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Cross-border Kurdish solidarity: An endangered aspect of Kurdishness

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Abstract

Cross-border kinship has been a particular hallmark of Kurdish identity and an important source of solidarity between Kurds of different regions within Kurdistan. However, this article argues that the values of cross-border Kurdish solidarity have been violated in the past, due to the collaboration of elements of the Kurdish movement with the Turkish, Iranian, Iraqi and Syrian states. Misconducted cross-border interaction has led to movement fragmentation, decline or/and termination, and to internecine violence between different sections of the Kurdish movement. This paper, reflecting on the interaction between the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements from the 1960s to the 1990s, argues that the Iranian Kurdish movement has been disadvantaged and has faced multifaceted challenges and difficulties partially owing to this interaction.

Keywords: Cross-border interaction; solidarity; Iranian Kurds; Iraqi Kurds; Kurdish movement.

ABSTRACT IN KURMANJÎ

Hevgirtina wêdeyî sînoran: Aliyekî lawaz ê Kurdayetiyê

Xizmîniya di navber û wêdeyî sînoran nişaneyêke taybet a nasnameya kurdî ye ku bûye çavkaniyêke girîng a hevgirtinê di navbera kurdên ji herêmên cuda yê Kurdistanê. Ligel vê, ev gotar diyar dike ku di raboriyê de nixêrîn vê hevgirtina kurdan ya wêdeyî sînoran hatine pêpeştkirin, bi taybetî ji ber hevkarîya hindêk pêkhatiyên bizava neteweyî ya kurdî ligel dewletên Tirk, Îran, Iraq, û Sûriyeyê. Danûstandina wêdeyî sînoran ya xerab hatî rêvebirin bûye sebebê parçebûn, paşketin an/û têkçûnê, û tundûtîjiya kujende di navbera pêkhatiyên cuda yê bizava kurdî de. Ev gotar berê xwe dide danûstandina di navbera bizavên kurdî yê Îranî û Iraqî yê ji 1960an heta 1990an, û diyar dike ku bizavan kurdî ya Îranî di rewşêke neguncaw de bûye û ketiye ber gelek dijwariyan ku beşek jê ji ber vê danûstandinê bûne.

ABSTRACT IN SORANI

Sollîdarêti kurdî le piştî sinûrekanewe: Xeter leser rehendî kurdbûn

Xizmayeti kurdan le herdû diwî sinûrekanewe yekêke le xale cewheriyekani nasnamey kurd û serçaweyekî girîngî sollîdarêtiye lenêw kurdanî herême ciyawazekani Kurdistanê. Bellam, em babete gengeşey ewe deka ke ew xizmayetiye le rabirdûda behoy hawkarîy bizûtnewe siyasîyekani kurd legell dewletani Turkiya, Suriya, Êraq û Êranda pêşel krawe. Xirap bekarhênanî peywendiyekani herdû diwî sinûr bote hoy pertbûn, pûkanewe yaxud kotayî hatinî peywendiyekan. Em babete tîşk dexate ser peywendiyekani bizûtnewekani kurdayetî le Êraq û Êran le 1960ekanewe ta 1990ekan. Bangeşey ewe dekat ke bizûtnewekani kurd le Êran zereryan

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lew peywendîyane pê geyîşituwe û rûberûy allingarîy corawcor bûnetewe behoy ew peywendîyanewe.

ABSTRACT IN ZAZAKI

Piştgirîya kurdan a mîyansînorkîye: yew parçeyê kurdbîyayîşî binê tehluke de yo

Xisimîya mîyansînorkîye taybetmendîya girînge ya nasnameyê kurdan û seba piştgirîya mabênê kurdanê herêmanê Kurdistanî yê çîya-çîyayan de çimeyêko muhîm bîyêne. Labelê na meqale de munaqeşe beno ke demo vîyarte de semedê hemkarîya tayê elementanê tevgerê kurdan bi dewletanê Tirkîya, Îran, Îraq û Sûriye ra, erjê na piştgirîya kurdan a mîyansînorkîye ameyî îxlalkerdene. Seba ke têkilîyê mîyanê sînoran xelet îdare bîyî, tevger bî parçe-parçe, bî kêmî û/yan zî ame peynîye û bî sebebê şidetê mabênê beşanê tevgerê kurdan ê çîya-çîyayan. No nuşte têkilîyanê mabênê tevgeranê kurdan ê Îran û Îraqî yê serranê 1960an û 1990an ser o vindeno. Tede munaqeşe beno ke tevgerê kurdanê Îrani semedê nê têkilîyan ra kewto dezavantaj û raştê tewir bi tewir zorî û zehmetîyan ameyo.

Introduction

Cross-border interaction between the Kurds of different regions of Kurdistan has a long history, in which solidarity has been an invaluable element. The Kurdish national liberation movement is not limited to a single state, but spans several nation-state boundaries, and Kurds have maintained strong cross-border ethnic links. For instance, in the early 1940s before the establishment of the Kurdish Republic,¹ cross-border Kurdish interaction increased considerably. The Iranian Kurdish organisation the Society for the Revival of the Kurds/Kurdistan (*Komeley Jîyanewey Kurd/Kurdistan*, commonly referred to as JK)² focused on cementing its relations with non-Iranian Kurdish nationalist groups and movements. In 1944, JK representatives met with Iraqi and Turkish Kurdish delegations at the border area of Mount Dalanper, and signed the Pact of the Three Borders (*Peymanî Sê Sinûr*) (Qazi, 2015). This Pact remains an important example of a formal cross-border Kurdish agreement (Yildiz and Taysi, 2007: 64). The JK was the first Kurdish nationalist organisation which placed a significant focus on cross-border Kurdish interaction and solidarity (Qazi, 2015). Nevertheless, the history of the Iranian Kurdish movement records that Kurdish cross-borderness has also led to brutal infighting (Manafy, 2005: 50). The way the movement has mobilised in interaction with the Iraqi Kurdish movement has led to several setbacks, impacting the integrity, cohesion and consistency of Kurdish nationalism. Due to the Iranian Kurdish movement's reliance on its safe haven in Iraqi Kurdistan, a complex relationship has developed between the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements.

¹ The Kurdish Republic of 1946 was founded by the Kurdish national leader Qazi Mohammad in the city of Mahabad. The Republic lasted only eleven months. It collapsed as a result of Reza Shah Pahlavi's repression and the intensive militarisation of Iranian Kurdistan.

² This article contains data from several translated Kurdish and Persian sources. In this regard, unless otherwise stated, the translations in this article are the author's own.

This article asserts that this form of Kurdish cross-borderness is dysfunctional, with an adverse impact on the Iranian Kurdish movement.

The cross-borderness of Kurdish nationalism is a product of the Kurds' dispersal between four states. This relationship has been regarded as a hallmark of *Kurdîyêti*,³ and an important source of Kurdish internal solidarity. However, the collaboration of several Kurdish organisations with what were regarded by many as nation-state occupiers of Kurdistan has become a significant challenge to Kurdish cross-borderness. The negative results of the misconduct of Kurdish cross-border interaction on the prospects and direction of the Kurdish movement are explained in this paper with reference to the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements' interaction over different phases in the second half of the twentieth century.

