

**Out of the Mountains into Politics:  
The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in Iraq**

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## ***Abstract***

In 1988, the Kurdish population of Iraq was systematically targeted in an organized military campaign now known as the Anfal Genocide. The Kurdish nationalist movement in Iraq, historically a rebellious and strong conglomeration of Kurdish tribes, was brought to its knees in this bloody example of state political violence. Fast-forward twenty years, and the same men and women who once ran through the hills with Kalashnikovs and mourned the loss of their families from chemical gas attacks are serving in official political offices, negotiating with international corporations, and greeting heads of state. How did this extraordinary change of circumstance occur? Why have the Kurds gained such political power? By applying social movement theory to the ethnic nationalist movement of the Iraqi-Kurds, this paper explains the rise of Kurdish political power as a result of the successful use of key political opportunities, effective resource mobilization, and critical attention to cultural framing.

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## **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

In 1988, the Kurdish minority inside Iraq, estimated at 5 million, or approximately 17% of the state's population<sup>1</sup>, was targeted in a planned, systematic military campaign. What would later become known as the Anfal Genocide was ordered by Saddam Hussein, directed by Ali Hassan al-Majid, and carried out by the Iraqi Ba'athist military. The complete vulnerability of the Iraqi Kurdish community was proven with bloody efficiency, as thousands were killed while the international community stood by in silence. Fast-forward twenty years, and the picture changes dramatically. The Kurdistan Regional Government is a legitimate territorial entity participating in a democratic, federal Iraqi central government. The same men and women who once ran through the hills with Kalashnikovs and mourned the loss of their families from chemical gas attacks are serving in official political offices, negotiating with international corporations, and greeting heads of state. In a speech to the students of the new English-language University of Kurdistan-Hawler in Erbil on December 6, 2007, the KRG Minister of Foreign Affairs Falah Mustafa Bakir described the dramatic change in the situation of the Kurdish region in northern Iraq:

Once our independence was unstable and de-facto, today it is well founded and de-jure. Once we were the recipients of humanitarian aid, today we play a role on the international stage. Once the mountains were our only friends, today, we are visited by men and women of every creed and color. Once we were a persecuted minority in Iraq, today we are a key political player, the engine that binds and drives the political process.<sup>2</sup>

How did this happen to a historically oppressed minority? Why have the Kurds of Iraq become so politically powerful?

Answering these questions involves understanding the Kurdish nationalist movement as a social movement. In the available research that has focused on the emergence of the

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<sup>1</sup> "Iraq," *CIA World Factbook*, Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>. Accessed December 8, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> KRG Minister of Foreign Affairs Falah Mustafa Bakir, in a speech to the University of Kurdistan-Hawler, Erbil, Iraq, 6 Dec 2007.

Kurdish nationalist movement, and nationalist movements in general, very few scholars have utilized ideas of social movements and organizational behavior. Even fewer have extended these theoretical tools to examine the development and changes inside these movements. Much can be learned from doing just this with a relatively ‘successful’ nationalist movement. The literature tracing and analyzing the initial emergence of the Iraqi Kurdish movement is abundant and intellectually rich. Recent journalistic accounts of current political developments are also plentiful. Yet, there is a gap in the proper scholarly analysis of these recent events, especially through the lens of social movements. Though I recognize significant attention must be paid to historical developments, especially regarding the emergence of political opportunities, I hope to fill this gap by focusing my analysis on the Kurdish movement as it has developed after the seeming destruction of the Kurdish movement in Iraq following the Anfal. *This paper will argue that through the use of key political opportunities, effective resource mobilization, and critical attention to cultural framing, the Kurdish national movement in Iraq has developed into a legitimized territorial entity with significant political power.*

Though the interaction and national desires of all Kurds are vital to my thesis, this paper narrows the focus specifically to the Kurds in Iraq. Broad cross-border studies of the Kurdish ethnic identity are valuable, but lack political and social depth exclusive to the state system of which these communities are imbedded. The lack of extensive contact between the Kurdish populations, combined with state-specific policies and a significant amount of cultural and linguistic division among the Kurds themselves, kept the threat at bay for decades. The intense determination of their respective host states to prevent a wider Kurdish movement has also caused the Kurdish communities to develop very differently under various state structures and political circumstances. Former US Ambassador Peter Galbraith, a longtime friend and political advisor to the Iraqi Kurds, pinpoints the unique situation in

Iraq, writing, “The Kurds have suffered in all the countries where they live, but nowhere as horrifically as in Iraq. Not surprisingly, therefore, Iraq is the incubator of Kurdish nationalism, and the place where the Kurds are closest to their dream of independence.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Galbraith, *The End of Iraq: How American Incompetence Created a War Without End*, (London: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 149.

## **Chapter 2 – Theoretical Background**

### **2.1 Nationalism: The Fuel for a Movement**

Any discussion of national movements must begin with a clear definition of nation and national identity. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* provides a suitable starting point with his definition of a nation, specifically as "an imagined political community."<sup>4</sup> He cites Ernest Gellner's idea of the modernity of nationalism in defense of his classification of it as 'imagined,' saying that nationalism invents nations through a process of imagining. The community imagined is a "deep, horizontal comradeship...that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings."<sup>5</sup> Liah Greenfeld offers a view on how this community creates a national identity, pointing to "national consciousness...[and] a set of ideas and sentiments that form the conceptual framework of the national identity."<sup>6</sup> However, echoing Rogers Brubaker in *Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism*, it would be a mistake to assume that nations are homogenous entities with well-defined and agreed-upon national interests.<sup>7</sup> Rather, nations must be viewed through the lens of 'constructivism', recognizing the continuously changing nature of nations under the impact of political and social structures.

As for a precise delineation of the term 'nationalism,' no clear-cut, satisfactory answer exists. The body of nationalism theory is full on conflicting concepts and vague arguments. This paper will employ a modernist view of nationalism as defined by Ernest Gellner: Nationalism is "a political principle which maintains that similarity of culture is the

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<sup>4</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (New York: Verso, 1991), 6.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Liah Greenfeld, "Etymology, Definitions, Types" in *Encyclopedia of Nationalism, Volume 1*, (San Diego: Academic Press, 2001), 251.

<sup>7</sup> Rogers Brubaker, "Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism." *Ethnicity Without Groups*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 15.

basic social bond”<sup>8</sup> and where the authority between members legitimizes itself through members being of the same culture (or nation).

