From Stalemate to Soul Mate:
Emergent Democracy in Kurdistan

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Abstract

The nature of the relationship between the KDP and the PUK has radically shifted from the one extreme, seemingly reconciling all the differences and being a soul mate for a strategic goal, to another extreme being an arch enemy. Existing literature on Kurdish political history focuses predominantly on the impact of international and regional affairs in the formation of Kurdish national political discourse. It underestimates the political impact of fragmented Kurdish demands in the construction of contemporary Kurdish national discourse. Characterising the Kurdish national movement and discourse as one strong unified political movement which is ready to grab any opportunity provided by the international developments is to reduce Kurdish politics to merely a matter of international relations.

Key Words

Northern Iraq, Kurdistan, Kurdish Nationalism, Barzani, Civil War, Shias

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Introduction

There is little need to explain the role of Saddam Hussein as the cruel oppressor over Iraqi society as whole with reference to the last three decades, but in particular that oppression affected those radically who were excluded from political power, such as Shias in the south, and the Kurds in the north. In particular, the Kurds are neither included effectively in the political circle in national government nor is their ethnic, cultural and social rights recognized by the central government. (Stansfield 2006:261-265) Indeed, this latter claim is true of Iraq regardless of type of regime or ideology; such as during the period of colonization by the United Kingdom, during the independent republic, during free officers or during the government of the Ba'ath party.

The first Kurdish political organization; the KDP, was founded in 1946 by Mullah Mustafa Barzani. Subsequently, there have been a number of other Kurdish political parties formed in northern Iraq. Two of them have emerged as the predominant representatives of the majority of the Kurdish community; one is the aforementioned KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party), which is led by traditional tribal leader Massoud Barzani. The other is PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan), which is led by an urban leftist and intellectual Celal Talabani, who is currently president of Iraqi republic. It is seemingly a single party with a homogenous party structure; however, there are small numbers of factions under this political party which exist independently. One such group is *Komala* which was founded by socialist students in the late 1960s and another is called *Bezutnawa* known as social democratic movement. These two main factions in 1975 formed the PUK. (Stansfield 2003:65-80)

In terms of Kurdish political demands there are not many radical differences between 1943 and 2007, although there are massive political changes in both international and regional politics, This however, does not mean that there is no relation or impact between Kurdish national discourse and international politics, on the contrary, as this article will argue that, there are predetermined conditions for the emergence of plural political movements which already exist in Kurdish community rather than stemming from a direct cause and affect relationship with international politics. Existing divisions in the contemporary popular Kurdish political movement against the KDP and PUK domination can not be explained only as the impact of international politics or as a result of regional countries' involvement but rather as a domestic political manifestation made by the unhappy Kurdish masses in response to their unmet political demands. (Stansfield, 2003:261)

Reading Kurdish political history from international relations point of view does not reflect reality on the ground and can not explain the political and ideological differentiations emerged in the last two decades in Kurdish society. In order to explain the pluralisation of contemporary Kurdish politics one needs to explore an essential dichotomy. On the one hand there is strong secular left wing represented by young educated intellectuals

based on urban centres mainly Suleymaniye and on the other hand there is an older generation believing in tribal conservative leaders. These two main factions contained many other sub groups and ideologies.

This article will predominantly discuss the main turning points of the Kurdish political history, with a particular reference to the crucial moments in Iraqi history since its invention as an independent state in 1932. It will explore the growing relationship between rival Kurdish political parties, the KDP and the PUK. In order to highlight the nature of this antagonistic relationship between rival parties the article will take into account; the gulf wars and the civil war period. It will argue that every major change both at national or international level had some direct implications on the development of new political organisations in the Kurdish national movement. (Manafy, 2005:36-37) Alongside an alternative reading of contemporary Kurdish political history, this article particularly will be devoted to further critical explanation of some key questions. They are; how did these rival parties unify? What were the conditions of possibilities made this unification come true? When and how this unification desire appeared? And what are the limitations of this unification into Kurdish politics?

Overview of Kurdish Political History Since the Independence

Iraq became a sovereign nation state with a representative form of government and constitution when the British mandate officially ended in 1932. Under Iraq's new constitution the non-muslims were made full citizens in contrast to their former position of the protected *'Millet'* system during the Ottoman period. The Iraqi constitution in this sense is the first and the most important step towards the creation of national unification. However, the constitution retained some of features of the traditional *'Millet'* system for the benefit of the religious communities. For instance; political rights for religious minorities were specifically recognized in article 37 of the constitution, which insured their representation in the parliament. (Hourani, 1947: 94) They enjoyed the most favoured positions in practically all branches of the government, although their tribal life devoted mostly to agricultural pursuits was not calculated to fit Kurds for government services. The Kurdish language was officially recognized side by side with Arabic in areas where the Kurds formed the majority of the population. (Longrigg, 1953:192)

The Kurds were clearly apprehensive at the prospects of being deprived of British protection after the termination of the mandate. The Kurds boycotted elections and sent appeals to the League of Nations. On July 26, 1930 nine Kurdish leaders of the Suleymaniya district sent a petition to the League of Nation[2] (Yildiz, K. 2004:13) The

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2   Kurdish tribal leaders complained that their 'national rights recognised by the Leagues of Nations have never been respected by the Iraqi authorities,' and demanded the 'formation of a Kurdish Government under the supervision of the League of Nations.' (Permanent Mandates Commission, Nineteen Session, PP. 184 -185)

Kurdish minority showed not only strong desire to maintain a separate identity as an eth-nic group, but also refused to be part of the new Iraqi state in which the Arabs formed a clear majority. The Kurdish refusal to accept their inclusion in Iraq as permanent takes the form of an active struggle to maintain their identity.

During the dissolution of Ottoman Empire and emergence of independent Iraq this new type of tribal power based on the combination of *Agha* and *Sheikh's* cooperation played a major role in the construction of national consciousness among the Kurdish community. (Ozogul 2004:100-105) Kurdish tribal chieftains and a small number of newly emerged Kurdish intellectuals constituted the first Kurdish political organization, the KDP, in 1946.

