁴⁰³ In May 1987, David Newton, the newly appointed U.S. ambassador in Baghdad, warned the U.S. that the Iraqi government was preparing for destruction and the possible use of "mustard gas" towards Iraqi Kurdistan.⁴⁰⁴ Newton's report went unnoticed in Washington as Reagan focused on improving newly established relations with Iraq.

³⁹⁶ Entessar. *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*. 141.

³⁹⁷ Baram, Amatzia. 2007. "US Input into Iraqi Decisionmaking, 1988-1990." In David Lesch. *The Middle East and the United States. A Historical and Political Reassessment*. Colorado: Westview Press. 352; Hahn. *Crisis and Crossfire*. 83.

³⁹⁸ Entessar. *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*. 142.

³⁹⁹ Kemp quoted in Entessar. *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*. 142.

⁴⁰⁰ Little. "The United States and the Kurds."

⁴⁰¹ Kelly. *Ghosts of Halabja*. 21.

⁴⁰² Al-Majid quoted in *Middle East watch. Genocide in Iraq*. 8.

⁴⁰³ *Middle East Watch. Genocide in Iraq*. 7.

⁴⁰⁴ Little. *The United States and the Kurds*.

In June 1987, Ali Hassan Al-Majid who was famously given the nickname “Chemical-Ali” after he ordered the gassing of Kurds, announced a decree that defined large swatches of Iraqi Kurdistan as prohibited areas.⁴⁰⁵ In a genocidal campaign called *Anfal*, the armed forces were ordered to “kill any human being or animal present within these areas”.⁴⁰⁶ Agriculture of corn was banned in these areas and supplies of food and medicine were prohibited.⁴⁰⁷ Then the attacks began. The Anfal campaign consisted of eight phases of systematic bombardment attacks on Kurdish villages by conventional weapons at first, followed by the use of chemical weapons. At first, the campaign targeted the rebels, but the last phases even targeted the Kurdish population at large. In March 1988 the city Halabja was exposed to chemical weapons without any warning, showing that the Iraqi government aimed to attack not only the rebels but even Kurdish civilians. The Anfal genocidal campaign killed between 100,000 and 200,000 Kurds. Over 4000 villages were destroyed. Thousands of Kurds were sent to prison camps in the southwest desert of Iraq where they were tortured, many brutally killed and thrown in mass graves, and some never seen again.⁴⁰⁸

The Anfal campaign was not only a violation of the Geneva Protocol of 1925, which banned the use of poison gas in war, it was also a war crime against defenseless Kurdish civilians.⁴⁰⁹ On September 1, 1988, Amnesty International raised an appeal to the United Nations Council, condemning the genocidal attack on the Kurdish villages and cities.⁴¹⁰ The U.S. Senate passed resolutions on punishing Iraq.⁴¹¹ However, while recognizing that the Ba’athist regime had violated international law, the Reagan administration took no further action and continued to support Iraq.⁴¹² “Human rights and chemical weapons use aside, in many respects our political and economic interests run parallel with those of Iraq” Reagan’s Middle East advisors pointed out in Washington.⁴¹³

⁴⁰⁵ *Middle East Watch. Genocide in Iraq.* 9.

⁴⁰⁶ Al-Majid quoted in McDowall. *Modern History of the Kurds.* 353.

⁴⁰⁷ Folkevord, Erling. 2002. *Om fortid, folk og framtid.* Oslo: Tapir Akademisk Forlag. 190.

⁴⁰⁸ For details on the camps, see *Middle East Watch. Genocide in Iraq.* 215-218; For details on the eight campaign phases, see Kelly. *Ghosts of Halabja.* 20-32.

⁴⁰⁹ Entessar. *Kurdish Ethnonationalism.* 138.

⁴¹⁰ Entessar. *Kurdish Ethnonationalism.* 140.

⁴¹¹ Entessar. *Kurdish Ethnonationalism.* 143.

⁴¹² Charountaki. *The Kurds and US Foreign Policy.* 148.

⁴¹³ Litte. “The United States and the Kurds.”

“No Friends but the Mountains”

President George H. W. Bush, who entered the Oval Office in January 1989 in the wake of the peace between Iran and Iraq, initially sought to build an even better relationship with Iraq. Although Bush recognized Hussein's record of brutality and ruthlessness, exemplified by his use of chemical weapons against his population, similarly to Reagan, he overlooked the war crimes that the Ba'athists had done towards the Kurds. Instead of punishing Iraq, Bush was, on the contrary, eager to do business with the Ba'athists.⁴¹⁴ “We should not revive Iraqi memories of the U.S.-Israeli-Iranian alliance of the 1970s that supported the Kurdish rebellion”, the State Department pointed out in early 1989.⁴¹⁵ Rather the U.S. should strive for “[b]usinesslike, profitable, and above all stable relations with Iraq”.⁴¹⁶ These guidelines became official U.S. policy towards Iraq during the final autumn of the Cold War.