Some research has been conducted on transnational ethno-nationalist movements. According to Kristian Gleditsch (2007), "transnational ties related to ethnicity are likely to influence the 'willingness' of groups to mobilize for violent conflict or respond to government repression with violence [and] groups that have transnational communities should have a generally larger pool of resources that they can draw upon in mobilizing for violent conflict" (297). Gleditsch identifies three varieties of transnational links: ethnic, political, and economic (Ibid). The development of the Iranian Kurdish movement can be studied through its transnational ethnic linkages, which provide cross-border communities with additional capabilities. For movements of rebellion, access to neighbouring territory for mobilising their activities is important, yet often costly, because rebellion groups in return for a safe haven and security often sacrifice some agency and autonomy (Salehyan, 2007: 222). Theoretically, cross-border interaction is a powerful factor in strengthening ethnonationalist movements, yet the cross-border interaction between the Iraqi and Iranian Kurdish movements reveals it can also have the opposite result. This is particularly due to the fact that, following the fall of the Republic of Kurdistan

³ *Kurdîyêti* is a form of collective Kurdish identity, though "it is not automatically immutable or universally understood. Rather, like ethnicity, nation and nationalism, it is influenced and shaped by discourses, political forces and contingent events" (Gourlay, 2018: 26). Though *Kurdîyêti* was articulated in the writing and poetry of Kurdish authors and intellectuals of earlier centuries, such as Ahmed-i Khani (Ehmedê Xani) in the seventeenth century, it was not specifically articulated as a concept until the mid-twentieth century. *Kurdîyêti* was the title of a poem by Kemal Gir in Iraqi Kurdistan, in an era when nationalist ideologies flowed across the Turkey-Syria border: "Translated as 'Kurdishness', the idea gradually became politicised in Iraq, a means of asserting Kurdish ethnic and ideological distinctiveness in contradistinction to that of Arab nationalism and socialism, then widely propagated ideologies" (Ibid: 29). The Kurdish experience of marginalisation and the denial of their identity by Turkish, Iranian, Iraq and Syria, intensified the politicisation of *Kurdîyêti*. As emphasised by Gourlay, "Defending one's Kurdishness in the face of persecution became a point of principle, while *Kurdîyêti*, as a model of unified Kurdish nationalism that aspired to relieve the bonds of oppression, offered relief and solidarity, and thereby security, to marginalised Kurds" (Ibid).

in 1946, the Iranian Kurdish movement has heavily relied on its access to territory in Iraqi Kurdistan, developing a spatial dependency.

Data used in this study has been extracted from a combination of (auto)biographies, newspapers, and other secondary sources. Autobiographies of political leaders and members of the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements, such as Jalal Talebani, Kerim Hisami and Said Kaveh, and officials of the Shah's National Organization for Security and Intelligence (*Sāẓemān-e Ettelā'āt va Amniyat-e Keshvar*, SAVAK), such as Issa Pejman and Hussain Fardoost, as well as historical texts on the relationship between the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements, have all been drawn upon throughout this paper. These materials contain invaluable information about the asymmetrical power relations between the movements of these two parts of Kurdistan.

The post-republic Iranian Kurdish movement

Re-establishing the Iranian Kurdish movement in the decades subsequent to the collapse of the Republic of Kurdistan was rendered difficult by conditions including the lack of a safe haven for Iranian Kurdish activists, the Iranian state's persecution of Kurdish activists, and the silencing of any voices of Kurdish nationalism (Kaveh, 1996). In the early 1960s, an amalgam of these challenges, but also the possibility of alignments with new cross-border actors, were the conditions in which the Iranian Kurdish movement operated. Making alignments with the Iraqi Kurdish movement in the late 1950s created new opportunities for mobilising through exiled nationalism, with a substantial geographical distance from the target area, Iranian Kurdistan.

The cross-border interaction of Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish groups has had a definitive impact on the direction of the Iranian Kurdish movement. Esman (1994) views ethnic cross-border solidarity as a strong source of mobilisation, aimed at challenging state policies toward certain ethnic communities. From Esman's perspective, cross-border ethnic interaction is tantamount to ethnic solidarity, incorporating a combination of obligations and responsibilities of individuals to their community (1994: 30). During the attempt in the 1960s to remobilise the Iranian-Iraqi Kurdish movement, cross-border Kurdish solidarity was viewed as a powerful source of movement mobilisation. While the fear of annihilation encouraged the Kurds to carry out collective political actions, cross-border solidarity was a "window of opportunity" (McAdam et al., 1996) which fortified Kurdish efforts to re-mobilise the movement.

From the start of the modern Kurdish movement in Iran, at the time of the establishment of the Republic of Kurdistan, cross-border Iranian-Iraqi Kurdish

solidarity was strong. The participation of Mullah Mustafa Barzani⁴ and his comrades from Iraqi Kurdistan in the Republic of Kurdistan demonstrated the existence of strong cross-border solidarity among the Kurds. In addition to the Barzani tribe, many teachers, military officers and other professionals from Iraqi Kurdistan participated in the Republic (Gadani, 2008: 54-62). The Republic of Kurdistan may be regarded as the beginning of an era of Kurdish cross-border solidarity. In the words of Yildiz and Taysi:

The Barzani tribe provided invaluable assistance to the Iranian Kurds, mainly in the form of the impressive force of military fighters that were integral to the protection of the republic. During the time in which the Iraqi Kurds, led by the Barzani [tribe], launched their insurrection against the Iraqi state, the Iranian Kurds offered their support, either by crossing the border and acting as *peshmerga*, or through the smuggling of supplies in to Iraq. (2007: 64)

Yet facing the strength of the Iranian, Turkish, Iraqi and Syrian nation states, Kurdish cross-borderness has suffered serious setbacks (Serdeşti, 2005, 2007). The movements of each part of Kurdistan have in different ways been affected by the negative repercussions of cross-borderness. The re-emergence of the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements in the 1960s was a product of the opportunities resulting from shifting circumstances facilitating movement mobilisation. For instance, the Kurdish Democratic party of Iran's (*Partiya Demokratîk a Kurdistanê Iranê*, KDPI, also known as PDKI)⁵ attempt to re-establish the Iranian Kurdish movement was linked to the emergence of the Barzani-led movement against the Abdul-Karim Qasem regime in Iraq.⁶ Through an alliance with Mullah Mustafa Barzani, the KDPI leadership was provided with spatial opportunity and a safe haven (Gadani, 2008).

The cultural and geographic proximity between the Kurdish struggles of different parts of Kurdistan “has played an important role in the birth, evolution, and transformation of the Kurdish nationalist movement” (Gurses, 2014: 253). However, cross-borderness has functioned as a double-edged sword, with both advantages and disadvantages. Several examples show that

⁴ Mullah Mustafa Barzani was co-founder of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (*Partiya Demokrata Kurdistan*, KDP or PDK). The KDP is one of the main Kurdish parties in the Iraqi Kurdistan, which was founded in 1946 in Mahabad, in Iranian Kurdistan. Even though Mullah Mustafa Barzani was among the co-founders of KDP, this party has since its establishment been led by the Barzani family.

⁵ The KDPI is the largest political and military organisation of the Iranian Kurds, established in 1945.

⁶ Saeed explains the reason for the establishment of a new phase of the Kurdish movement in Iraqi Kurdistan in the time of Abdul Karim Qasim as following “after the coup of Abdul Karim Qasim and the termination of the role of the Iraqi Monarchy in 1958 and establishing the Republic of Iraq, the Kurds once again had hopes to gain their rights. Yet, those hopes were frustrated and the conflict in Iraq between Ba’athists, Communists and Abdula Karim Qasim suppressed the demands of Kurds iterated by KDP leadership. Thus in 1961, the movement restarted its guerrilla campaign against the central government due to the failure of fulfilling the promise that had been given to the Kurds” (2017: 35)

the relationships between Kurdish movements have become subject to abuse and internal rivalry. In some cases, self-interested Kurdish leaders have been deployed by the states controlling Kurdistan in attempts to eradicate the national movements of other parts of Kurdistan. Furthermore, the movement of one part has been used as a bargaining chip in negotiating support and sanctuary for the movement of another part. Despite examples of positive interaction between people and groups, the cross-border interaction of modern Kurdish movements has been marked by internecine division and violence, challenging the positivity that has been attributed to cross-border ethnic kinship in the studies of other movements. The negative repercussions of cross-border interaction between the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements can be attributed to the changing and diverging interests of these organisations. The regimes controlling Kurdistan have been successful in creating different understandings of national interest among the Kurds and dividing them into different sections with competing outlooks.