Mullah Mustafa Barzani who is the legendary leader of the KDP and the father of cur-rent president of the KRG, Massoud Barzani, demanded from central government follow-ings in 1943:

1. The creation of an all-Kurdish province embracing the Liwas of Kirkuk, Arbil, and Suleymaniya, as well as the Kurdish qadas (districts) of Mosul –namely-, Dohuk, 'Amediya', Aqra', Zakho, Sinjar, and Shakyan- and the largely Kurdish qada of Khanaqin in Diyala liwa.

2. The appointment of a Kurdish official with cabinet rank to administer the newly cre-ated Kurdish province.

3. The appointment of a Kurdish undersecretary to each of the various ministries.

4. The cultural, economic and agricultural autonomy of Kurdistan in the widest possi-ble sense, except in matters pertaining to the army and the gendarmerie.

5. The dismissal or transfer from Kurdish areas of officials known for bribery or mis-use of authority.

6. The adoption of Kurdish as an official language.' (Jwaideh, 2006:232)

There are a few points which need to be highlighted in this political manifesto. The first point is that the political organization of the Kurdish community around 'party' rather than an Agha or Sheikh led rebellion raised concerns or cited demands against central government. Even though there had been some popular public demands in these Sheikh led revolts they did not address all Kurds. Barzani was not only demanding to expand Kurdish territories and power, but he was demanding some political, cultural and eco-nomic autonomy for the greater Kurdish nation. The second point is that the Kurdish move-ment and its inclusive character became institutionalized. All Kurds regardless of their tribal affiliation would be able to join and take an active part with their free will in this party politics. This did not mean however, that all Kurds would equally be members and raise their voice in the party politics. Undoubtedly, there were unequal power relations within the party cadres favouring the tribal chieftains and their loyal members. Even though there was an unequal power relation and structure within the party the institutionalisation

of the Kurdish national movement was certainly a new form of making politics for Kurdish masses. Last but not least, although there were some variations and differences, Barzani's political manifesto constituted the core demands of the Kurdish national movement; including political and financial autonomy, socio-cultural rights, territorial claims (Kirkuk) and Peshmerge forces.

It is notable; however, that the Iraqi Central government could not accept all of these demands, and partial acceptance did not satisfy Mullah Barzani and wider Kurdish community. (Jwaideh 2006:234-236) Even though some of the demands, for example, the transferring some of the corrupt officials, and providing more public services into the Kurdish areas, were met, some groups within party structure Barzani and newly emerged socialist factions of the KDP cadres were not happy with overall negotiations. They considered central government's offer as a bribe to ignore more important political demands. The inevitable collapse of negotiations between Barzani and central governments led to military confrontation and a predictable defeat for the Kurdish militias. This vicious circle would be the repeated almost with the same and inevitable consequences throughout Kurdish political history.

In order to consolidate its power, every regime change took a place in Baghdad agreed to settle with some of the demands in Kurdish manifestation. (Tripp 2007:5-6) But, this would only be a temporary and strategic move to eliminate any potential political claim for independence or autonomy. For Kurds the 1958 revolution which ended the kingdom in Iraq, was the harbinger of a new era, therefore all Kurdish organisations welcomed and supported this coup d'état. Free officers led by General Abd al-Kerim Qasim overthrew the Hashemite monarchy and not surprisingly granted some of the Kurdish demands; such as; permission to return of Barzani from exile, and appointing a Kurd, Khalid Naqshbandi, as a member of three man 'sovereignty council'. (Yildiz 2004:16) However, the following political events in the aftermath of 1958 military intervention were not so different from previous Kurdish experience. Once the free officers were established and consolidated their political power, they turned against the Kurds and perceived them a number one national enemy against the construction of Iraqi-Arab national identity. Many small Kurdish political factions were operating within the KDP and as a result of these negotiations the very first signs of splits and oppositions emerged within Kurdish politics. (Yildiz 2004:17)

It was almost a repeated scenario for the Kurds in the July 1968 revolution, which, brought the ruthless Ba'ath regime to power, except that because of the direct involvement of Iran, the U.S. and Israel turned the Kurdish case into an international problem. As Tripp states that 'in July 1968 Hasan al-Bakr appointed three Kurdish ministers, two representing Barzani and the other who identified with Talabani's faction of the KDP. This opened the way for negotiations, but also allowed Hasan al-Bakr and his colleagues, [Saddam Husain was responsible for these negotiations with the Kurds as a second man in command in Baghdad,] to play the factions off against each other.' (Tripp 2007:192)

Barzani took advantage of this political turmoil in Baghdad and organised an offensive strike to Kirkuk in 1969. Although Central Government managed to push the Peshmerge forces out of Kirkuk, because of its very vulnerable situation in Baghdad and the very difficult inaccessible Kurdistan mountains, they failed to achieve a decisive victory. The Ba'ath regime, more importantly, desperately needed to settle with the Kurds in order to consolidate its power in Iraq. Barzani's primary aim was to convert this political vacuum into a golden opportunity for Kurds and increase the political effectiveness of the KDP in future negotiations with government. Ironically, these negotiations ended with the famous March 1970 manifestation.