The post-Cold War era and Hussein's decision to invade Kuwait on August 2, 1990, led to a change in U.S. foreign policy. The post-Cold war objectives of the U.S. foreign policy was to “deter the outbreak of regional wars...[and] increase regional presence”.⁴¹⁷ The Bush administration shifted its benign policy toward Hussein's Iraq to a direct interventionist policy of “regime change”.⁴¹⁸ After invading Kuwait, Hussein declared it to be the nineteenth province of Iraq.⁴¹⁹ Washington was horrified at the prospect of Hussein exercising his control over the oil-rich lower Gulf monarchies that were providing the West with oil and economic well-being. The Bush administration was therefore quick to intervene. By October, 200,000 U.S. troops were stationed in Saudi Arabia in what was named Operation Desert Shield.⁴²⁰ Working through the United Nations Security Council, the Bush administration managed to push through resolutions demanding Iraq's withdrawal. This resulted in the imposition of severe international sanctions, including a trade embargo. The sanctions were intended to force Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait.⁴²¹ On January 16, 1991, the U.S. launched massive airstrikes against Iraq. Comparing the Iraqi president to Hitler, Bush was now determined to destroy his regime.⁴²²

⁴¹⁴ Hahn. *Crisis and Crossfire*. 106; Entessar. *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*. 143.

⁴¹⁵ Little. “The United States and the Kurds.”

⁴¹⁶ Little. “The United States and the Kurds.”

⁴¹⁷ Charountaki. *The Kurds and US Foreign Policy*. 167.

⁴¹⁸ Charountaki. *The Kurds and US Foreign Policy*. 166.

⁴¹⁹ Entessar. *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*. 143.

⁴²⁰ Cleveland. *The Modern Middle East*. 228-233.

⁴²¹ Cleveland. *The Modern Middle East*. 228-230.

⁴²² Cleveland. *The Modern Middle East*. 232.

The objective of Operation Desert Shield was never to punish Hussein for committing war crimes in Iraqi Kurdistan. Rather, it was about American interests in Kuwait being at stake. However, on February 14, 1991, a CIA-controlled radio station operating from Saudi Arabia had encouraged the Kurds to revolt and “hit the headquarters of the tyrant and save the homeland from destruction”.⁴²³ The broadcast led the Kurds to believe that this time they would receive U.S. assistance if they led another uprising. Initially successful, in March, the Peshmerga forced Hussein’s troops to abandon Erbil, Kirkuk, and a few other Kurdish cities. However, by mid-March, after Kuwait was liberated in Operation Desert Shield, Hussein’s forces regained the upper hand, rearranged their troops and launched a major assault to recapture territories from the Kurds.⁴²⁴ The Peshmergas were attacked from air and land. “[W]here is George Bush?” one Peshmerga had screamed when the Ba’athists attacked, “tell him he must do something”.⁴²⁵ Once more, after gaining Kurdish trust, the U.S. stood on the sideline as the Kurds were massacred, and yet again, the Kurdish villages were destroyed. An estimated 2,4 million people fled from their homes. 1,5 million Kurdish refugees entered Iran by mid-April. Another 500 000 fled to Turkey. The rest fled into mountains along the Turkish border where thousands lost their lives on the harsh mountain climate. With the memory of Anfal fresh in their minds, the Kurds were convinced that Hussein had arrived to “finish the job”.⁴²⁶

Although Bush denied having betrayed the Kurds, massive media coverage on the horrific Kurdish refugee flight soon forced him to launch Operation Provide Comfort. In May 1991, U.S. and European troops entered Iraqi Kurdistan and established a safe haven, implementing a no-fly zone that banned Hussein’s forces from entering.⁴²⁷ Gradually the majority of the refugees returned home. Some, fearful of new military reprisals from the Iraqi government, never did.⁴²⁸ The safe haven allowed the Kurds to establish a situated, unrecognized *de facto* state with free elections by May 1992. Thus, the Kurds acquired a semi-independent administrative political entity referred to as The Kurdistan Regional Government.⁴²⁹ Despite rough Turkish, Iranian, and Syrian opposition to Kurdish statehood throughout the rest of the

⁴²³ Little. “The United States and the Kurds.”

⁴²⁴ Romano, Rowe, and Hussein. “The United States and the Kurds.”

⁴²⁵ Peshmerga quoted in Bullock and Morris. *No Friends but the Mountains*. 24.

⁴²⁶ Kelly. *Ghosts of Halabja*. 45.

⁴²⁷ Charountaki. *The Kurds and US Foreign Policy*. 169; Little. “The United States and the Kurds.”

⁴²⁸ Kelly. *Ghosts of Halabja*. 45-46.