Interaction after the Republic of Kurdistan

Following the difficult period of repression by the SAVAK (Kaveh, 1996), the emergence of the 1958 movement in Iraqi Kurdistan provided Iranian Kurds with the opportunity to re-establish their political activity against the Pahlavi regime.⁷ Yet this was not unproblematic, as it led to the Iranian Kurdish movement being subjected to further repression (Serdeşti, 2007: 4-6). In the beginning of the 1960s, the KDPI-KDP interaction was advantageous for both sides of the movement; whilst the Iranian Kurdish movement accessed spatial resources, the Iraqi Kurdish movement received the loyalty and support of Iranian Kurds (van Bruinessen, 1992). One example of Iranian Kurds' support for Barzani was the KDPI *peshmerga*'s participation in the fighting around Mount Pêrs, in the Badinan region of Iraqi Kurdistan, in 1963, in which the *peshmerga* of both the KDPI and KDP fought shoulder-to-shoulder against the Iraqi regime (Serdeşti, 2007: 117). Initially "the loyalty of the KDP-Iran to Barzani was almost unquestioning, and the party subordinated its own political activities to the interests of the Iraqi Kurdish movement" (van Bruinessen, 1992: 34-35). However, due to Barzani's ill-treatment of the leaders and members of the KDPI, this phase of Iranian-Iraqi Kurdish relations ended ill-fated, with negative consequences for the Iranian Kurds (KDPI, 1981: 6-7). With the increase in support of the regime of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi to Barzani, the Barzani-KDPI relationship underwent a drastic change. As noted by the KDPI:

⁷ The KDPI's underground cells have in the late 1950s suffered massively from mass persecution and imprisonment. This mass imprisonment peaked in 1959. Therefor in the literature of the Iranian Kurdish movement, the 1959 is referred to as the Year of Destruction (*sali qirān*). (Gadani, 2008: 40)

Initially the Iranian Kurds were treated very well by Barzani. However, with the rise of Mohammad Reza Shah's influence on Barzani, the good relations were replaced by the mistreatment and bullying of the KDPI, and the closer the SAVAK got to Barzani, the more difficult conditions became for the KDPI. (Ibid: 7)

The second phase of cross-border relations, from 1979 to the late 1980s, had more complex characteristics. With the emergence of new actors on both sides of the borders, relations diverged. Following the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the Iranian Kurds initiated a new era of struggle. Whilst the KDP forces were under new leadership, the KDP-Provisional Leadership (*Qiyadey Muneqet*),⁸ and collaboration with the Iranian Army to hunt the Iranian Kurdish *peshmerga* of the KDPI and the Revolutionary Workers' Society of Iranian Kurdistan (*Komeley Şorşgêrrî Zêhmetkêşanî Kurdistanî Êran, Komala*)⁹ (KDPI, 1981: 9-10), the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (*Yekêtiy Nîştîmanîy Kurdistan, PUK*),¹⁰ was desperate for external support and a safe haven from which to continue its struggle against the Iraqi Baathist regime and thus developed a multifaceted strategy. As stated by Kreyenbroek and Sperl,

When the Shah was overthrown in 1979 both the PUK and the KDP [...] competed for the new regime's favour. The latter was successful, partly because of the long-standing relationship with Tehran, but more practically because Masoud [Barzani] was willing to support Tehran against its own Kurdish insurgents led by KDPI. (2010: 22)

On the one hand, the PUK leader Jalal Talebani declared his support for the Islamic Republic as an anti-imperialist force in the region (Khoshhali, 2018), whilst on the other the PUK from 1982 to 1983 sent some of its units to support Iranian Kurdish forces. In return, the KDPI played a mediating role during in the 1984 negotiations between the PUK and the Iraqi government (Bruinessen, 1992: 39). Ultimately, the PUK drew closer to Tehran, on which it developed a strong reliance. During this period, the position of the Iranian Kurdish movement changed from guest to host, thus giving it a position stronger than during the 1960s. Therefore, despite the challenging conditions

⁸ Following the 1975 Algiers Agreement between Iran and Iraq, the KDP faced collapse and disintegration. However, after the death of its leader Mostafa Barzani, the KDP reorganised its activity under the name of the Provisional Leadership (*Qiyadey Muneqet*). The KDP operated for nearly two years under this title; following this, the name KDP was re-adopted. Despite the brevity of the Provisional Leadership period, several important issues and conflicts regarding the KDP's actions emerged at this time.

⁹ Komala is a leftist Iranian Kurdish organisation formed in the late 1968. The death of Mohammad Hussain Karimi, one of the ideological leaders and co-founders of Komala, during the disarming of the police station in Saqqez on 15th February 1979, marked the announcement of the official political activity of Komala.

¹⁰ The PUK was established in 1975, and from this time was in conflict with the KDP. The KDP and PUK constitute the major political and military organisations of Iraqi Kurdistan.

of these years, the cross-border interaction of the 1980s was less damaging than in previous years.

The third phase of Iranian-Iraqi Kurdish groups' interaction, from the 1990s until today, has been a product of the regional changes affecting the Kurdish movement. This era began with the establishment of the Kurdish Regional Government (*Hikûmetî Herêmi Kurdistan*, KRG) in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1992. Compared to the 1960s, during this period the capability of the Iranian Kurdish movement fell drastically, and the number of casualties among its members was high. While in the 1960s the Iranian Kurdish movement was subject to Barzani's interests, during the 1990s the Iranian Kurds suffered from the PUK's dependency on Tehran.

The KDP-KDPI interaction in the 1960s

The KDP-KDPI relationship in the 1960s was based on the KDPI's spatial dependency on the Iraqi Kurds (Yildiz and Taysi, 2007: 62-65). Re-mobilising the KDPI's activity inside Iranian Kurdistan was a difficult task, due to the militarised situation of the region. The Shah initiated harsh reprisals in 1959, aimed at destroying the KDPI's underground cells. This operation was very comprehensive, resulting in the imprisonment of many hundreds of KDPI members, and the exile of others (Hisami, 1971: 49). In the words of Jalil Gadani, "as a result of SAVAK's mass imprisonments, many fled from Iranian Kurdistan. The 1959 mass imprisonment has been referred to as the Year of Destruction (*salî q̄rān*)" (2008: 40). Consequently, the KDPI leadership and activists were desperate for a safe haven.

Mullah Mustafa Barzani was among the leading figures who survived the Pahlavi regime's attack on the Republic of Kurdistan, managing to flee to the Soviet Union. According to Ghani Beloriyan, Barzani, after his return, encouraged and promised his support to the KDPI leadership to re-establish their movement (1997: 62-65). Yet despite Barzani's promise of support to the Iranian Kurdish movement, his attitude changed entirely following the Shah bestowing support for his own movement. Through the 1960s and until early 1975, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi provided the Iraqi Kurdish movement with financial and military support, and a territorial base (Fardoost, 1990: 502; Pejman, 1996). The Shah's support for Barzani was preconditioned on Barzani's capability to hamper the Iranian Kurdish movement. The extent of the Shah-Barzani relationship was revealed, during the 1960s when several members of the KDPI, particularly those critical of Barzani's attitude toward the Iranian Kurdish struggle, either disappeared or were assassinated and their dead bodies delivered to the Iranian regime. KDPI documents reveal that, following the visit of an Iranian intelligence officer to the KDP's military camps in the spring of 1965, Barzani ordered the KDPI to remove all its bases from the Iran-Iraq border, and to cease its activities inside Iranian Kurdistan: "In a

historical edict, Barzani ordered attacks on the KDPI bases in the border areas. Following this order, the KDPI's library and all its publishing equipment were plundered" (KDPI, 1981: 8-9).