According to the March manifesto, government, apart from oil, defence and finance, agreed to recognise distinct Kurdish identity and language in education, allowing this to be represented in local and national administration. In addition, by the end of 1974, both parties had agreed to participate in a special committee responsible for the implementation and clarification of this manifesto. In response to the government position Barzani agreed to declare a ceasefire and end his direct and strong alliance with Iran. In actual fact, neither Barzani nor the central government trusted each other; therefore they did not reduce the number of military personnel and seek alternative options for future alliances. (Bengio, 2005:174-176)

Iraq's active involvement in 1973 *Yom Kippur* war and the signing of strategic defence treaties with the Soviets changed both parties' positions from a regional to an international level causing them to seek an active policy changes. This active engagement with international politics opened the way for new actors, Israel and the U.S, interference in the Kurdish case. With strong support from Iran and the U.S, Barzani intensified attacks on Iraqi forces and forced central government to give further concessions. He thought that Kurds could manage to change Saddam's unacceptable autonomy offer before the March 1974 dead line. According to Saddam's offer Kurds would have their autonomous region based in Arbil, but this autonomy was going to be extremely weak, vulnerable, and heavily dependent on its relationship with Saddam. In fact Kurds were offered a puppet autonomy as Saddam would have the power to appoint the president of the autonomous region and also dissolve the parliament at any time. (Tripp 2007:204)

Simultaneously, each party while seeking to increase their power by military means they were having secret meetings to solve their problems, therefore declaration of final agreement in Algiers in March 1975 between Baghdad and Tehran was a complete shock for Barzani. With this agreement Iraq solved its border problem in favour of Iran and Tehran and agreed to stop its military and logistic assistance to Barzani. Without this vital support, Kurdish forces could not resist Saddam's army and surrendered, while the leader and his loyal followers crossed border into Iran. (Tripp 2007:205) This was a dramatic moment for the Kurdish national movement as Saddam's forces advanced into the Kurdish heartland and razed many villages to the ground forcing nearly half a million Kurds to move into central and southern Iraq.

The collapse of 1975 revolt was the final breaking point for opposition groups within the KDP. Barzani's admittance of this heavy defeat and unconditional surrender proved to be a catalyst in the emergence of uncontainable opposition. As explained previously, the KDP consisted of number of different factions varying form socialist to nationalists, opposition groups had different concerns relating to the KDP's policies and its leadership. Talabani was the leading figure of the socialist groups within the KDP and he had challenged Barzani previously in 1964 and 1970, during the negotiation with the government of Iraq in 1964, without the political bureau's approval, or even consultation, Barzani had signed an agreement which fell significantly short of the original demands such as autonomy. (Stansfield 2003:72) After Barzani expelled Talabani and other prominent political bureau members from the KDP administration in 1964, he demanded autonomy and initiated a military offence against the government. (2003:73) Talabani not only criticised Barzani and his leadership skills for not obtaining more constructive and better results in negotiation with the government, but also highlighted the fact that Barzani's ideological position was irreconcilable with his leftist, maoist, view. Despite the position of some other opposition groups acting with different motives, Talabani was the prominent figure who could organise and direct opposition groups under the PUK organisation. When Barzani ordered that 'all armed Kurds to hand in their weapons,' (2003:83) the *Komala* and *Bezutnawa* formed an umbrella organization, the PUK, under the Talabani's leadership.

In the aftermath of 1975, the two main parties engaged in an open conflict and antagonism. For instance; in 1978, in Hakkari province in Turkey, the KDP ambushed and killed around 700 PUK peshmerges with famous commanders, Ali Askari, Dr. Khalid Sa'id and Sheikh Yezdi. (Stansfield 2004:87-89) Although there are number of theories about who was responsible for this massacre and what had happened exactly, the Hakkari massacre caused further fragmentation within Kurdish political movement. Sami Abdurrahman who was a prominent and well respected politician left the Barzani and established his own party called the Kurdistan Popular Democratic Party. From the PUK front, some of the *Bezutnawa* members left the party and formed the Kurdistan Socialist Party. (McDowall 1996:346) Every national and international political change affecting regional countries prepared the conditions for the emergence of existing but dissatisfied groups and ideologies. Within the boundaries of this main argument we should consider the opposition groups operating with different motives such as Sami Abdurrahman and his faction as a direct challenge to Barzani's leadership skills and traditionalism which presented danger to the KDP's unification. (Stansfield, 2003:89)

The Iran – Iraq war and the *Anfal* campaign in 1988 support further our main claim, in preparing the conditions for the Islamic movement of Iraqi Kurdistan (IMIK) in 1992. The sudden and unexpected emergence of IMIK was one of the crucial moments of Iraqi Kurdish political history. Sunni Islam, in terms of the number of followers in comparison to the other denominations such as Shia Kurds, is the most powerful religious denomination (Bruinessen 1992:23). Within this Sunni structure there are also Sufi brotherhoods Qadiris

and Naqshbandis. Despite their ideological background both Talabani (Qadiri) and Barzani, (Naqshi) or even Saddam, used this religious network to mobilise and legitimise their power. (McDowall 1996:12, 355, Leezenberg 2006:213) As a result, the question which needs to be posed here is; why did the religious groups and leaders, sheikhs, not organise themselves as a different and distinguished political movement? Why did they prefer and enjoy being members of different parties?

Historically, all Iraqi ethnic groups were considered a part of millet system due to their religious affiliation. As a response and reaction to this system, both Sunni Arab and Kurdish nationalisms formed themselves on the basis of their ethnic identity rather than religious. (Leezenberg 2006:212, McDowall 1996:2) This was because; firstly, secular Kurdish nationalists perceived religion, particularly Islamic identity, as a potential threat to their imagined national identity. They even claimed that Kurds were forced to accept Islam because Kurds true religion is Zoroastrianism. (Leezenberg 2006:204-205) Secondly, Islamic movements could not develop a strategy to lead all opposition groups, instead Islamic movements such as Muslim Brothers have got good and close relationship with regimes and more importantly they refused using violence as political means (Leezenberg, 2006:214) Thirdly, the language and discourse of the Islamic movements were more focused on the international issues such as Palestine by using *Jihadist* discourse and focusing the importance of being part of *Ummet* rather than a specific nation and it's political problems. For the first time in political history of Iraq, Kurds were making a political claim which was not based on their distinguished ethnic identity but their belief. The IMIK was a political movement which aims to establish an Islamic government in Baghdad by if necessary, using violence. I would like to criticize Leezenberg's claim that the IMIK 'is a guerrilla movement rather than a civilian political party.' He substantiates this with here say to support his claim 'muslim conservatives conducted a campaign of throwing acid on the exposed legs of urban women wearing mini skirts.' (Leezenberg 2006:217) As he himself admits in the endnotes of his article[4] He cannot provide evidence or a quote from reliable source for this particularly important claim. However this does not mean that such activities never taken a place in Kurdistan.[5] In addition to the methodological criticism my main objection is that he underestimates the significant political developments to explain the IMIK's emergence in Iraqi politics. The structural organisation of IMIK isn't radically different from the other main parties. Although Islamic movements in Iraq and amongst the Kurdish population existed much earlier than nationalism did they did not have enough potential and produce powerful enough national discourse to become a