⁴²⁹ Charountaki. *The Kurds and US Foreign Policy*. 172.

twentieth century, President William J. Clinton enforced the no-fly zone and allowed the Iraqi Kurds to rebuild their villages and construct a civil society.⁴³⁰

The Gulf War and the U.S. assault had severely political, social, and economic consequences. The wars and economic sanctions had made Iraq bankrupt. The regime's constant assault on its own people had led to widespread suffering.⁴³¹ When President George W. Bush entered the White House in 2000, he was already determined to take decisive actions against Hussein. After the September 11 attacks, the world's only remaining superpower announced a harsh criterion for determining its allies and enemies. "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists".⁴³² This culminated in the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the overthrow of Hussein. President Bush quickly declared victory, announcing "mission accomplished" on May 1, 2003.⁴³³ In the aftermath of Hussein's overthrow and the reordering of the Iraqi political structure, the Kurdistan Regional Government prospered, was officially recognized, and developed into a stable democratic autonomous region. However, this prosperity was not seen in the rest of the country.⁴³⁴ South of the border of the Kurdistan Regional Government, the overthrow of Hussein had led to sectarian strife and political chaos. The mission that Bush declared accomplished had in reality ushered a new era of uncertainty for the future political direction of the country.⁴³⁵

Following President Barack Obama's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Iraq in 2011, the ground was laid for a disaster. This resulted in a power vacuum, which led to sectarian civil war. This contributed to the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2014.⁴³⁶ It terrified the public and challenged regional and global order.⁴³⁷ In June 2014, shocked by ISIS's immediate advancements, Iraqi soldiers fled from Mosul and abandoned all their military equipment. Using military equipment that they captured from the Iraqi forces, ISIS quickly advanced into Iraqi territories.⁴³⁸ Kurdish resistance became crucial in stalling further expansion. The U.S. once again found the Kurds to be a reliable "ally".⁴³⁹ The Kurds received

⁴³⁰ Gunter. *The Kurds*. 71.

⁴³¹ Cleveland. *Modern Middle East*. 436.

⁴³² Bush quoted in Yildiz. *The Past, Present and Future*. 93.

⁴³³ Bush quoted in Ismael. *Iraq in the Twenty-First Century*. 216.

⁴³⁴ Romano, Rowe, and Hussein. "The United States and the Kurds."

⁴³⁵ Ismael. *Iraq in the Twenty-First Century*. 216-218.

⁴³⁶ Mannina, Ryan N. 2018. "How the 2011 US Troop Withdrawal from Iraq Led to the Rise of ISIS." In *Small Wars Journal*.

⁴³⁷ Ismael. *Iraq in the Twenty-First Century*. 217.

⁴³⁸ Romano, Rowe, and Hussein. "The United States and the Kurds."

⁴³⁹ Romano, Rowe, and Hussein. "The United States and the Kurds."

military and economic support from the U.S. In 2014 the Peshmerga succeeded in liberating Kirkuk, the city that the Kurds were driven out of in the 1960s and 1970s. The Kurdish Peshmerga that had fought for freedom against the Iraqi regime throughout the second half of the twentieth century became internationally recognized and praised as the world's main force against ISIS.⁴⁴⁰

In September 2017, nearly 100 years after the Treaty of Sèvres that had promised the Kurds a homeland, but never saw the light of day, the Kurds were once again pursuing their old dream of *Kurdistan*. By September 2017, the Peshmerga had lost 1800 fighters, with additional thousands injured and many missing in the fight against ISIS. These sacrifices and the recognition the world gave the Kurds created a belief among the Kurds that the “Peshmerga fought on behalf of the free world” and deserved to be rewarded. As a result, a referendum for independence from Iraq was held. Although the referendum resulted in over 90 percent of votes in favor of independence, it was quickly abandoned after pressure from neighboring countries.⁴⁴¹ While Turkey, frightened of its own Kurdish population, threatened to use force and set a blockade, Baghdad demanded the referendum to be nullified and ordered the Kurdistan Regional Government to surrender its airports.⁴⁴² In October, the Iraqi military seized Kirkuk and other territories that the Kurds had liberated from ISIS in 2014, killing many Peshmerga that guarded the city, forcing the rest to retreat north.⁴⁴³

Looking to the West for hope, the Kurds soon realized that President Donald Trump's administration did not intend on supporting its so-called Kurdish ‘ally’ this time. In October 2019, the Trump administration decided to withdraw U.S. troops in Syria following the defeat of ISIS. Leaving their Syrian Kurdish ally behind, Trump gave Turkey a green light to invade the Kurdish-populated territory. Time and time again, the Kurds have had to remind themselves of their old proverb – that they have “*no friends but the mountains*”.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴⁰ Charountaki, Marianna. 2018. “From resistance to military institutionalization: the case of the Peshmerga versus the Islamic State.” In *Third World Quarterly*. Vol. 39. No. 8. 1583-1603.