In this period the KDPI leadership was divided into two wings, the Ishaqi and the Moeini factions.¹¹ The KDPI's dependency on Barzani, and its leadership's disputing views on how to mobilise the movement, were the core elements of the internal disagreement and conflict within the organisation. The Abdollah Ishaqi-led wing was under the total control of Barzani, and subjected to Barzani's consideration of the interests of the Iraqi Kurdish movement. This was that the KDPI had to cease its activity and not provoke Iran, which was sponsoring Barzani's insurgency. The other faction, led by Solaiman Moeini, attempted to establish a proactive movement based on the interests of the Iranian Kurds. As Bruinessen writes, "this group felt that Barzani, in order to receive support from the Shah, deliberately kept the KDP-Iran back from political struggle in Iran" (1992: 34-35).

The KDPI's Revolutionary Committee

Barzani gave the KDPI an ultimatum: either leave Iraqi Kurdistan, or cease its activities (Serdeşti, 2007: 31). This resulted in a dispute within the KDPI. Ishaqi's faction submitted to Barzani's first option, believing that without his blessing and support, continuing the struggle would be impossible. However, Ishaqi's opponents announced the formation of the KDPI-Revolutionary Committee in the summer of 1966 near Alanê (a village of Serdeşt) with the participation of seven KDPI members (Kaveh, 1996: 151-152). The Revolutionary Committee rejected Barzani's ultimatum, and, alternatively, attempted to establish its activities inside Iranian Kurdistan. As a result, during 1967 and 1968, some areas of Iranian Kurdistan witnessed political activity led by Ismail Sherifzadeh, Abdullah Moeini, Mullah Aware and their fellows in the Revolutionary Committee (Moradbeigi, 2004: 26). However, the Revolutionary Committee remained isolated, without support or a safe haven. It was totally destroyed when its members were trapped and attacked by the Iranian Army in a village near Bane. Without its leadership, the Revolutionary Committee ceased to function in 1968, after eighteen months of existence (Kaveh, 1996: 172). The Iranian Kurdish movement, following the defeat of the Revolutionary Committee, experienced a new period of decline and difficulties.

Assassination and internal violence

As Manafy states, "Kurdish political history embodies the empirical evidence to support the claim of enmity of one group against another" (2004: 46). This

¹¹ Abdollah Ishaqi, with the *nom-de-guerre* Ahmad Tofiq, was the leader of the KDPI for most of the 1960s, while Solaiman Moeini was a member of the KDPI's Central Committee.

claim is applicable to the Iranian Kurdish movement's relationship with Barzani in the 1960s. The assassination of many KDPI leaders and members in Iraqi Kurdistan was systematic; SAVAK was directly involved, maintaining a presence in Barzani's military camps, for example in Haji Omran (Serdeşti, 2016: 94). On 15 May 1968, Solaiman Moeini and his comrade Xelil Şewbaş, when attempting to return to Iran, were captured and accused of disobeying Barzani's orders. Barzani ordered their executions, and Moeini's corpse was delivered to the SAVAK, who humiliatingly displayed it publicly in cities and towns in Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI, 1981: 12-13). The assassination of Sedîq Anjiriazar, a member of the KDPI's central committee, was another mysterious disappearance of a KDPI leader in Barzani-controlled areas. Yosef Rezwani, a KDPI member in the 1960s also known as Abdollah Şlêr, claims that the SAVAK, in collaboration with KDP officials, assassinated Anjiriazar (Serdeşti, 2007: 5-6). Similar episodes in this period show that the KDPI suffered from significant insecurity. However, Said Kaveh, a participant in the KDPI-led movement in the 1960s, argues in his autobiography that Barzani should not be blamed for all the incidents of this period, since much occurred without Barzani's knowledge and involvement. The Iranian intelligence service infiltrated the KDP's intelligence service *Parastin*, and, parallel to Barzani, individuals from other sections of the KDP collaborated with the SAVAK in murdering Iranian Kurds (1996: 122-148). This period was marked by great hardship and disappointment for the KDPI. As described by Rasul Pêşnmaz, another participant in the KDPI-led movement in the 1960s, "we were caught by surprise – after what we did for the Iraqi Kurdish movement, we never expected such treatment in return" (Pêşnmaz quoted in Serdeşti, 2015: 64-65).

Despite Ishaqi's close ties to Barzani, his fate was not very much different from those of the KDPI members assassinated or handed over to the Pahlavi regime. While Moeini and many others were handed to the SAVAK, Ishaqi ended up in the prisons of the Iraqi regime. With the rise of Iranian pressure on Barzani, even Ishaqi was not spared; Barzani exiled him to Kani Masi in the Badinan region of Iraqi Kurdistan (Serdeşti, 2007: 26). Fearful of being handed to Iran, Ishaqi fled to Baghdad, where he was interred in the Iraqi regime's prisons and met a mysterious death (Serdeşti, 2015: 114-117). Iranian Kurds have held Barzani personally responsible for these assassinations and the mistreatment of KDPI members in Iraqi Kurdistan in the 1960s. Pêşnmaz has written in strong terms about this issue:

Now is the time for Masoud Barzani, the President of the KRG, the KDP, KRG and the Kurdish Parliament, in order not to further offend the Kurds in Iran, to officially acknowledge and condemn the assassination and expulsion of Solaiman Moeini and many other KDPI members. First of all, they must apologize to the family of Moeini, and

then to the Kurdish people of Iranian Kurdistan. (Pêşnmaz quoted in Qazi, 2010)

Referring to an “order” made by Idris Barzani¹² in 1967, regarding the arrests of members of the KDPI, the KDPI has argued that this order disturbed the reorganisation of the movement in Iranian Kurdistan. The Barzani forces joined the Iranian Army in areas such as Pîranşar, Serdeşt, and Bane, and hunted members of the KDPI inside Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI, 1981: 9-10). As emphasised by Jalal Talebani, “Mullah Mustafa’s incorrect policy toward Iranian Kurds, attacking, capturing and killing some of them, had a massive impact in weakening their movement. On the other hand, the KDPI leader Ahmad Tofiq [Abdollah Ishaq] implemented a divisive and destructive policy in his party, which furthered this damage drastically” (Talebani quoted by Reshid, 2017b: 318). As held by Kreyenbroek and Sperl,

In the late 1960s a sporadic guerrilla campaign was conducted by KDPI from Iraqi territory, but this was brought to an unhappy end by the intervention of the Iraqi KDP at the bidding of Tehran (which was supplying it with war materials for its own war against Baghdad), an unfortunate precedent which continued to damage relations between the Kurds of Iran and Iraq into the 1980s. (2010: 18)

The Student Union of Iraqi Kurdistan (SUIK) was among the first organisations which, in 1968, blamed the KDP and Barzani for the assassinations of Anjiriazar, Moeini and many other KDPI members in the 1960s. The SUIK stated that,

The Kurdish society should condemn the obscurantist assassinations of our people in Iranian Kurdistan by the hand of the dark-minded Iranian regime and the Kurdish leadership [...] The Kurdish movement in Iraq received the unconditional support of the toiling people of Iranian Kurdistan, but the rewards for this support were assassination, terror and deportation to Iran. (SUIK quoted in Serdeşti, 2015: 113)

Iran’s agenda in supporting Barzani

As acknowledged by Hussain Fardoost, a senior officer of SAVAK, “Mansurpoor [a high-ranking member of SAVAK] became the intermediary in the Shah-Barzani relations. Through the whole period of Barzani’s insurgency, Mansurpoor commuted between Tehran and Barzani, having his own headquarters among the Barzani forces” (1990: 502). The Pahlavi support for Barzani was initiated by Issa Pejman, a senior officer of SAVAK, during the

¹² Idris was Mullah Mustafa Barzani’s son and the father of Nechirvan Barzani, the current President of the KRG.

territorial disputes of the 1960s between Iraq and Iran. The Iranian regime viewed the Iraqi Kurdish movement as a useful, low cost means of weakening the Iraqi regime's position in negotiations on territorial issues. In addition, the Iranian regime could crush the insurgency of Iranian Kurds, by deploying its proxy Barzani (Pejman, 1996: 174-179; Reshid, 2017a: 300-308).