## 2.2 Social Movement Theory

Social movement theory is a diverse set of ideas that has evolved through the years, making significant advancements as new cultural and political eras emerge. Pulling together these seemingly separate social movement theories, Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, in their landmark book *Comparative Perspective on Social Movements*, aim to build a synthesized framework involving political opportunity structures, mobilization, and framing processes (these theories will be explained further in their own sections).<sup>9</sup> They choose these three components from what they identify as a general theoretical consensus on the importance of three factors:

- (1) The structure of political opportunities and constraints confronting the movement;
- (2) the forms of organization (informal as well as formal), available to insurgents; and
- (3) the collective processes of interpretation, attribution, and social construction that mediates between opportunity and action.<sup>10</sup>

McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald provide a basic overview of the theoretical beginnings and development of these study areas, stressing their interconnected nature. Most of the first case studies used to provide weight and credibility to these newly developed theories regard environmental issues, gender rights, or labor policies. Though significant research was done on the Black American Civil Rights Movement and did incorporate ideas of ethnic identity, the predominate view on equality and human rights was inherently euro-centric and assimilationist.<sup>†</sup> Peter Vermeersch’s study of Romani ethnic mobilization presents a similar

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<sup>8</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 9.

<sup>9</sup> Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>†</sup> I would like to avoid the appearance of making a moral judgement concerning the often-tense debate over assimilation and its space in the realm of minority rights. The facts of this argument depend on a cultural context. For example, the American Civil Rights Movement considered the integration and assimilation of black Americans to be a noble goal. In contrast, Tibetans regard assimilation as a death sentence for their ethnic group and actively mobilize against it.

criticism, saying that social movement literature and theories of ethnic identity are not often combined.<sup>11</sup>

David Romano, in his book *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization, and Identity*, employs McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald's synthesized theoretical framework to conduct a thorough study of the Kurdish movement in Turkey. Romano's focus on the Turkish Kurds stems from his interest in the sheer number of Kurdish citizens in Turkey (about half of the world's Kurds) and Turkey's shifting focus towards a democratic, European future.<sup>12</sup> Though he does provide a short overview of the Iraqi Kurds, he fails to adequately extend his social movement focus beyond the Turkish borders, leaving out many significant political and social details. This paper uses a similar set of theories, though interpreted in a slightly different manner to provide greater clarity and general applicability.

### 2.3 Political Opportunity Structure

Peter Eisinger became the first to coin the term 'structure of political opportunities' in his study of riot behavior in the early 1970s.<sup>13</sup> The emerging literature and research on collective action behaviors and resource mobilization did not adequately address the fact that "social movements and revolutions are shaped by the broader set of political constraints and opportunities unique to the national context in which they are embedded."<sup>14</sup> Political opportunity structure (POS) can be defined as "the complex of formal and informal political conditions into which a movement must enter when it becomes active."<sup>15</sup> McAdam, in his contribution to *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, attempts to provide clarity through four approaches that can provide a framework for analysis.

1. The relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Vermeersch, *The Romani Movement: Minority Politics and Ethnic Mobilization in Contemporary Central Europe*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 28.

<sup>12</sup> Romano, 24.

<sup>13</sup> McAdam et al., 23.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Vermeersch, 39.

2. The stability or instability of that broad set of elite alignments that typically undergird a polity
3. The presence or absence of elite allies
4. The state's capacity and propensity for repression<sup>16</sup>

However, Romano adds a fifth factor: "5. International and foreign influences supportive of the state or its opponents."<sup>17</sup> He, along with Vermeersch, believes that traditional social movement theory did not pay enough attention to ethnic identity and tries to compensate for the unique complications that a territorial ethnic movement can face.

## 2.4 Resource Mobilization

Mayer Zald, in his essay *Looking Backward to Look Forward: Reflections on the Past and Future of the Resource Mobilization Research Program*, details the development of resource mobilization theory.<sup>18</sup> The 1960s marked a watershed for social movement scholars, providing new case studies and research possibilities. From this era emerged the resource mobilization (RM) theories.<sup>19</sup> Zald recognizes that RM has limitations, particularly in its limited focus on structural and cultural areas. However, he believes that the theories built to address these limitations are not designed to replace RM, but rather to be integrated into it. In other words, the idea of resource mobilization in collective action was missing the theories of political opportunity structures and cultural framing.

In the search for a framework to analyze resource mobilization, this paper shall incorporate Dieter Rucht's definition:

Mobilization is the process of creating movement structures and preparing and carrying out protest actions which are visible movement "products" addressed to actors and publics outside the movement. For large-scale and sustained movement activities, mobilization require resources such as people, money knowledge, frames, skills, and technical tools to process and distribute information and to influence people.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> McAdam et al., 27.

<sup>17</sup> Romano, 25.

<sup>18</sup> Mayer N. Zald, "Looking Backward to Look Forward: Reflections on the Past and Future of the Resource Mobilization Research Program," in Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller, *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 326.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 332.

<sup>20</sup> McAdam et al., 186.

This table, though it provides clear and extremely helpful factors that can aid in understanding mobilization, is too simplistic and can present problems if taken as concrete characteristics for firm types. However, if used as a starting guide point, Rucht's ideas can offer analytical clarity and an interesting picture of how some movement organizations overlap into political interests and bureaucratic politics. This paper will use these three factors (mode of operation, main resources, and structural features) to evaluate the mobilization of the case study.

## 2.5 Cultural Framing

As defined by Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald in their work *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, cultural framing is "...conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action."<sup>21</sup> Though this theory can stand on its own and be used to investigate social movement motivation, it was developed to fill in the gaps of resource mobilization and political opportunity structures. Without attention to cultural factors and strategic uses of frames of understanding by movement elites, we are left without a full explanation of how the movement gains support and constituents. As David Snow and his colleagues contend in their essay *Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation*, "little headway has been made in linking together social psychological and structural/organizational factors and perspectives."<sup>22</sup> Snow et al. attempt to do just this as they pull their conception of 'frame' from Erving Goffman's seminal 1974 work *Frame Analysis*, defining it as a "primary framework [that] allows its user to locate,

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 6. As quoted in Romano, 21.