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4   He states that 'I suspect that these assaults are an import of South Asian (perhaps Pakistani) origin, where throwing acid in enemies' and (especially women's') face has become sadly widespread practice; but I must admit I have insufficient knowledge about these matters.

5   For instance, I found out about 56 news on Google search engine supporting this claim. However, the reliability of this information is always questionable.

leading voice for the oppressed people of Iraq.

Although Leezenberg has no reference for his claims about the Islamic revolution in 1979 and war with Iraq followed with the most tragic ethnic cleansing operation against the Kurds and Anfal campaign. This certainly provides some explanation for the emergence of a sudden and successive revival of the Islamic movements in Iraq in 1992. (Leezenberg 2006:216-217) We should not confuse Islamic Movement of Iraq with existing Sufi Brotherhoods (Qadiri and Naqshbandi). As a political movement IMK (Islamic Movement of Iraq) is distinguished from Sufi orders by using its powerful Jihadist rhetoric against the central government of Iraq. When the leader of the IMK mullah Othman Abdulaziz declared a holy jihad against central government in 1987 he was not only opposing the Ba'ath party and government but also he was calling his supporter in fight against the infidels, Communist Kurds, the PUK. (Leezenberg 2206:219)

'Chemical' Ali's infamous Halabja attack was a turning point for the IMK and its leaders to isolate themselves from the Muslim brothers who did not condemn the attack and further did not approve the military struggle against central government of Iraq. (Leezenberg 219) In a state of severe economic deprivation, political turmoil and corruption, the IMK have managed to convert Kurdish people's anger against both the regime in Iraq and the existing Kurdish national leaders into strong popular support. They have suggested that they are an alternative to this endless conflict. As a result of this public anger and desperation IMK came third in 1992 election and won 5%[6] of the total vote. (McDowall 1996: 387) They managed to get substantial support and votes not surprisingly from war torn city of Halabja, and even more votes from economically deprived city centres Suleymaniye and Arbil. Conversely, the IMK's political stance and program was not affective amongst the northern tribes which were stronghold of traditional KDP areas. The IMK has become another important and independent[7] political actor in Iraqi Kurdish political structure.

Kurds during Iran-Iraqi War

The KDP and the PUK have differed over the degree to which they should accommodate the central government and over their relationships with Iran, sometimes swapping positions, but their biggest differences have resulted from disagreements over political power and revenue sharing. (Hiltermann 2007:86-88)

Regional political developments have further complicated the status of the Kurds in Iraq. During the first few years of the 1980-1988 war, the Iraqi government adopted a

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6   It seems that there is a little confusion on the percentage of the IMK. For instance McDowall (1996:386) gives the IMK votes as % 4 but Leezenberg (2006:221) states this as %5.

7   Some scholars such as McDowall (1996: 386) and Leezenberg 2006:223) point out the international support and links of the IMK. Despite this fact I argue that economic deprivation of the city centres, and chemical attack in Halabja in 1988 were more important factor than any stated Iranian or Saudi support.

more conciliatory approach toward the Kurds to minimize domestic problems that would complicate the war effort. For Saddam the worst case scenario was the strong co operation of Iranian with Kurds. In order to keep northern border safe from Iranian attacks he simultaneously carried out secret negotiations with Barzani then Talabani. In 1984, Talabani's PUK agreed to cooperate with the government, although Barzani and the KDP remained in opposition. (Hiltermann 2007:88) By 1987, the diminishing military threat from Iran and a truce between Barzani and Talabani (Yildiz 2004:25, McDowall 1996:351) freed the government to concentrate additional forces against the Kurds. Arbitrary imprisonment, torture, and forced resettlement of Kurds outside their area were accelerated, and Iraqi forces launched at least two lethal gas attacks against Kurdish targets in 1988, including the town of Halabja in March 16, 1988, where about 5,000 were killed. Halabja has become a symbol of ethnic cleansing and the horrible national traumatic memories of the genocide policies of the Saddam's Arab nationalism. In total, by the summer 1989 more than 180, 000 Kurdish civilians were killed and more than 4000 villages and lands were destroyed. (Stansfield 2004:90-91).

Kurds were traumatised by the impact of the Anfal campaign and held their leaders responsible for all atrocities. When the operation ended in 1989 Kurdish intellectuals and public retrospectively criticisized their leaders and policies (Hiltermann 2007:226-227), as I have suggested previously it was not so difficult for the IMIK to fill the gap and become an alternative for Kurds. Further divisions in both parties occurred. These factions later rejoined with the KDP, for instance Sami Abdurrahman and the PUK as Stansfield notes; 'a great deal of damage had been done to the position of the PUK by this grouping, and the fault lines it created in the 1980s are still apparent twenty years later.' (Stansfield 2004:91) One such occurrence is that Mustafa Nawsirvan, a prominent leader of the PUK left the party in 2005 to create an independent and alternative list for the oncoming regional and national elections.[8]

Despite their ideological differences Talabani and Barzani went into immediate cooperation at the end of the 1980-1988 Iraq-Iran war. This was as a direct result of Saddam's ethnic cleansing policies known as *Anfal*.[9] The Military superiority of the central government of Iraq was also another reason to push Barzani and Talabani forces, the Peshmerge, in to the mountainous area in Northern Iraq. The defeat was completely destructive in terms of the military network of the Kurdish national movement and psychologically it demoralized Kurdish national hopes. This unexpected political development forced these two main parties and other smaller ones into the establishment of the Iraqi Kurdistan Front

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8   Indeed, the Goran movement has achieved a great success in both national and local elections. They won 25 seats out of 111 in Kurdistan National Assembly and 8 seats in Baghdad in 2010 national election.