Mohammad Reza Shah supported Barzani for nearly a decade. The Algiers Agreement of 1975 (Reshid, 2017a: 300-308) and the positions of the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements in this period, reveal that the Iranian regime's policies were a triumph for Mohammad Reza Shah and catastrophic for the Kurdish movement, marking the failure of cross-border Kurdish solidarity. Fardoost considers the Barzani-led Iraqi Kurdish movement, which had a direct impact on Iran's domestic security, to have been among the most important issues occupying SAVAK between the 1960s and 1975 (1990: 501-503). The Shah's support for Barzani was preconditioned on Barzani's dismantling of the Iranian Kurdish movement. The Shah was confident that his support for Barzani would never result in the actual rise of Kurdish nationalism: as Entessar writes, "The Shah correctly calculated that by helping [Mulla] Mostafa he could compel him to cease aiding the Iranian Kurds and even use him to restrain Kurdish activities inside Iran" (1992: 28). Mohammad Reza Shah implemented a policy of divide and rule in order to disable the Kurdish movement in Iran and created a negative attitude towards national solidarity between Barzani and Iranian Kurds (Ibid: 28-29). Regarding the possibility of a spill-over into Iran of any of Barzani's successes, the Shah was confidently reassured by Barzani that "there was no real danger of an uprising among Iranian Kurds and that he could afford to play his Kurdish card against the Iraqi regime with impunity" (Ibid: 119).

The second phase of interaction

Around the time of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the Kurdish movement experienced a new period of prominence and activity. However, a serious issue facing the Iranian Kurdish movement in this period was the KDP's collaboration with the newly-established Islamic regime in Iran in the early 1980s. After the death of Mullah Mustafa Barzani on 1st March 1979, the remaining forces of the KDP, resettled in different regions of Iran, fell under the leadership of Barzani's sons Idris and Masoud and were reorganised and deployed again against the Iranian Kurdish movement. In its relations with the Islamic regime, the KDP consistently disregarded the Iranian Kurdish movement's interests. This disregard provoked a reaction from the Iranian Kurdish parties (Khlikgi, 1999: 13). The Iranian Kurdish movement's critical attitude towards the KDP was manifested in the Kurdish Plan for Autonomy

(*Xudmuxtari*) issued by the Iranian Kurdish leadership.¹³ The Iranian Kurdish leadership in Mahabad, with the participation of representatives of the Komala, KDPI and *Chrike-bay-e Fedayi-e Kbalgh-e Iran* (an Iranian Marxist organisation), formulated eight articles as the framework for negotiations with the Provisional Government in Tehran. The eighth article of this plan was the most controversial, as can be seen in this quotation:

Since Mullah Mustafa Barzani and the KDP-Provisional Leadership have been and still are elements of the CIA and SAVAK, they are to be abandoned by the Kurdish people. The Kurdish people request that the Iranian Revolutionary Government cut any interaction with the KDP, and expel their treacherous leadership from Iran. However, this request [of expulsion] should not affect the rank-and-file members of the KDP. (cited in Eskandari, 2015)

None of the individual participants of the (closed) meeting in Mahabad acknowledged themselves as the author of this article, revealing that such a proposal was thought of as being against Kurdish national solidarity as well as morally wrong in expelling refugees still under threat. The eighth article, on the one hand, provoked the Barzanis to intensify their collaboration with the Islamic regime, whilst on the other hand the Islamic regime used these words of the Iranian Kurdish parties as an instrument to stir further division among Kurds, and organise the KDP for its own benefit. According to Eskandari, the eighth article was a nonsensical demand, which “just caused further division and antagonism among Kurds, especially at such a sensitive time” (Eskandari, 2015).

The eighth article also reflects the existence of a deep frustration among the Iranian Kurdish movement towards Barzani. The article was a product of the historical failure of cross-border Kurdish solidarity. Referring to the controversial nature of this article, Eskandari claims that “this article is still an issue of discussion and dispute” (2015). The KDPI later regretted its inclusion in the Plan for Autonomy (Gowhari, 2011: 108-110). On the other hand, with the intensification of the clashes between the Iranian Kurdish movement and the Iranian army/the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), the PUK

¹³ Briefly, the content of the plan was as follows. 1. Declaring support for the Iranian Revolution and demanding freedom for the Kurdish people. 2. Supporting the integrity of Iranian territory and considering Kurdish wishes to be based on the idea of autonomy and federalism. 3. Considering the rights and interests of the workers and oppressed of Kurdish society. 4. Developing and building the economy of the underdeveloped and neglected Kurdish region. 5. Establishing a joint council (consisting of patriotic officers sympathetic to the Kurdish movement and the Revolutionary Council) to control the military bases in Kurdistan. 6. Identifying and punishing military personnel who fired against demonstrators. 7. Appointing Shaikh Ezzedin Hosseini as the lead negotiator of the Kurds. 8. Expelling the KDP-Provisional Leadership from Iran. The negotiation plan was formulated under the direction of Shaikh Ezzedin Hosseini, Abdolrahman Ghassemloo, Selah Mohtadi, Ghani Beloriyan and Foad Mustafa-Sultani.

supported the KDPI and Komala during a short period, particularly during the fighting over the main road between Pîranşar and Serdeşt. This PUK participation became known in the Kurdish movement as the Backing Force (*Hêzî Pîştiman*) and is considered to have marked a highpoint in Kurdish cross-border cooperation. During this battle, several military leaders and *peshmerga* of the PUK lost their lives (Moradbeigi, 2004: 66; Reshid, 2017b: 220-221). The Kurdish defence resulted in the weakening of the Iranian military's control of Kurdistan, albeit for a short period.

The third phase: Regional change and decades of deadlock

The US-led coalition against Iraq in 1991, as a reaction to the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in August 1990, and subsequently the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, which resulted in the fall of Saddam Hussein, drastically changed the regional balance of power in the Middle East. These invasions have arguably empowered Iran's regional position, and provided the regime with an unexpected opportunity for implementing its vision of a proactive foreign policy (Kozhanov, 2018: 6-9). Iraq, previously the archenemy of the Islamic regime, fell gradually under the control of Iran, and has become the first front in Iran's multifaceted domestic and regional agenda. During the rise of Iran's regional power, the USA suffered unpopularity from its post-2003 presence in Iraq (Maloney, 2008). The Iranian regime has used these changes to weaken its opposition groups, and manoeuvre through political changes in the region.

Since the developments of the early 1990s, the KDPI and Komala have faced conditions restricting their ability to conduct insurgency. Long-term torpor, and a deep dependency on the safe haven of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), have been the main outcomes of geopolitical changes eroding the capability of these Iranian Kurdish forces (Serdeştî, 2002: 7-9). However, since the KRG's establishment, Iran has sought to penetrate the Kurdish region. The KDPI and Komala's presence has become central to the Iranian-KRG relationship. The closer the KRG-Iran relationship becomes, the more constrained the activity of the KDPI and Komala is. However, the KDPI and Komala have explained the drastic decline of their activity in the 1990s as due to their "regard for the achievement of the Kurds in the KRG", and also their desire not to provoke Iran's further interference in the KRG (PDKI, 2013).