⁴⁴¹ Palani, Kamaran, Khidir, Jaafar, Dechesne, Mark, and Bakker, Edwin. 2019. “The Development of Kurdistan’ de facto Statehood: Kurdistan’s September 2017 referendum for independence.” In *Third World Quarterly*. Vol. 40. No. 12. 2270-2288.

⁴⁴² Zucchini, David. September 26, 2017. “Iraq Orders Kurdistan to Surrender Its Airports.” In *the New York Times*.

⁴⁴³ Palani. *Kurdistan’s September 2017 referendum*.

⁴⁴⁴ “*No Friends but the Mountains*” is a popular Kurdish proverb that is expressed to show their feeling of betrayal and abandonment. It is intended to convey loneliness because of their history as a stateless minority in the Middle East without loyal allies or neighbors.

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BOX 28:

- Folder 08: Iraq-Kurds (December 1963- March 1966)
- Folder 07: Iraq (December 1963-March 1966)

National Security File - Files of Harold H. Saunders:

BOX 16:

- Folder 01: Iraq (April 1, 1966- January 20, 1969)

BOX 16:

- Folder 02: Persian Gulf (April 1, 1966-January 20, 1969)

National Security File – Special Head of State Correspondence:

BOX 25:

- Folder: Iraq (August 1, 1965-January 20, 1969)

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BOX 138:

- Vol 1: Iraq (December 1963-July 1968)

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BOX 6:

- Middle East/ Near East

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BOX 2:

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Appendix: List of Characters

- Bazzaz, Abd al-Rahman** – Iraq’s Deputy Prime Minister (1965-1966)
- Al-Bakr, Ahmed Hasan** - President of Iraq (1968-1979)
- Ali Hassan Al-Majid** –Military Commander of Iraq (1982-2003)
- Arif, Abd al-Salam** - President of Iraq (1963-1968)
- Arif, Abd al-Rahman** - President of Iraq (1966-1968)
- Barzani, Mulla Mustafa** – Leader of Kurdistan Democratic Party (1946-1979)
- Barzanji, Sheikh Mahmoud** – Leader of a series uprisings against the British Mandate of Iraq.
- Bundy, McGeorge** - National Security Advisor (1961-1966)
- Bush, George H. W.** – President of the U.S. (1989-1993)
- Bush, George W.** – President of the U.S. (2001-2009)
- Carter, Jimmy** – President of the U.S. (1977–1981)
- Clinton, William J.** – President of the U.S. (1993-2003)
- Eisenhower, Dwight D.** – President of the U.S. (1953-1961)
- Faisal I** – King of Iraq (1921-1933)
- Ford, Gerald** – President of the U. S. (1974–1977)
- Hughes, Thomas L.** – Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (1963-1969)
- Humphrey, Hubert** – Vice president of the U.S. (1965-1969)
- Hussein, Saddam** – President of Iraq (1979-2003)
- Johnson, Lyndon B.** – President of the U.S. (1963–1969)
- Kemal, General Mustafa** – President of Turkey (1923-1938)
- Kennedy, John F.** – President of the U.S. (1961–1963)
- Khomeini, Ayatollah Ruhollah** – Leader in Iran (1979-1989)

Khrushchev, Nikita – First Secretary of the Soviet Union (1953-1964)

Komer, Robert – Member of the NSC (1961-1967), National Security Advisor (March-April 1966)

Kissinger, Henry – U.S. National Security Advisor (1969–1973), Secretary of State (1973–1977).

McNamara, Robert S. - Secretary of Defense (1961-1968)

Nasser, Gamal Abdul – President of Egypt (1956–1970)

Nixon, Richard – President of the U.S. (1969-1974)

Obama, Barack – President of the U.S. (2009-2017)

Pachachi, Adnan – Iraq’s Foreign Minister (1966-1967)

Pahlavi, Mohammed Reza – Shah of Iran (1941–1979).

Qassim, Abd al-Karim – Prime Minister in Iraq (1958-1963)

Reagan, Ronald – President of the U.S. (1981–1989)

Rusk, Dean – U.S. Secretary of State (1961-1969)

Saunders, Harold H. –Member of the NSC (1961-1975)

Strong, Robert – U.S. Ambassador in Iraq (1963-1967)

Talabani, Jalal – Political Leader in the Kurdish National Movement (Later President of Iraq 2004 – 2014)

Talib, Naji - Iraq’s Foreign Minister (1964-1965)

Truman Harry S – President of the U.S. (1945-1953)

Trump, Donald J. – President of the U.S. (2017-)

Tsafirir, Eliezer – The Head of Mossad intelligence service in Iraqi Kurdistan (1964-1975)

Wilson, Harold – British Prime Minister (1964-1970 and 1974-1976)