9   Anfal is the name of chapter (75) in Quran and means that spoils of the war. This campaign consists of 7 different but interrelated operations towards the KDP and the PUK forces. (Hiltermann 2007:133)

(IKF) in May 1988. (Anderson and Stansfield 2004:88) Although the IKF consisted of many rival parties[10] this political frontier organised and supported the main political and military struggles against the Iraqi government.

Sudden and quite unforeseen international political developments gave a historic opportunity for the Kurdish struggle to gain its momentum once again. Saddam's invasion of Kuwait was indeed a turning point in the Kurdish history. Because of the bitter experience of the 1975, the key question in the Kurdish leaders' minds at the eve of second gulf war was the reliability of international support.[11] Kurds during their struggle against the Central Government of Iraq have experienced many betrayals by outside supporters on previous occasions; such as the Soviet Republic in 1946, or Iran either in the 1964 uprising or in the recent war. Moreover, the failure of international support to stop the use of chemical weapons against the Kurds had a deep psychological affect on Kurdish public opinion. (Anderson and Stansfield 2004:180) This trauma can be best illustrated by the famous Kurdish saying;

'Kurds have no friends but mountains.'

We should attempt to analyse this critically under the light of Kurdish political history and explain the limits of this cooperation. In the case of serious common threat and the danger of total national destruction it is very logical and understandable to create a front which eliminates the existing difference and increases morale. The Peshmerge keeps national spirit alive and provides fresh hopes for the national unity. On the other hand to break this imagined national unity Saddam and the Ba'ath administration deployed a seemingly efficient divide and rule policy over Kurds. They simultaneously created their pro-government Kurdish groups. Saddam however, took this a step further; organized these Kurdish groups, (*Jash*)[12] armed them, and used them as a way to weaken and divide the Kurdish national front. (Manafy 2005:48) Once the Kurdish front was divided then the Kurds would be fighting against Kurds and Central government of Iraq would be in control for manipulating negotiations in favour of its policies.

This well might be seen as true explanation of Kurdish Politics for 1980s and early 1990s but as this article will argue that every significant national and international political event has got some crucial impact on the consciousness of Kurdish people. The prime example of this argument was the rise of the IMIK in 1990s. It was one of the first signs of the Kurdish people showing that their loyalty is not granted for the KDP and PUK. More

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10 This front would be in active until the invasion of Kuwait which served as a catalyst and strengthened the cooperation of Kurdish parties for creating autonomous Kurdistan region. The IKF 'was an umbrella covering the KDP, PUK, KPDK, KSP, PASOK, ICP, KTP and AD.' (Stansfield 2004:92)

11 When Talabani visited Washington in just after Iraqi invasion of Kuwait he stated that 'we have been deceived many times by foreigners. We are determined no to make the same mistakes again.' (Gunter 1999:27)

12 McDowall gives the total number of Jash by the summer 1986 as 150,000. (1996:354)

importantly they also showed a strong reaction and criticism towards their leaders' incompetent policies and seek for alternatives for their demands. In that sense not the international system but every unmet demand among the Kurdish community will add just another faction and fresh challenge into the existing fragmented political structure.

The Second Gulf War and Its Aftermath

After an initial hesitation and worries[14] the Iraqi Kurdish Front an alliance with pro government militia called the *Jash*[15], following the defeat of Saddam's land forces on the 4th of March 1991, initiated a popular uprising against government forces in major towns simultaneously with a Shia uprising in the south. The outcome was not what the Kurds had wanted in fact their worst case scenario came true. The US led coalition forces refused to intervene to support the rebels. They had once more been abandoned by the US led international forces. There were of course some internal and external reasons for not supporting Kurdish uprising; the most important one was that the coalition forces were not in a full agreement about post Saddam Iraq. They feared that in the event of break up of Iraqi state neighbouring countries, mainly Iran and Turkey, would intervene and claim part of Iraq. (Romano 2006:205-206, Tripp 2000:258)

Once again history repeated itself and real politics defeated the nationalistic dream. The cost of the failure of protecting the Kurds against Saddam's brutal dictatorship was beyond the imagination. Over 2 million Kurds had to leave their homes and fled into Turkey and Iran. (Romano 2006:207) On 5 April, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 688 which imposed an immediate halt for any military action against Iraqi civilians particularly the Kurds. In addition to this, coalition forces declared the creation of 'safe heaven area, which meant that there would be no Iraqi aircraft north of the 36 parallel. These policies were further supported by large scale international humanitarian aid. (Polk 2006:157-8) The NGO's started to operate and organize this aid program in the north. However, all these policies and resolutions were only temporary and emergency arrangements, until a final peace settlement with Government of Iraq could be reached, so in 1992 the Kurdish leaders opened negotiation with Saddam on autonomy for Kurdistan.

In order to force the Kurdish leaders to accept his terms Saddam announced a blockade[16] which meant the withdrawal of administration and offices from Kurdish area. Someone had to administer Kurdistan. This unexpected new development constituted

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14 Deputy Chairman of Revolutionary Command Izzat Ibrahim warned the Kurds in Suleymaniye 'if you have forgotten the Halabja, I would like to remind you that we are ready to repeat the operation' (McDowall, 1996:370)

15 The *Jash* is originally founded by the central government of Iraq at the beginning of 1960s amongst the loyal Kurdish tribes. The Jash means that 'donkey foul' in Kurdish.