In analysing the patterns of the Iranian Kurdish movement, the change of the regional balance of power following the 1990s Gulf War is crucial. Until 2003, the relationship between Iran and Iraq was one of conflict and hostility, which stemmed from "a variety of border disputes, the rival power ambitions of leaders in both states, overlapping problems with Kurdish minorities, and the fate of a large Shi'ite population in the south of Iraq" (Buzan and Wæver, 2003: 192). The US-led coalition against Iraq in the early 1990s, in reaction to Saddam's aggressive annexation of Kuwait, resulted in heavy international

sanctions which weakened Iraq drastically. Whilst Iraq for some decades worked as an instrument of regional balance, following the West's change of attitude and the international sanctions imposed on the Baathist regime in Baghdad, this regional balance of power disappeared (Ibid.).

In the early 1990s, the Kurdish insurgency in Iraq was still the most serious challenge to the Iraqi state. The 1990's Kurdish uprising, and the Iraqi regime's violent reaction, had resulted in the "exodus of 2 million Kurds and others, of whom 1.5 million crossed into Iran and more than 400,000 more became trapped on the mountainous border with Turkey, which refused their entry" (Dahlman, 2011: 184). Subsequently, in order to protect the Iraqi Kurds from further genocide and atrocities, the international community issued an UN-sanctioned no-fly zone to prevent Iraqi air attacks on the Kurds. This international intervention has benefited the Kurds, and resulted in the establishment of the KRG (Buzan and Wæver, 2003: 205).

During the 1980s and until 1993, the Iranian regime's military bases inside Iranian Kurdistan, in both urban and rural areas, were the targets of regular guerrilla actions of the KPDI and Komala. However, from the early 1990s Iran intensified its strikes on the civilian and military bases of the KDPI and Komala, located in the mountainous Iranian-Iraqi border areas (Minorities at Risk, 2010). Through policies aimed at subverting the KRG,¹⁴ such as supporting groups including the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (*Bizûtinewey Îslamî le Kurdistan*) in fighting the PUK, Iran has aimed at several goals, including forcing the PUK to increase its dependence on Iran (Reshid, 2017b: 238-240). The 1990s was a chaotic decade for the Kurds in Iraq. In the aftermath of the first Gulf War, the Iraqi state was dysfunctional and unable to protect its borders, or react to violations of its sovereignty by its neighbouring countries Turkey and Iran (Yildiz and Taysi, 2007). Similar to Turkey, Iran began artillery shelling and conducting subversive activities in the KRI, aiming to defeat its Kurdish opposition and, by deliberately targeting civilian areas, create dissatisfaction and encourage Iraqi Kurds to blame the KPDI and Komala and force them to withdraw from their border mountain bases (Berman, 2016).

Iran's growing political, military and economic influence, and its visible interference in the affairs of the KRG, caused a drastic decline of the activity of KDPI and Komala. The KRG's high level of dependency on Iran and

¹⁴ Since the establishment of KRG, Iran has had a complex relation to the ruling political parties of this region. Iran has been able to pursue its multiple agendas in KRG through implementing a policy of divide and rule. Tehran's implementation of this policy has through critical eras of the political live of KRG resulted in intensification of internal sectarianism in the KRI. While in the early 1980s KDP was the main Iraqi Kurdish organisation with close ties to Tehran, currently, all indications point to the PUK possessing such as position. The hostile Iranian attitude to the Kurdish referendum of 25 September 2017 is an example of the confusing KRG/KDP-Iran relations. However, analysing the complex Iranian-KRG relationship is beyond the scope of this article.

Turkey provided these states with significant political and economic influence on the policymakers and policymaking of this Kurdish region. Since the KRG's establishment, Iranian influence (particularly in the so-called Green Zone, the PUK's zone of dominance) has become more obvious. As Nader et al. write, "the establishment of the KRG in 1992 benefited Tehran, as the autonomous region's authorities clamped down on Iranian Kurdish attacks coming from northern Iraq. The period also saw a spate of Tehran-sponsored assassinations" (2017: 105). Currently, Iran has two official consulates in Hawlêr and Sulaymaniyah, the two main cities of the KRG. In addition, Iran has hundreds of unofficial intelligence bases in and around Sulaymaniyah. As stated by David Pollock, "the extent of Iranian influence is particularly evident in Sulaymaniyah province, which borders Iran and is dominated politically by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and its splinter Gorran Party" (Pollock, 2017).

The historical ties between Iran and the political forces of the Iraqi Kurds have provided Iran with a golden opportunity for interfering in the affairs of the KRG and establishing intelligence bases in different regions of the KRI. These bases, organised and led by the IRGC, have been used in targeting the KDPI, Komala and civilian Iranian Kurdish individuals exiled in the KRI (LvinPress, 2007; 2008). Iran's position as its main lifeline to the outside world has resulted in the PUK's long-term dependency on the Iranian regime. This has allowed Iran to colonise the Green Zone, where for instance in the province of Sulaymaniyah alone, "Iranian agents have 700 safe houses" (Pollock, 2017).

The 1990s: A deadly decade for KRI-based Iranian Kurds

As mentioned, throughout the 1990s the civil and military camps of the KDPI and Komala in KRI were under huge pressure, both from the IRGC and the IRGC's local Iraqi Kurdish collaborators (Kurdistan Newspaper, 1998). One such example is the attack on the port of Koy-sanjagh (*derwazey Koye*),¹⁵ a PUK-controlled military checkpoint on 8 December 1997, where four high-ranking officials of the KDPI lost their lives.¹⁶ According to a statement released by the KDPI, "at the checkpoint of Koy-sanjagh they [the KDPI officials] were sniped at from all sides, all four of them being instantly killed" (KDPI, 1997). This incident is among the few cases where the KDPI successfully identified the instigators and brought them to the court, yet no sentences were issued in this case.¹⁷ Despite the difficulty in identifying the exact number of assassinations

¹⁵ Koy-sanjagh is a provincial city between Hawlêr and Sulaymaniyah.

¹⁶ According to the KDPI, Manasour Fattahi was killed shortly before the attack on Koy-sanjagh, and the other four, Seyyed Mansour Naseri, Abubakr Esmaeelzaddeh (Samal), Rafat Hosseini, and Yedulla Shireen-Sokhan, were shot at the checkpoint.

¹⁷ Regarding this attack, Sulaymaniyah's Criminal Court made the following decision: "The act of the accused, Arsalan Hama Sour Hama Amin, Abdul Razaq Othman Hussein and Marewan Kamal Mohammad [some of the PUK members involved in this attack], is not considered a crime, because they acted in good faith and in

by the IRGC, documents show that from 1992 to 1998, more than 300 Iranian Kurds¹⁸ with links to one of the Iranian Kurdish parties were assassinated in the KRI's Green Zone (Rehmanpenah, 2015).

Iran's policy of trans-border terror and reprisals towards its opposition resulted in the elimination of a safe haven for Iranian Kurds in the KRI (Sikirter, 2014). From 1995 to 1997, Iran's attack on Kurdish opposition parties and individuals in the KRI peaked. In 1996, 3000 Iranian troops equipped with artillery, and under the protection of the PUK, entered Iraqi Kurdistan and shelled KPDI bases in Koy-sanjagh from a nearby mountain (Phillips, 2015: 99). The number of casualties from this attack is unclear; however, it resulted in the displacement of more than 2000 Iranian Kurdish civilians living in the KPDI's civilian compound, Camp Azadi. Iranian forces surrounded the headquarters of the KDPI during this operation, with the intention of capturing the KDPI leadership; however, this proved unsuccessful.¹⁹

This operation was a clear violation of the sovereignty of Iraq, and once more showed that Kurdish collaboration with governments of states that are suppressing the Kurds of other parts of Kurdistan is a major issue challenging Kurdish nationalism and the prospect of a successful Kurdish liberation movement. Following the 1996 operation, Iran forced the KDPI to sign an

implementation of an order issued by their superior, as per Item 40 of the Punishment Act, which forces them to obey" (Sulaymaniyah Criminal Court, 1998).