<sup>22</sup> David A. Snow, et al., "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation," *American Sociological Review*, 51, (1986). In Doug McAdam and David A. Snow, *Social Movements: Readings on Their Emergence, Mobilization, and Dynamics*, (Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing, 1997), 235.

perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms.”<sup>23</sup>

The material with which such frames are built includes collective memory and cultural values. Maurice Halbwach defines collective memories, recognizing them as “memories of a shared past that are preserved by members of a specific group who experiences them.”<sup>24</sup> He also points out the importance of collective memory of the past as potential legitimization of political and social claims of the present, emphasizing the ideas of ‘social memory’ and ‘historical reconstruction’.<sup>25</sup> Social memory needs the reconstruction of historical facts (accuracy optional) for certain events and traditions to remain relevant and remembered. Snow et al. call this frame alignment, or “the linkage of individual and SMO [social movement organization] interpretive orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values, and beliefs and SMO activities, goals, and ideology are congruent and complementary.”<sup>26</sup> Essentially, the movement leaders are selling their ideas and actions to a specific group by appealing to, and sometimes manipulating, public collective memory.

## 2.6 Additions to the Paradigm

Just as both Peter Vermeersch and David Romano recognized, social movement theory has neglected several aspects of ethnic identity movements. They both felt it necessary to add to the paradigm in order to complete their case study pictures. Also, the original social movement theories were formed before globalization had swung into action, leaving one to ponder the consequences of instant global communication, increased immigration, and the growing economic and political interdependence of states and regions. The concepts of paradiplomacy, diaspora politics, and collective national trauma must be added to the social movement theoretical set in order to fully explain the Kurdish nationalist movement in

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<sup>23</sup> Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), 21.

<sup>24</sup> Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *The Masada Myth: Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 271.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 274.

<sup>26</sup> Snow et al., 235.

today's political structure. Just as McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald chose to integrate three theoretical lines of thought to fully flesh out social movement theory, I will attempt to fill in some serious gaps using paradiplomacy, diaspora politics, and collective national trauma.

## Chapter 3 – Historical Background

Kurdistan is a mountainous area that takes up a large part of the border region between Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Armenia.<sup>27</sup> With more than 27 million<sup>28</sup> estimated for the entire Kurdish ethnicity<sup>29</sup>, it is thought that the Kurds are the largest stateless ethnic group in the world.

### 3.1 Early History

Though there is vague evidence of a



Kurdish identity in Sumarian inscriptions from four thousand years ago, a more distinct connection between ethnic Kurdish tribes and their inhabited territory did not emerge for hundreds of years. Traditionally organized through kinship (often loosely interpreted) tribal systems, the first recorded Kurdish revolts were against the Arab conquest of Mesopotamia in 637, though they eventually acquiesced to Arab rule and Islamic faith.<sup>30</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, in his working paper “Transnational Aspects of the Kurdish Question,” points out, however, that these early ‘pre-modern’ revolts were about tribal leadership struggling against outside influences, rather than any conception of national identity.<sup>31</sup> Whatever the reasons, David McDowall feels the results of these revolts – usually some measure of self-rule - are most interesting, creating a continuity of sorts with future, more modern, nationalist

<sup>27</sup> Map found at: *Welcome to Kurdawary Website*, <http://www.geocities.com/viyan2000/kurdistan.html>. Accessed 28 April 2008.

<sup>28</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurd#External\\_links](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurd#External_links)

<sup>29</sup> Estimations for the populations and related percentages of Kurds are just that, estimations. There is no official, unbiased source for such statistics. Just as Kurdish nationalists will have a tendency to exaggerate their numbers, state governments usually under-report such things. Also, with the recent history of violent oppression and genocide, ethnic Kurds are often reluctant to report their true ethnicity.

<sup>30</sup> David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*. (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 21.

<sup>31</sup> Martin Van Bruinessen, “Transnational Aspects of the Kurdish Question,” *EUI Working Papers: Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies*, (Florence: European University Institute, 2000), 3.

aspirations. He details, “Even when they were not in a state of rebellion, many tribes were able to achieve functional independence.”<sup>32</sup>

This manner of autonomy continued into the age of empires, when Kurdistan would come to be known as the area caught between the Ottoman Empire and the Persian Safavid dynasty.<sup>33</sup> Essentially, the support of the Kurdish chieftains was seen as a political tool to get respect, supplies, and support from the empires. Instead of extending their respective administrative arms into Kurdish society and political life, the Ottoman and Persian Empires preferred to pay for the loyalty of Kurdish principalities, offering support for the ruler of the area against his potential rivals in exchange for autonomy and military forces.<sup>34</sup>

As the Empires progressed, they eventually pushed their centralized bureaucracy into the Kurdish principalities, eliminating the autonomy of the chieftains and plunging many of the areas into temporary chaos. From this emerged Sheikh Ubayd Allah, who some consider the first Kurdish nationalist leader. In a letter to the British Consul-General in Tabriz, William Abbott, the sheikh penned:

The Kurdish nation...is a people apart...the Chiefs and Rulers of Kurdistan, whether Turkish or Persian subjects, and the inhabitants of Kurdistan, on and all are united and agreed that matters cannot be carried on in this way with the two Governments [Ottoman and Qajar], and that necessarily something must be done, so that European Governments having understood the matter, shall inquire into our state. We also are a nation apart. We want our affairs to be in our own hands.<sup>35</sup>

The revolt that his son led in Iran in 1880 was, according to McDowall, a confused attempt that unsuccessfully tried to walk a line between new nationalist sentiments and old tribal-imperial loyalties, ending in a spectacular failure.<sup>36</sup> Yet, the rhetoric behind the revolt,

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<sup>32</sup> McDowall, 21.

<sup>33</sup> Jack David Eller, *From Culture to Ethnicity to Conflict: An Anthropological Perspective on International Ethnic Conflict*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 153.

<sup>34</sup> Bruinessen, in Atabaki and Dorleijn, 27-29.

<sup>35</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, Turkey No. 5 (1881) Correspondence Respecting the Kurdish invasion of Persia, Sheikh Obeidallah to Dr Cochran, 5 October 1880, Inclosure in Abbott to Thomson, Urumiya, 7 October 1880. As quoted in McDowall, 53.

<sup>36</sup> McDowall, 55.

whether yet fully understood by Kurdish inhabitants or not, signals a turning point in the conception of 'Kurdish-ness' and ethnic-territorial identity.