16 It should be noted that this blockade intensified the existing international embargo (UN Resolution 688) over Iraq. Some writers call this 'double blockade'.

another historic point for Kurdish National movement. Despite the traumatic memories of ethnic cleansing and chemical attacks of the Ba'ath just few years back both leaders did not lose time in starting immediate negotiations with Baghdad.[17]

They could hold free democratic election to govern themselves. The front immediately withdrew from demanding formal autonomy and declared its intentions to replace old administrative forces and to govern Kurdistan. (Natali 2005:64) The election took place on 19 May 1992. McDowall noted that 'overwhelming majority voted according to their sense of personal loyalty many were the beneficiaries of patronage networks, other directly to a political leader, or via intermediaries trough whom services or supplies available….. Many Jash who could sell their services had 'shop around.' (1996:380)

It is clear that in this election campaign personalities and tribal kinship played a major role rather than any ideological differentiation. Although, the front declared that this election would be on the basis of proportional representation, with a threshold of 7 percent of the vote to be elected[18] the results, even if there was a confusion and dispute over victory, were an equal distribution of the seats between the KDP and the PUK with 50 seats each and 5 guaranteed seats for Christian Assyrians. (1996:383) Following the election the first Kurdistan regional assembly convened on 4 June 1992 and a month later formed its first government, the KRG (Kurdistan Regional Government). (Gunter 1999:29)

At first glance it may seem that this was the first attempts to create a democratic regime in Iraqi Kurdistan, and some writers such as Natali and Stansfield, even if they address some difficulties, claim that Kurds are not alien to democracy and they are not a primitive tribal society. However, there are some other writers such as McDowall claim that this is not a properly functioning democracy but a new tribalism based on two major tribal confederation, the KDP and the PUK. (1996:387) From the 1992 election results and campaign it seems that this argument would be a fair and better one to describe the reality of Kurdish national movement in 1990's. The two parties were in full control of the leadership of Barzani and Talabani even though they remained outside the parliament; their strong personalities and control over party politics were causing serious obstacles in constituting an institutional democracy. In practical terms this unified administration was unable to act without consent of the leaders and the sudden experience of self rule in fact deepened the existing fragmentation and made it more vulnerable than the pre self rule era. In the existing of a real common threat, Saddam, the parties consolidated their differences and acted in a coalition against the central government. (Romano 2006:21) But in the

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17 Gunter states that 'Saad Salih Jabr, the chairman of the free Iraqi Council, cabled Barzani: 'we were surprised and shocked… by the Kurdish front's holding of negotiations with Saddam's regime. We were even more shocked by the …exchanging [of] kisses and embrace with Saddam at a time when the blood of the… Iraqi people in general have not yet dried.' (Gunter 1999:37)

18 Stansfield states that more than 40 parties participated in the 1992 elections. (Stansfield 2003:96)

absence of such external other which accommodates the internal differences the real challenge for Kurds was to find political solutions to their problems and provide services to their subjects. It was very clear that by the 1993 neither of the parties was willing to transfer its power, particularly peshmerge and financial resources, to the common institutions.

Although both party leaders claimed that they won the election, as Talabani later admitted in an interview, 'everyone ended up dissatisfied with the results.' (Gunter 1999:29) The next election which changed this dead lock of the equal power sharing system would be in 1995. It would be decisive about the leading party. As McDowall states it was time for both parties to go shopping in Kurdish voting market in order to increase their chance to win the next election. The only ways to achieve that aim was to establish new coalitions with existing small parties and to expand the patron client network to unaffiliated Kurds by providing some privileges or violating human rights, intimidation policies including torture.[19]

Civil War Between the KDP and the PUK, the Washington Agreement in 1998

The main characteristic of the Kurdish national movement in the 1990's was its dual structure and endless antagonisms between two dominant political parties. After the formation of the first government, each party tried to expand their influence over the small non affiliated Kurdish tribes. Each and every attempt to change the statues quo caused another tension between the KDP and the PUK and eventually escalated into an open conflict involving regional and international actors.

There were several reasons for this ferocious civil war. The first Narrative is based on a simple land dispute between different tribes which were loyal to rival parties. This simple issue turned into long lasting civil war causing more than 10,000 peoples lives. Some politicians such as Omer Marani[20] who is the official representative of the KDP in Turkey and scholars such as McDowall (1996:386) believe this narrative, although they admit that civil war has been complicated further with involvement of other factors such as emergence of IMIK but the main reason the civil war took a place between early 1993 and 1998 was the change of allegiance of a section of the *Harki* tribe from the KDP to the PUK. The tribe had offered his service to the KDP because in return they expected that the KDP would help them to settle a land dispute in its favour, in fact the KDP failed to help the tribe in its claim. As a result, the *Harki* tribe then switched its allegiance to the PUK and seized the land they had claimed. (Stansfield 2003:96-97) In addition to this tribal loyalty

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19 For full and detailed account of these practices please see Human rights Watch reports volume 16. No.4 and volume 19. No.2

20 I conducted an interview with Mr. Marani in Ankara on 17.01.2009.

some previously separated small opposition parties changed their allegiances too. For instances while Sami Abdurrahman and other three small opposition parties[21] rejoined with KDP, pro Iranian and supposedly socialist group headed by Hama Haji Mahmoud switched its allegiance from KDP to PUK.(Tahiri 2007:174)

Another important factor in the 93/8 civil war was the rise of Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (IMK) led by Mulla Uthman Abd al Aziz of Halabja. With the strong support of Iran, the IMK gained a considerable amount of vote in Halabja, Panjwin and Khurmal. McDowall explains that; *'the ground in Kurdistan is ready for an Islamic revival. They see the mistakes and corruption of the KDP and PUK very clearly and Iran supports these groups with food and weapons.' (1996:386)* It was indeed an ironic situation that having fought bitter struggles to be free from direct rule of an Arab regime, the Kurds had asked to Saddam to be their legitimising source for autonomy and be the conciliatory force between them. Political Islam became an outlet for the non tribal and urban based Kurdish people. (Natali 2005:65) As it has been illustrated above both the KDP and the PUK had been supported by Iran many times and more importantly this circumstantial and conditional support was not posing real threat to the existing status quo in Kurdish politics. However, the IMIK firstly was not considered as a foreign political power by the main stream parties and more importantly the real power of political Islam was stemming from indigenous Kurdish people who were extremely disappointed by the policies of the main parties. Although they could not get any seat in the parliament because %7 threshold they initiated to implement some social services such as hospitals, schools which were much appreciated by economically deprived Kurdish people. (Tahiri 2007:174) Therefore, the meaning of this popular support for the IMIK was considered to be substantial enough to change equally shared political power in Kurdistan. In fact, the PUK perceived the rise of political Islam is a direct threat to itself because of ideological differences. The IMIK's Islamic values indeed were not compatible with the PUK's socialist principles.