¹⁸ Menal Tahir, the widow of Mansour Naseri, in a letter entitled "*Trajidiyayi penaberani Rojbelat le başuri Kurdistan* (the Tragedy of the Iranian Kurdish refugees in Iraqi Kurdistan), criticises the KDPI leadership for acting passively. Tahir holds that the KDPI leadership's lack of strategy and passivity were responsible for the assassinations of her husband and many other Iranian Kurds in the KRG. In addition, this letter contains and reveals details of how the IRGC forces' surveillance of the KDPI in Sulaymaniyah left the bases and members of this organisation with no security, and how the KDPI leadership, despite being informed by their KDPI officials (among them Mansour Naseri) in the city, failed to act in a way to secure the safety of their members. Furthermore, Tahir in her letter attacked the KRG's judicial system for its avoidance of charging individuals involved in the checkpoint incident (Tahir, 2009).

¹⁹ The PUK's role before and during the IRGC's shelling of KDPI bases in Koy-sanjagh has been a point of controversy. The night before the shelling, anonymous sources (probably from the PUK) informed the KDPI leadership about the potential threat to the organisation. Whether this was a deliberate warning or a leak remains unclear, and the KDPI leadership has attempted to avoid speaking of how they were informed of the attack and by whom. On the subject of the attack, Talebani in his autobiography states "we let the IRGC to enter Iraqi Kurdistan because they were determined to attack the KDPI. When we knew that the Iranians would come, the KDPI was warned about their arrival. They [the KDPI] were told to prepare for it, leave their bases and return later. The Iranians came and fired some artillery. It ended without human casualties, because of our correct policy" (Talebani quoted in Reshid, 2017b: 321-322). However, the IRGC's recent documentary (*Koy-sanjagh* produced in 2017) on the attack, despite containing many distortions, provides additional detailed information (Heghighatjo & Nikdast, 2017). The process of the attack itself, and its effects on the KDPI (and the Kurdish movement), are not discussed in Talebani's narrative. The documentary also reveals that high-ranking military officials of the PUK were among the Iranian troops (minutes 26-27). The people of Koy-sanjagh played a noteworthy role in sheltering women and children of the KDPI. The KDPI members reported that the support and solidarity of the people of Koy-sanjagh through this difficult time was the expression and practice of *Kurdlayeti*. As a previous participant of the Iranian Kurdish movement, living for many years in Iraqi Kurdistan, the author has first-hand experience and knowledge of many of the attacks the IRGC conducted against the Iranian Kurdish movement in KRI in the mid-1990s.

agreement on 4th August 1996 ceasing all its cross-border activities (Minorities at Risk, 2010). This marked the end of more than a decade of a proactive Iranian Kurdish movement. The Iranian presence in Iraqi Kurdistan meant that the 1990s was a bloody decade for the Iranian Kurdish movement. As a result of the KRG's restrictions on and monitoring of the KDPI and Komala, these parties' ties to the people inside Iranian Kurdistan, one of their main sources of financial support, weakened drastically, creating financial difficulties for different parties, which continue until today (Sikirter, 2015). Furthermore, how to cope with these new circumstances has become a subject of disagreement between the factions of the Iranian Kurdish movement.

Geographically-challenged Kurdish nationalism

The interaction between the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements over several decades can be described as complex and dysfunctional. This can on the one hand be explained by the geographical complexity Kurds and their movements must face, and on the other can be viewed as a by-product of the fragmentation of views on Kurdish national interests. The Kurds of different parts of Kurdistan have acrimoniously accused each other of disloyalty. For instance, Jalal Talebani blamed Iranian Kurdish groups for being ungrateful to the PUK, stating that

We have at different times and by different means supported the Iranian Kurdish movement, we gave them our martyrs. While the KDP chased and killed the peshmergas of Iranian Kurdistan [in the early 1980s], we stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Iranian Kurds in fighting the IRGC. (Talebani quoted in Reshid, 2017b: 220-221)

However, the history of interaction illustrated in this article suggests that Iranian Kurdish groups have been more dedicated to their Kurdish cousins on the Iraqi side. The Iranian Kurdish movement has through the 1980s relied in different ways on the support of the Iraqi regime, yet it is difficult to find examples of an Iranian Kurdish movement actively collaborating with the Iraqi regime against the Iraqi Kurdish movement. In the 1970s and 1980s, when the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements were equally disadvantaged and had to rely upon finding a safe haven on the soil of the neighbouring countries, they acted very differently regarding the regime of the host state.

There are several examples showing Iranian Kurds' capability of *Kurdayetî* and expressing solidarity with other parts of Kurdistan. For instance, the KDPI leader Abdolrahman Ghassemlou, despite his party's dependency on territory in Iraq, in a statement condemned Saddam's chemical attacks on Halabja on 16th March 1988. Ghassemlou's condemnation was viewed by the Iraqi state as a provocation, and it contributed to the breakdown in relations between the KDPI and the Iraqi government (Piranjuk, 2014). Over a decade later, following the Turkish capture of the PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan on 15th

February 1999, despite the militarisation of the area by Iran and the wave of detentions, protest actions were held across Iranian Kurdistan (BBC, 1999). These protestors were not members of the PKK, but expressed their solidarity with the organisation at a time of awakening nationalism in Iranian Kurdistan (Ghaderzade and Mohammadzadeh, 2018). Thirdly, during the KRG's referendum for independence on 25th September 2017, despite warnings from the security forces and further imprisonments, Iranian Kurds celebrated the Kurdish referendum in different cities with dances and distribution of sweets (Kayhan London, 2017).

Iranian Kurds' nationalistic reactions to the events in other parts of Kurdistan give reasons to assume a highly politicised Kurdish national sentiment in this part of Kurdistan. While a strong sense of *Kurdîyeteî* among Iranian Kurds cannot be the only reason for why Iranian Kurdish groups appear more nationalistic and unwilling to act against their Iraqi Kurdish cousins, presumably there is a link between the politicisation of Kurdish nationalism in a given part of Kurdistan, and the way the movement of this part interacts with the surrounding world.

The geography of Kurdistan has played an undeniable role in the formation of Kurdish identity and the ways Kurds have mobilised their movements (O'Shea, 2004: 1). The dysfunctionality of Kurdish cross-border interaction may partly be due to the geography. The evolution of the interaction between Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish groups since the 1950s should be analysed as a geographically-defined phenomenon. For instance, the KDP's ill-treatment of the Iranian Kurdish movement during the 1960s and the early 1980s, was a by-product of the organisation's deep dependency on its safe haven in Iran. The similar conditions experienced by Iranian Kurds in the 1990s within the PUK's zone of influence were a result of the PUK's dependency on Iran, when the PUK was challenged by the KDP, Turkey and the Iraqi regime. Through the 1990s and especially after the initial stages of the PUK-KDP's fratricidal war, Talebani wrote, "without allying with Iran, we would not have been able to recapture areas we lost to the KDP after 31st August 1996, when the KDP invited Iraqi government forces to help them in expelling the PUK from Hawlêr" (Talebani quoted in Reshid, 2107b: 254-255). The KDP-PUK war did not only damage political and economic progress in KRI, it also instituted the dependency of these forces on neighbouring countries, to the extent that these forces, at critical phases of their internal conflict, had to appeal to the support of neighbouring countries, namely Iran and Turkey. This dependency meant that the movements of other parts of Kurdistan were seen by the PUK and KDP as bargaining chips, in negotiating support from Iran or Turkey.

However, the Washington Peace Agreement signed between the PUK and the KDP in September 1998 led to the normalisation of relations between these parties (Aziz, 2011: 87-88). For instance, as one of the major issues between the

PUK and KDP related to equal access to tax revenues, revenue sharing was established. A relatively peaceful power-sharing arrangement reduced the PUK-KDP tension and their dependency on neighbouring countries. As stated by Aziz, “following the Washington Agreement the two parties have increased cooperation, normalized political relation, improved the economic sector of the region and organized joint committees of their representatives with the UN and NGOs” (2011: 89).