### 3.2 War, Peace, and Betrayal

The Ottoman Empire at the turn of the century was crumbling from the inside. As debt mounted and central authorities desperately tried to control their vast lands, nationalist forces began to rise from the rubble, namely in the form of the Young Turks, originally a diverse group of many ethnicities, including Kurdish.<sup>37</sup> Striving to re-invent the empire through the introduction of a constitution, internal divisions led to the formation of a splinter group, the Union and Progress Committee. The Unionists seized control in a coup in July 1908 and, despite language of cultural freedom, managed to alienate most ethnicities and eventually adopted an official policy of open Turkish nationalism.<sup>38</sup> They banned all of the non-Turkish schools, organizations, clubs, and publications that they had graciously allowed in the immediate aftermath of their coup.<sup>39</sup> Several Kurdish paramilitary and underground societies were set up, spreading dissent and pushing revolt; yet the First World War changed their world dramatically.

As Gerard Chaliand writes in his famous book *A People Without a Country*, the Young Turks pushed the Ottoman Empire into the war with territorial conquests in mind. Kurdistan was almost destroyed in its role as the battleground for the Ottoman and Russian troops. This 'great game' played out by the major powers is clearly seen in the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, signed between France and Britain and approved by Russia, which carved up the obviously failing Ottoman Empire into colonial spheres.<sup>40</sup> This agreement would later give birth to the Treaty of Sèvres.

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<sup>37</sup> McDowall, 100.

<sup>38</sup> Gerard Chaliand, ed., *A People Without a Country*, (Brooklyn: Olive Branch Press, 1993), 13.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*.

As the Ottoman Empire conceded defeat on October 10, 1918, hopes for an independent Kurdistan were higher than ever before. The empire's administration was in shambles. Yet, the Kurdish urban class was not well developed, still dealing with the history of tribal factions and loss of provincial leadership.<sup>41</sup> Despite this, they, in conjunction with the Ottoman-Armenians, presented their case to the Paris Peace Conference at the end of World War I. Gaining support from Woodrow Wilson, the Treaty of Sèvres, signed in August 1920, promised to create a Kurdish nation-state. Chaliand points out his confusion at the fact that this treaty is regarded so fondly in Kurdish eyes, saying:

The 'independent Kurdistan' envisaged by the Treaty was in fact, therefore, a country from which two-thirds of its territory had been lopped off, including its fertile areas and its traditional grazing grounds, not to mention Persian Kurdistan... The Sèvres Treaty... was not only profoundly unjust and humiliating for the Turkish people, it was also an affront to the Kurds.<sup>42</sup>

Considering what came next, we can understand the wistful longing for Sèvres. Following Kemal Atatürk's revolution, the new Turkish government renegotiated with the Allies, coming up with the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, which left out an idea of minority autonomy and split the Kurds between many states.<sup>43</sup> The Kurds in 'Southern Kurdistan,' also denoted by the old Ottoman administrative millet called Mosul, fell under British 'mandate', incorporating their piece of Kurdistan into a new state called Iraq. Anthropologist Jack David Eller points to this moment as the watershed for the development of separate Kurdish identities. In his opinion, instead of a strong pan-Kurdish movement, each state's Kurds have experienced different treatment under various regimes, developing distinct cultural and political attributes.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>43</sup> Hurst Hannum, *Autonomy, Sovereignty, and Self-Determination*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 182-184.

<sup>44</sup> Eller, 155.

### 3.3 Planting the Seeds of Revolution

Paying attention to Eller's theory about separate development, we now must focus on this paper's subject, the Iraqi Kurds, beginning with their history under the British mandate as a piece of Iraq. Technically, British forces had only occupied the southern two-thirds of modern day Iraq, but the League of Nations extended the mandate to cover the Mosul area.<sup>45</sup> Great Britain's struggle to form an Iraqi state after World War I had been troublesome, to say the least, plagued by a number of problems, one of which involved a large Kurdish revolt that had to be destroyed using the Royal Air Force.<sup>46</sup> Despite promises to draw "the administrators, magistrates, and teachers in their country...from their own ranks, and adopt Kurdish as the official language in all their activities,"<sup>47</sup> the British did little to implement any real laws or projects benefiting the Kurdish people of their new mandate. The Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of June 1930 officially ended the British rule and began the independence of the Iraqi state under the Hashemite monarchy and King Faisal.<sup>48</sup> Much to the Kurds' anger, it said nothing about the Kurdish region of Sulaymaniah, prompting revolts led by Sheikh Mahmoud Berezendji (who had previously been arrested for leading revolts but later released). The Sheikh, as described by British officer Arnold Wilson, was "a man who quoted President Woodrow Wilson's fourteen points verbatim and wore a Kurdish copy of the Treaty of Sevres, with pages from the Koran, like a talisman wrapped around his arm."<sup>49</sup> Obviously, the Wilson's idea of political self-determination based on national identity had taken root in Kurdistan.

Though the mandate officially ended in 1932, the British tried to keep a tight sphere of influence over the Hashemite monarchy, which they had put into power. However, the new independence naturally led to various political developments within Iraq, and specifically

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<sup>45</sup> Chaliand, 146.

<sup>46</sup> Charles Tripp, *History of Iraq*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 55.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 149.

<sup>49</sup> Quil Lawrence, *Invisible Nation: How the Kurds' Quest for Statehood is Shaping Iraq and the Middle East*, (New York: Walker & Company, 2008), 14.

regarding the Kurdish question. In 1937, Turkey, Persia, and Iraq created the Saadabad Treaty, which, among other things, promised coordinated efforts against “the formation and activity of associations, organizations, or armed bands seeking to overthrow established institutions.’ In other words it was aimed against the Kurdish movement.”<sup>50</sup> After a set of deaths and coups that displaced the Iraqi monarchy with pro-Nazi politicians, the British sent in an occupation force to reestablish the Hashemites in 1941.<sup>51</sup> The Royal Air Force had to intervene yet again in 1943, when Mullah Mustafa Barzani, the famous Kurdish rebel fighter, overpowered the Iraqi Army, forcing them to retreat.<sup>52</sup> The defeat of this revolt, and the subsequent collapse of the short-lived Kurdish Mahabad Republic – a Soviet-supported attempt at establishing a Kurdish state in Iran - caused Barzani and his fellow fighters to seek asylum in the Soviet Union.<sup>53</sup>

Despite being in exile, Mustafa Barzani managed to create the Kurdistan Democratic Party, which held its first conference on August 16, 1946, electing Barzani as ‘president’ of the organization.<sup>54</sup> For a number of years, the party struggled to find its identity, eventually being transformed by party secretary-general Ibrahim Ahmad into a more civic (rather than ethnic) based group, which “adopted a Leftist programme, calling for agricultural reform and the recognition of peasants’ and workers’ rights and the introductions of labour associations.”<sup>55</sup> During the intra-Kurd power struggle for party control, the leaders were also dealing with developments on the larger Iraqi stage and on an international scale. Anti-British and pan-Arab sentiments had been growing rapidly among the rest of Iraq, eventually leading to Iraq’s membership in the Arab Coalition that violently opposed Israel’s declaration of independence in 1948.