In addition to the shifting allegiance between rival Kurdish parties sharing cross border custom revenues was another important reason for this civil war. Geographically the KDP was located to the North of Iraq where the intersection of Turkish and Iranian border. Therefore the main commercial route to Iraq was under the control of Barzani's peshmerge and the KDP was in full control of around $1 million per day income from *Khalil Ibrahim* custom centre.[22] (Manafy 2005:51) Due to its geographical position Talabani was unable to access to this income and having serious difficulties to fund its own peshmerge forces and public services. Talabani felt very disadvantaged and claimed an equal share

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21 Tahiri states that 'the Kurdistan socialist party (KSP), the Kurdistan popular democratic party (KPDP) and the Kurdish independent party (KIP) which had all polled very poorly in the election, united and formed the Kurdistan Unity Party (KUP). In the summer of 1993, the KUP united with the KDP.' (2007:176)

22 As Olson points: 'during the 1990s around 500 to 1500 trucks a day used the border port of Habur/Ibrahim al-Khalil, After the US invasion of Iraq in March 2003, the truck traffic rose to some 2000 trucks a day (2005:25).

of custom revenues. In fact equal share of custom revenue was crucial to increase PUK's public support and expand its network. Without this fund, as McDowell highlighted above many Jash commanders and tribes were available to vote for the highest bid, it was almost certain that the PUK would not be as successful as in the next election which was scheduled in June 1995. In that case it would not be very speculative to claim that there would be some dramatic irreversible political consequences for the PUK.

From international political perspectives neither regional nor international players would want such internecine civil war between Kurdish parties. Firstly, for Turkey this new political fight would destabilise the region and allow the PKK to expand and strengthening its network to fill the political vacuum created by this political turmoil. For the U.S and European countries, mainly England and France, this is not the most desirable futuristic scenario as Kurds stand out the most powerful opposition group to topple Saddam. A civil war would destroy the concept that Kurds need to be protected from Iraqi dictator. And more importantly this would cause big question of eligibilities and feasibility of implementing democratic values among Kurdish communities. Although it seems that it is an irrational act from different international point of views as it is highlighted that this was very rational perhaps unavoidable clash for the rival parties to be dominant power in Iraqi Kurdistan. Therefore, it is very difficult to explain this internecine civil war with external power. Instead, it seems that it would be more logical to explain from internal political developments.

Not long after the first clashes, under the French government initiative with British and American diplomats' participation the representatives of the main parties met in Paris to reach a peace agreement attempt in July 1994. In the declaration both parties agreed to cease all fighting, not interfering the KRG policies, respecting democracy, human and minority rights and immediate reforms on financial and military institutions. (Gunter 1999:77) Neither Paris agreement nor the INC (Iraqi National Congress) initiatives could not resolve the problems. Each time the leaders reiterated good wills and the need for peaceful settlements but failed to implement those decisions. However we should point out those external powers maintained the balance of power and prevented total domination of one side to another. For instance, when Talabani forces occupied the capital city, Arbil, and the KRG parliament in 1995 and in 1997 Turkish army entered in northern Iraq with some 50.000 troops in the name of fighting with PKK but gave logistic and military support to the KDP to prevent PUK's decisive victory. (Tahiri 2007:178) In reaction to this open involvement of Turkey in Kurdish fighting Iranian forces carried out a military operation against Iranian Kurds based in Iraq with considerable support of the PUK peshmerge. As a result of this active cooperation the PUK's forces received Iranian's direct military assistance against Turkey and America backed KDP forces. (Gunter 1999:85)

The 93/8 civil war turned into a complex paradoxical situation when the leader of the KDP, Barzani, invited Saddam's forces into the city of Arbil to help fight against Talabani forces. (Lundgren 2007:76) This was a perfect opportunity for Saddam to show its presence in Kurdish problem and destroy the American sponsored INC's infrastructure based

in Arbil. (Stansfield 2003:98) This policy shows ironically how volatile the political structure of Iraqi Kurdistan is. In order to counteract Barzani's unexpected move, Talabani asked for immediate Iranian support to regain the control of Suleymaniye. Barzani justified his act by claiming that 'after the United States and the west refused to listen us and help us, we agreed with the central government to end this foreign threat.'(Gunter 1999:86) Both leaders accused each other for being an agent of foreign powers and betraying great Kurdish nation.[23] Upon the invasion of Arbil by Saddam's forces Turkey with active participation and support of Britain and American administration invited both parties to so called Ankara peace process in late October 1996 and in the second round of this meeting in September 1997. (Barkey and Fuller 1998:159-161) According to Ankara peace process both parties agreed on followings: 'formation of an interim coalition government including relatively small ethnic minority representatives, normalisation of the city of Arbil, transfer of the Kurdistan regions revenues including those from the Ibrahim Khalil, border crossing to the central bank of Kurdistan and setting of a date for general elections. (Gunter 1999:86) there is no need to express that none of these principles were implemented until direct involvement of the American administration and inviting both parties to Washington in 1998.