The relations of the Iranian Kurdish groups in Iraqi Kurdistan with the KDP and PUK in the post-2003 era were based on new circumstances. Three main reasons, the emergence of a stable and cohesive KRG (Aziz, 2011: 87-90), the dramatic rise of Iran’s power in Iraq (Eisenstadt et al., 2011), and a relatively pacified and monitored Iranian Kurdish movement, led to the KDPI and Komala becoming fully subject to the KRG’s authority. While the KDPI and Komala were not disarmed, their insurgencies inside Iranian Kurdistan were reduced to a very low level, about which Iran had little to complain. There was therefore no reason for the PUK or KDP to take any drastic or controversial steps, such as requiring Iranian Kurds to leave the KRI; taking such a step, from a nationalistic point of view, would have been highly controversial.

A complicating issue is that while Iranian Kurdish groups appear more committed to the Kurdish movement and to the interests of their Kurdish cousins in Iraq, internal disputes have been an evidently destructive characteristic of the Iranian Kurdish parties. For instance, while the Iranian Kurdish movement in the mid-1980s witnessed a half-decade of bloody fratricidal war between the KDPI and Komala (KDPI, 1984 and Saedy, 2010: 64-68), currently both these parties, due to many internal divisions, have two or three splinter parties. This has caused damage to the Iranian Kurdish movement, including deep fragmentation, the waste of the movement’s resources, and anger and disappointment expressed by Iranian Kurds. These conditions have also in some way played a part in restricting political parties of Iranian Kurds’ ability to conduct a successful insurgency.

Such a relationship in which Kurdish political parties try to justify acts of internal violence, characterised by Manafy as “the killing of Kurds by Kurds” (Manafy, 2005: 17), raises the question of the degree of maturity of Kurdish nationalism. Based on Anthony Smith’s theoretical conceptualisation of nationalism, cross-border interactions of Kurdish groups can be considered as a component of “the process of formation, evolution, or growth, of nationalism” (2001; 4). Yet the dysfunctionality of this relationship challenges the idea of Kurdish nationalism as something that serves the well-being of the entire Kurdish nation, because nationalism according to Smith should be “an ideology that places the nation at the centre of its concerns and seeks to promote its well-being” (2001; 9).

Smith suggests that in the study of nationalism, one should consider the degree of “sentiment or consciousness of belonging to the nation” within a given national community (2001; 4). While cross-border Kurdish interaction reveals a shared national sentiment within the Kurdish movements of different parts of Kurdistan, the dysfunctionality of this interaction leads to the assumption that this process has been interrupted by surrounding circumstances, such as geographical difficulties and dependency on external forces. The troubled internal relationships of the Kurdish movement raise the question: have the groups of the Kurdish movement been able to “exhibit a high degree of national consciousness”? (Smith, 2001: 6). The nature of interaction within the Kurdish movement suggests that Kurdish nationalism has not been practised as an organised ideological foundation, but as “a diffused feeling of national belonging” (Smith, 2001: 6) that has been disturbed by external interventions. The diffusion of Kurdish nationalism is also a by-product of the geopolitical circumstances that have become a part of the Kurdish reality, meaning that the Kurds of each part of Kurdistan have developed their own definition of national interest that can, in certain cases, come into conflict with each other. For instance in Iraqi Kurdistan, due to the reactions of Iran and Turkey, for both the PUK and KDP any activities of the Turkish or Iranian Kurdish movement on Iraqi Kurdistan’s soil is considered a threat to the security and stability of this region, which is an achievement of the Iraqi Kurds. The partition of Kurdistan has challenged the national, political, and cultural identity of the splintered Kurdish nation. Competing understandings of national interest are an issue threatening collective Kurdish national interest and identity. Overcoming this threat requires fundamental “ethno-symbolic reconstruction” of Kurdish national identity, a process that involves “reselection, recombination and recodification of values, symbols, and memories” (Smith, 2001: 17-20).

Conclusion

This paper concludes that the cross-border interaction between the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements, from its emergence to its final failure, has chiefly been a product of geographically-determined circumstances. The geopolitical situation of the Kurdish homeland, split into four parts and subjected to the authority of four different nation states all with hostile relations with the Kurds, has left a profound impact on the ways the Kurds of different parts of Kurdistan mobilise their movements. The evolution of Kurdish nationalism in the twentieth century has also to a certain degree been subject to these geographically-determined circumstances. As a result of the establishment of new nation state-borders and boundaries, different understandings of national interest, emphasised by Kurds of different parts of Kurdistan, can be identified. In this study, it has been argued that a diffused feeling of national belonging can be identified among Kurds. This can be explained within the context of the

role of nation states and their different institutions (e.g., education systems, mass media and culture) in enforcing and sponsoring nationalism (Malesevic, 2006: 28). Yet since the Kurdish people do not possess the independent institutions of a modern nation state with the task of systematically propagating nationalism, the evolution of their national sentiment has continuously been interrupted and violated by the nation states among which Kurdistan is divided, and strengthening and unifying Kurdish national identity has been shown to be an immensely complex and challenging task.

The dysfunctional cross-border interactions between the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements have arguably been the result of the above-described situation, with a negative impact on Kurdish nationalism. This relationship has been unequal; the superiority of the Iraqi Kurdish movement, especially in the 1960s, was evident, as was its ill-treatment of the Iranian Kurdish movement. The internal violence resulting from the KDPI-KDP relationship shows that the Kurdish struggle has failed to develop an organic link between the people and its leadership, and has failed to formulate a radical revolutionary ideology with no tolerance for internecine strife between Kurds.

The major forces of the Iraqi Kurdish movement, the KDP and the PUK, have been held responsible for this misconduct, whilst the Iranian Kurdish counterparts of these interactions, the KDPI and Komala, can be largely exonerated. The KDPI and Komala, despite having their bases inside Iraqi Kurdistan and having some degree of relationship with the Iraqi regime in the 1980s, including receiving the Iraqi state's military and financial support, did not exert a significant cost on the Iraqi Kurdish movement (Saedy, 2010: 115-121), and demonstrated a satisfactory degree of neutrality, if not solidarity (WikiLeaks Document, 1988). According to Mahmoud Osman,

Even though the KDPI was forced by the political circumstances, the geography and the geopolitics of Kurdistan into having a relationship with the Iraqi regime, this was never at the cost of the Iraqi Kurdish movement. This relationship never became a factor of threat or harm to the Iraqi Kurds. On the contrary, sometimes the KDPI in order to not damage the Iraqi Kurdish movement, was disadvantaged by this relationship. Our [KRG's] access to the data and documents of the Iraqi intelligence service [following the liberation of Kirkuk in 2003] only reveal the positive behaviour of the KDPI. The KDPI members and leadership should be proud of themselves (Osman, 2012)²⁰

²⁰ Dr Mahmoud Osman is an Iraqi Kurdish politician who has been involved in the Iraqi Kurdish movement since the 1960s. This claim refers to the Iraqi Kurdish authority's access to comprehensive archives and documents of the Iraqi regime in Kurdistan.

In addition to discussing the decades of cross-border kinship and interaction between Kurds of different parts of Kurdistan, this study also argues that the difficult interactions of Kurdish groups have challenged what the theory of nationalism generally suggests is a positive interaction, contributing resources and solidarity particularly at critical moments. This study has mainly focused on the negative aspects of the cross-border interaction of Kurdish groups; however, the author of this study acknowledges that cross-border Kurdish interaction has many dimensions. Whilst this paper has brought to light the interaction between the Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish movements with its adverse effect on the Iranian Kurdish side, other angles have not been included in this research due to the limited scope of this study. Taking into account the importance of some of these other aspects, for instance the cultural and economic angles of cross-border interaction particularly between the Iranian and Iraqi Kurds, may provide a different picture of Kurdish cross-borderness.

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