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<sup>50</sup> Chaliand, 149.

<sup>51</sup> Tripp, 108.

<sup>52</sup> Chaliand, 149.

<sup>53</sup> Chaliand, 149.

<sup>54</sup> McDowall, 296.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 297.

The Coalition's defeat in Israel was a hard blow for the general Iraqi political public, especially considering the blame placed on Iraq from other Arab coalition partners. Prime Minister Nuri Al-Sa'id, who came to power shortly after the defeat, pushed Iraq into a pro-Western alliance, believing pan-Arabism and pro-Soviet attitudes to be too divisive for Iraqi politics and too dangerous for the Hashemite monarchy he was trying to protect.<sup>56</sup> Instead, he signed the Baghdad Pact in 1955, along with Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, and Great Britain. A new project in the Cold War game, this was designed as a regional defense force and an alliance against Soviet influence in the Middle East.<sup>57</sup> However, the KDP leadership viewed this in the same light as the Treaty of Saadabad, as a regional agreement for suppressing the Kurdish efforts.<sup>58</sup> The pro-Western partnership did not last long, however, essentially killed by the disastrous Suez Crisis. Though the Western powers, including Great Britain, France, and Israel, had met with military success, their invasion of the recently nationalized Suez Canal had an entirely opposite result in public opinion, especially in Iraq. Egypt's Arab nationalist leader President Gamal Abdel Nasser "emerged...a hero both in Egypt and abroad...as the conqueror of European colonialism and Zionism."<sup>59</sup> Nuri Al-Sa'id had taken a political gamble in signing the Baghdad Pact, placing his government, and himself, directly in line with the British-supported Hashemites.<sup>60</sup> In July 1958, the Free Officers, led by 'Abd al-Karim Qasim, carried out a classic coup d'état, killing Al-Sa'id, a number of his government officials, and, of course, the Hashemite royal family. With the popularity of Nasser and his rhetoric in this new regime, one would think that the Kurdish elites would have sided with the Hashemites. However, internal Kurdish leadership struggles and the prospect of gaining power through relations with a new government proved stronger than ideology, compelling

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<sup>56</sup> Tripp, 141.

<sup>57</sup> "Lesson from History: 1955 Baghdad Pact," *BBC News: Middle East*, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/2801487.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2801487.stm). Accessed 15 April 2008.

<sup>58</sup> McDowall, 300.

<sup>59</sup> Derek Varble, *Essential Histories: The Suez Crisis 1956*, (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 84.

<sup>60</sup> Tripp, 142.

the KDP to place their hope and support behind these new Free Officers, including the Ba'athists, led by Abd al Karim Qasim.

### 3.4 Revolutionary Iraq

Indeed, Qasim, promised a democratic republic and invited Mullah Mustafa Barzani back from his exile in the Soviet Union, following Barzani's pledge of devotion to the new regime.<sup>61</sup> Qasim did not trust the current KDP secretary-general Ibrahim Ahmad and preferred to work with Barzani, feeling his reputation and charismatic leadership was more powerful than the other KDP leaders. Yet, as the KDP and Kurdish public fell into confusion and violence from the conflicting leadership, Qasim began to turn away from the KDP, looking to opposing tribal forces for the necessary support and flirting with the idea of joining the Nasser's United Arab Republic.<sup>62</sup> This loss of alliance, the personal humiliation felt by Barzani, and the prospects of Iraqi membership in the United Arab Republic – an Egyptian-Syrian union based on virulent Arab nationalism - led him to reevaluate his political and military options.

The Kurdish revolt began in 1961, and, though relatively unorganized and poorly supported, put a drain on Qasim's government and personal reputation, signaling an imminent change in leadership. As Barzani and the KDP began to look for the next potential coup leaders to court, they realized that the groups most likely to find success were, in fact, the pan-Arab nationalists and Ba'athists.<sup>63</sup> In a move that would impress Faust himself, Barzani threw his lot in with the emerging National Council of the Revolutionary Command, led by Nasserist Abd al Salam Arif.<sup>64</sup> The myriad of deals made between Arif and Barzani all centered on the consolidation of power for both of them. To begin, Barzani wanted complete control of the KDP. He never showed an ideological affinity for or against communism,

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<sup>61</sup> McDowall, 302.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 307.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 313.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

preferring to follow to winds of financial support unencumbered. Yet, a left-leaning faction within the KDP led by Jalal Talabani began gaining power.<sup>65</sup> To prevent this, exchanging his support of Arif's coup for Arif's backing of his leadership, Barzani signed a peace agreement on behalf of the KDP, essentially compromising on previously sacred conditions like political autonomy.<sup>66</sup> After assuring his position at the helm of the KDP, Mullah Mustafa reneged on his agreement, reverting his position back to the more hard-line policies and, encouraged by international support from Iran and Israel, re-opening the war against the regime.<sup>67</sup> Even after Arif died in a helicopter accident, his Nassarist government continued the policies of refusing Kurdish demands. The combined strain of the Kurdish question and a poor showing in the 1967 war against Israel caused another military coup, this time providing power to the Ba'athist elements within the army.<sup>68</sup>

### **3.5 Ba'athist and Saddam: Beginning of the End?**

With yet another coup, the internal power struggle, usually played out in a Talaban and Ahmad versus Barzani context, reared its head. The Ba'ath Party, despite a notable Arab nationalist slant, "wanted to create the illusion of a broader representation in government in order to neutralize the threats that might arise."<sup>69</sup> In short, they preferred to keep their enemies close. Talabani and Ahmad took the opportunity to cooperate with the new government, trying to obtain important concessions. Yet, Barzani, still in control of most of the peshmerga troops, continued the guerilla war efforts, proving that he was ultimately indispensable in any negotiation process. Therefore, when the government began making gestures to show their interest to negotiate in 1969, the negotiations ultimately took place between rising Ba'athist 'star' Saddam Hussein and Mullah Mustafa Barzani.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Lawrence, 19.