By the end of 1996, the picture became clear about who shared the power; the governorate of Erbil and Dohuk was in control of the KDP; whereas the PUK was in control of the city of Suleymaniye. Barzani demanded an immediate military intervention of the Turkish and American forces against Talabani's move. Two Turkish armoured brigade units, around 2,000 soldiers, were deployed in Northern Iraq to stabilize the internal balance of power.(Stansfield 2003:98) Growing international and regional countries' concerns led the two parties to sign a peace agreement in Washington in 1998. According to this agreement both parties agreed to:

1. Normalise the situation of Erbil, Suleymaniye and Dohuk, with both parties being able to operate in all cities.

2. Introduce revenue-sharing, particularly with regard to the crossing-point of Ibrahim Khalil.

3. Establish a temporary unified government.

4. Reunify the KNA (Kurdistan National Assembly)

5. Address security issues, especially with regard to the PKK.

6. Make arrangements for the return of Internally Displaced People (IDP).

7. Agree the timing of the multi-party election. (Stansfield 2003:101)

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23   'in reference to mullah Mustafa Barzani's surrender to Baghdad in march 1975 and his son's reputed current dealings with Turkey and Saddam's regime, the PUK began increasingly refer to the KDP as 'defeatist' and ' agents'. Talabani also called Barzani a 'liar'. For its part, the KDP   referred to the PUK's actions as 'treason' and its fighters as 'jalali jackass' an illusion to Talabani's earlier alliance with Baghdad in 1960s.' (Gunter 1999:80)

In comparison to the other attempts for breaking a peace between these stalemates there is not a radical change from what has been agreed in previous deals. Then the question we should also ask that what made the Washington process successful? Why these two leaders although they talked and agreed almost the same principles many times before they failed to operationalize the peace agreement?

By the end of 1997 it was very obvious for Kurdish public and leaders that neither of the rival parties would be able to claim a victory. Therefore, I strongly believe that the main reason for the predictable success of Washington agreement is the realisation of the impossibility of a decisive victory and ever increasing number of Kurdish people who are extremely unhappy about their leaders' action and perceive this destructive war as the biggest threat of Kurdish national unification. Both leaders are more concerned about this public anger and dissatisfaction than regional countries' interest.

Talabani was the first to take an initiative and sent a letter to Barzani in just before the beginning of the holy month, Ramadan, starting with 'taking into consideration the primary interest of Kurdistan and the Kurdish people…' (Gunter 1999:90) Barzani responded Talabani's letter positively stating that 'undoubtedly, the internal fighting has inflicted enormous hardship[24] to our people internally or externally. The future of Kurdistan's progress depends upon reconciliation, brotherhood and peace. Kurdish unity and dialogue will pave the way for an honourable and just resolution of the Kurdish people's legitimate aspirations within Iraq's unity and sovereignty.' (1999: 93) as Barzani highlights that civil war changed Kurdish people's perception and priorities significantly which in turn affected their leaders who considered peace is more beneficiary than war. Despite this goodwill and strategic timing before the holy month the people of Kurdistan never forgot the days of the civil war and crimes committed against them.(Lawrence, 2008:30)[25]

Conclusion

A majority of scholars claim that modern Kurdish political history, since the Bedirhan revolt in 1847, is a repetition of endless fighting for power and status amongst the Kurds. This particular approach frames Kurds and Kurdish leaders as a mere pawns in international politics, presenting Kurdish political history as a series of responses to the involvement of foreign powers. Although throughout the modern history of Kurds there are plenty of examples of such involvement, but when one examines the details of the development of Kurdish politics there is a more complex picture. In order to explain how Kurdish

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24 This internecine civil war indeed caused extreme hardship on Kurdish people. For instance human rights watch stated in 1997, 70,000 people were displaced by rival parties. And even used the term 'political cleansing' to describe the human right violations committed by both parties in Kurdistan during civil war. (Gunter 1999:88)

25 There were many protests and public inquiry about the fate of missing people and properties confiscated from rival party members during the civil war. for further information please see Kamal Cohamani's article on http://www.kurdmedia.com/article.aspx?id=15489 accessed on 20.02.2010

national movement developed in Iraq we need to consider the number of internal and external developments but our focus should be on the nature of this relationship between the periphery and centre.

It is indeed in terms of ethnic identity Kurds do no not constitute a homogenous community. On the one hand there is a traditional chain of power represented *sheikhs* and *aghas*, which is the continuation of late Ottoman policies, and on the other hand there are new emerging modern political groups which are represented by urban elites, middle class Kurds. Therefore History of modern Kurds is the history of these two main factions power struggle in relation to the regional and international developments. We should not assume that the periphery will be the only determinant factor in shaping the future of the Kurdish national movement in Iraq. Instead of examining Kurdish politics from international and regional perspectives I pointed out that the pluralisation of the Kurdish national movement since 1964 is a direct result of internal opposition which challenges the leadership and party policies in response to the regional and international developments.

Sometimes the relationship between the internal dynamic and external factors might be in combination, affecting each other as illustrated in the emergence of the Islamic movement in 1992. The picture is complex. It would not be fair to explain the popular support of the IMIK only in connection to the Iranian revolution in 1979 or the Halabja attack. I argue that the external factors have prepared the pre-condition for the success for the predominantly Sunni Islamic movement of Kurdistan in 1992. We should also consider social bases of the political movements and inefficiency of Kurdish parties in providing social and public services. However this is not to claim that 'Kurdish forces have adopted whatever generally available ideological programme and vocabulary has suited them at best at the time.' (Halliday, 2006:18) Islamic movements would not be feasible without Islamic community which was reactivated by the Halabja and Anfal campaign. Despite the fact that there are considerable amount of Shia Kurds, it would not be possible to imagine a strong Shia political movement in Iraqi Kurdistan as the majority of Kurds (%80) belong to Sunni branches of Islam. (McDowall 1996:11, Bruinessen 1992:23) This means that limits of the possibilities of political organisations in Kurdish community are constructed by the combination of the socioeconomic structures and regional political developments.

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