<sup>66</sup> McDowall, 315.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 317.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 320.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 324.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 327.

Barzani came closest to achieving Kurdish autonomy in the March 1970 agreement; this ceasefire accord gave extensive minority protections and language rights to the Kurds, as well as a significant opportunity to participate effectively in the Ba'ath government.

Interestingly, the short peace broke down due to disagreements on the exact borders of the Kurdish region and the nationalization of the Kirkuk oil fields.<sup>71</sup> Needless to say, the fighting resumed. Evidence also exists to show that Barzani refused this agreement in light of international influence. For a time, the Kurds had played a pivotal role in pushing the interests of Iran, Israel, and even a Cold War-focused United States. Yet, this wasn't to last. In later years, Ezra Danin expressed the Israeli realist position towards the Kurds quite well, saying:

It was clear to me that the assistance we gave to the Kurdish fighters in Iraq could not but be interpreted as exploiting the Kurdish tragedy for our own ends, even though the assistance itself was a noble contribution and despite the fact that Israel gained military advantages by tying the hands of a considerable part of the Iraqi army by forcing it to deal with the Kurdish problem.<sup>72</sup>

The US attitudes matched exactly to the Israeli realist perspective. The CIA had channeled over \$16 million to the Kurds during the early 1970s; especially after an Iraqi-Soviet 'friendship treaty' was signed in April 1972.<sup>73</sup> Nonetheless, Henry Kissinger summed it up with his cold statement that "secret service operations are not missionary work."<sup>74</sup> The Pike Report tendered to the US Congress explained this position saying:

The president, Dr. Kissinger, and the foreign head of state [the Shah]...preferred instead that the insurgents simply continue a level of hostilities sufficient to sap the resources of our ally's neighboring country [Iraq]. This policy was not imparted to our clients, who were encouraged to continue fighting. Even in the context of covert action, ours was a cynical surprise.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Hurst Hannum, *Autonomy, Sovereignty, and Self-Determination*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 191. It must be noted here that Hannum's book was published in 1990, which is seventeen years before another agreement on Kurdish autonomy in Iraq would be threatened by the exact same issues.

<sup>72</sup> Ian Black and Benny Morris, *Israel's Secret Wars: A History of Israel's Intelligence Services*, (New York: Grove Weidenfield, 1991), 330.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 332.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 330.

<sup>75</sup> Black and Morris, 330.

With the KDP overrun by Iraqi tanks and troops, Mullah Mustafa abandoned his fight on March 23, 1975, fleeing to Tehran, then the United States for cancer treatments.<sup>76</sup>

After Barzani's death in 1979, his sons took over his Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), but were challenged by Jalal Talabani's new party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), creating the atmosphere necessary for the ensuing intra-Kurd civil conflict and power struggles. Yet, during the Iran-Iraq War, these groups, supported by the Iranians, put aside their differences to create the Kurdish Front and fight against Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath regime.<sup>77</sup> The reaction from Baghdad is now known as the Anfal Genocide. The series of military campaigns, organized and led by Ali Hassan al-Majid – later called 'Chemical Ali' – began in 1988 with a mandate from Saddam Hussein to find a solution to the Kurdish problem. Thousands of Kurdish civilians, if they lived through the chemical bombs, were chased from their villages and either killed on the spot or taken to a concentration camp.<sup>78</sup> In trying to place a number on the death toll, a Human Rights Watch report gives the details of a meeting between Kurdish leaders and the Ba'ath party government in 1991:

[Kurdish leaders] raised the question of the Anfal dead and mentioned a figure of 182,000--a rough extrapolation based on the number of destroyed villages. Ali Hassan al-Majid reportedly jumped to his feet in a rage when the discussion took this turn. "What is this exaggerated figure of 182,000?" he is said to have asked. "It couldn't have been more than 100,000."<sup>79</sup>

The international community had been watching the violence in relative silence. Pleas for help and evidence of mass violence had been pouring out from the beginning of the campaign, but no significant action was taken in fear that it would upset the peace

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<sup>76</sup> McDowall, 337.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 352.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 357-360.

<sup>79</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Genocide in Iraq: The Anfal Campaign Against the Kurds." *Human Rights Watch Report*, <http://hrw.org/reports/1993/iraqanfal/>.

negotiations between Iran and Iraq. Broken and reeling, any further ideas of Kurdish rebellion crumbled as the focus turned onto sheer survival.

### **3.6 De Facto Independence**

In January 1991, after the Iraqi army marched into Kuwait, an international military force, led mostly by the United States Army, launched a defensive counter-attack on behalf of the Kuwaitis. The six-week Persian Gulf War was decisive and left Saddam Hussein's regime on unstable ground. Uprisings in both the Shia south and Kurdish north were put down with brutal force. Alarmed by the flood of refugees into neighboring Turkey, Iran, and Syria, the UN Security Council issued Resolution 688 denouncing the violence and demanding humanitarian access inside Iraq. To complement this effort, a 'no-fly zone' was established over much of the Kurdish territory, providing the protection necessary for refugees to return to their homes.<sup>80</sup> This international shield, combined with strict embargo sanctions from Baghdad, effectively gave the Kurdish region of Iraq the autonomy for which they had been fighting. On May 19, 1992, the KRG held peaceful, contested, multi-party elections that resulted in a KDP-PUK power sharing arrangement, with Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani at the helm. However, fighting between the parties erupted, halting the budding democracy and reconstruction until the US government brokered a peace deal in September 1998.<sup>81</sup> Yet, in McDowall's opinion, "It was only the imminence of a US invasion of Iraq that compelled them actively to cooperate to present a united political and military stance."<sup>82</sup>

### **3.7 Another New Beginning**

Upon the US invasion in March 2003, the Kurdish peshmerga (the Kurdish regional militia) fought alongside of Coalition troops in northern Iraq, sustaining numerous casualties and impressing the American administration with their zeal. As the Americans began their

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<sup>80</sup> McDowall, 373-376.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 380-385.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 462.

attempt to install democracy in Iraq, they often looked to Kurdish leaders for advice and cooperation. A struggle would ensue in which the Kurdish leaders would have to walk a thin line, playing between nationalist aspirations and American support. The new game of federalism was strikingly similar to the old war cry of 'Democracy for Iraq. Autonomy for Kurdistan.' Negotiations for the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL), and subsequently the Constitution, ensured Kurdish demands and protections for their vital interests. Through coordinated international public relations and relatively peaceful cooperation from citizens, the Kurdish leaders were able to establish Kurdistan-Iraq, now officially recognized as the Kurdistan Regional Government, as a 'bastion of democracy,' safe for foreign officials, business development, and even tourism.

## **Chapter 4 - Political Opportunity Structure**

Despite McAdam's useful fusion of political opportunity structure theory into four specific features, and Romano's addition of a fifth, I find these given determinants still overlap. For this paper, I have reorganized these five factors into three characteristics for analysis:

1. Institutional Background – the state, regional, and international institutional structural makeup, particularly focusing on the open/closed nature of the systems and the capacity for state repression that stems from this nature
2. Unity in Movement Leadership – the amount of accord, or lack thereof, within established/potential leaders of the social movement
3. Internal/External Allies and Enemies – the presence or absence of support for or opposition to the social movement, both within the state political structure and the larger international structure

We will be examining these components in the recent developments of the Kurdish nationalist movement to look for openings in the political structure favorable for the Kurds.

### **4.1 Institutional Background: Opportunities to Escape Repression**

The relative open or closed nature of a political system, determining how much political and social freedom movements are allowed, is inherently connected with the repressive capacity of the state, especially when that state is under the rule of an authoritarian regime. Obviously, when a regime is closed to independent civic activity in general, they will be more likely to utilize repressive measures to prevent any social challenge or political threat. In my framework, I have combined these two factors of the political opportunity structure together, as complementary characteristics. The two main openings in the structure that had significant impact on the repressive capacity of the state are the de facto independence period of 1991 to 2003, and the American invasion and its ensuing events.

“Iraq is the only country which allows the Kurds a certain cultural autonomy. But at the same time, it considers itself as an integral part of the wider Arab nation.”<sup>83</sup> This middle zone, in which the state admits and even tolerates the existence of a minority national identity but severely restricts any political or social development in the name of minority nationalism, is an incubator for frustrated nationalists. They are allowed just enough room to cultivate their history and cultural traditions, but oppressed because of it. Instead of ignoring the existence of the Kurdish identity (a tactic well-known in Turkey), Iraq has historically recognized their Kurds as Kurdish, rather than Iraqi, thus targeting them as such. The constant cycle of failed negotiations between various regimes and the Kurdish leaders only fostered a sense of the state being completely untrustworthy, leading to more militarization on both sides. Yet this entire structure of political givens, expectations, and constraints changed from 1991, ushering in a new era of relative freedom.

Though the Kurdish Nationalist Movement struggled for many decades under the various regimes imposed upon them, the de facto autonomy experienced from 1991 until 2003 provided a break in the state repression and an important opening in the political structure, allowing the movement to mature in several ways. Iraqi Kurdistan’s de facto statehood began to develop in 1991 with Resolution 688 from the UN Security Council which denounced the Ba’ath regime’s oppression of Iraqi civilians, specifically mentioning the Kurdish population, and demanded that the Iraqi government allow international humanitarian aid access to communities inside of Iraq.<sup>84</sup> This resolution was history in the making for the United Nations; it was the first step in reconsidering the doctrine of non-interference in the domestic affairs of member states.<sup>85</sup> Yet, even after the UN’s official condemnation of the regime’s violent tactics, Kurdish refugees continued to pour towards the

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<sup>83</sup> Turaj, Atabaki, and Margreet Dorleijn, eds., *Kurdistan in Search of Ethnic Identity: Papers presented to the First Conference on Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity in the Middle East and Central Asia*, (Utrecht: University of Utrecht, June 1990), 26.

<sup>84</sup> McDowall, 375.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

Iranian and Turkish borders as a result of the lack of force behind the resolution. Though the UN was unwilling to stretch the non-interference doctrine any farther, the president of Turkey, Halil Turgut Ozal, was struggling under the pressure to open his borders to over half a million Kurds. He proposed the idea of ‘safe haven’ within the borders of Iraq.<sup>86</sup> On April 28, 1991, the same US-led coalition that had defeated Saddam’s forces in Kuwait declared a ‘no-fly zone’ for Iraqi aircraft anywhere north of the 36<sup>th</sup> parallel.<sup>87</sup> This ‘no-fly zone’ essentially put a roof of sorts over the heads of the Kurdish territories, keeping Saddam from dropping more chemical weapons or troops, but not providing any officially organized governing assistance.<sup>88</sup>

Though the years of repression and the Anfal genocide was an incredibly high price to pay, the *de facto* independence that resulted from yet another failed rebellion was potentially the best thing to happen to the Iraqi Kurds. Israeli political scientist Shlomo Avineri points to the ‘historic opportunity’ of *de facto* independence, provided by the UN ‘no-fly zone’ intervention measures, for institution and capacity-building as an explanation for the relatively advanced infrastructure and diplomatic relations of the Kurdistan Regional Government today (as compared to the rest of Iraq).<sup>89</sup> Though the ‘safe haven’ was a relatively weak and very limited humanitarian intervention, Saddam’s choice to add on his own siege was essentially leaving the Kurds to fend for themselves. He used the army to build a blockade, cutting government salaries, stopping any imported food or goods, and refusing to allow fuel shipments to pass through the border. Despite his egoistic conviction that the north would crumble without Baghdad’s control, the siege backfired. Though the internationally supported ‘no-fly’ zone played a key role in providing this opportunity for the

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 378.

<sup>88</sup> Notably, the ‘no-fly zone’ also protected a significant part of the Shi’a ethnic territory, another large ethnic group that participated in the uprisings of 1991. The Shi’a were also brutalized by the Ba’ath regime in retribution for their revolt.

<sup>89</sup> Shlomo Avineri, interview held during meeting at Central European University, Budapest, Hungary, March 2008.

Kurds, it was ultimately Saddam's policy decision about the blockade that reduced the repressive capacity of his regime towards the Kurds. In a fairly direct result from his decision, Saddam had created a new opening in his own political system. As Quil Lawrence, author of *Invisible Nation: How the Kurds' Quest for Statehood is Shaping Iraq and the Middle East* writes, "It wasn't always pretty, but for the next dozen years Kurdish leaders stumbled their way toward political maturity."<sup>90</sup>

The 2003 invasion of Iraq by American-led coalition forces was, in every way, a second chance for Kurdistan. In the time leading up to the declaration of war, Kurdish elites and well-placed, influential members of the Kurdish-Iraqi diaspora were able to court the many suitors they had in the Bush administration and Pentagon. Oddly enough, a powerful adversary, Turkey, provided one of the best opportunity openings for the Kurdish leaders. When the Turkish parliament refused to allow the American 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division to move through its border with northern Iraq, the American military faced the prospect of invading Iraq without the key northern front upon which they had planned.<sup>91</sup> The Kurdish leaders offered up the services of their newly reunited and well-trained peshmerga forces. Combined with American Special Forces, the peshmerga quickly accomplished the tasks set before them, neutralizing Mosul and Kirkuk, and gained the respect and admiration of many in the Pentagon. The actions of the Kurdish elites took advantage of this alignment of interests before the war and continued to do so after.

When retired army officer and newly appointed head of the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance, Jay Garner, arrived in Iraq on April 15, 2003, he was actually returning to familiar ground. Leading Operation Comfort – the US code name for the military support of the humanitarian aid for Kurdish refugees - in 1991, Garner had met many of the

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<sup>90</sup> Lawrence, 4.

<sup>91</sup> Galbraith, 158.

Kurdish leaders before and constantly involved them in all of the political negotiations.<sup>92</sup>

Garner created the Leadership Council, a group of seven key leaders who he felt represented a cross-section of the Iraqi public. This group included both Barzani and Talabani, the Shiite leaders of the SCIRI and Da'wa parties, famous Shiite exiles Ahmed Chalabi and Ayad Allawi, and a relatively unsupported Sunni named Naseer Kamel al-Chaderchi. However, barely a month after arriving, Garner was replaced by L. Paul Bremer as the new "civilian administrator of postwar Iraq...[who] would oversee the selection of an Iraqi transitional government."<sup>93</sup> Highly criticized on both sides of the American and Iraqi political fences, Bremer's actions and decisions made it clear that the American government was directing the interim processes with an iron fist. This was a huge game change from Garner's original approach of an Iraqi-led process.<sup>94</sup> However, Garner's original approach involving the 'Magnificent Seven' on the Leadership Council carried through. Though the Council fought for control with Bremer, this proved to be an opportunity rather than a hindrance for the Kurdish leaders, who worked their American contacts with great political expertise.

Through the drafting of the TAL and, subsequently, the Constitution of Iraq, the Kurdish elite in Iraq and Washington, DC, pressured internal and external actors to protect their interests. Understanding that this opportunity to affect the Constitution would in turn influence future political opportunities and the structure in which they would function, the Kurdish leaders were relentless. Peter Galbraith, in his book *The End of Iraq*, details the Kurdish position in these negotiations:

Their goal was simple: to have a document that took the least away from them. The Kurds knew the strength of their hand: they controlled their own territory, they had their own army, and they were politically united.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005), 33.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>95</sup> Galbraith, 162.

The opportunities of the past ensured this new open structure to build their future. The Kurdish leaders understood that taking advantage of this process would be an arduous task, and eventually enlisted several Western political experts including Galbraith, a former ambassador for Croatia and negotiator in the Dayton Peace Accords, to walk them through the legal minefield. Their achievements - ensuring a federal arrangement that guaranteed their autonomy, maintaining the peshmerga forces under Kurdish control, and establishing Kurdish as one of two official Iraqi languages – would secure a powerful and protected position for the Kurds in Iraq. Where once they were entirely vulnerable to a strong central regime, the Kurds were now assuring themselves of safety through federalism. By utilizing the newly opened political system, the Kurdish elite had reduced the repressive capacity of Baghdad to practically nothing.

The Kurdish position in the new political environment became a legitimized version of essentially what they had before. Now, allowed in through the front doors of the offices of foreign governments, the Kurds had exposure to even more opportunities and resources than before. As the KRG Foreign Minister acknowledges:

That old phrase, the Kurds have no friends but the mountains, is no longer true. Today, because we are a legitimate entity, we benefit from a more equal relationship with other countries and international organizations. Our legitimacy stems from our constitutionally mandated position within Iraq. The KRG is a recognized government in Iraq, and Kurdistan is a legally autonomous region. We have progressed from being a de-facto to a de-jure part of the world.<sup>96</sup>

The recognition of this change and alteration of mobilization styles, which shall be examined shortly, is what has allowed the Kurds to consolidate considerable political power. Though George W. Bush's initial presidential campaign in 2000 expressed a noted aversion to any exercise of nation building, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 had the immediate effect of establishing northern Iraq as a distinct national homeland for the Kurds. Lawrence agrees,

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<sup>96</sup> Bakir, speech, 6 Dec 2007.

“The Kurds will never willingly go back - America has played midwife to a Kurdish homeland that cannot be unmade, save by catastrophe.”<sup>97</sup>

## 4.2 Kurdish Unity, or the Lack Thereof

Though social movements may begin as passionate public pleas driven by crucial concerns, the development and success of the movement often depends on its organization and leadership. If any case study can attest to the importance of unity in leadership for the movement as an important feature of the political structure, the Kurdish-Iraqi case is a perfect example. As seen in the historical background of the Kurds, many efforts ended in disaster due to intra-Kurdish power struggles between elites and their respective parties. Throughout the various nationalist and Baathist revolutions in Iraq, the Kurdish leadership grappled for position and power, utilizing tribal factions to pit Kurd against Kurds. In June 1988, reeling from the massive Anfal campaign being waged against them, the Kurdish leaders of various parties and factions agreed to form the Kurdistan Front, joining together in an attempt to defend the Kurdish people. John Bulloch and Harvey Morris, in their book *No Friends But the Mountains*, list the partners involved in the front:

Barzani’s Kurdistan Democratic Party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, led by Jalal Talabani, the Kurdistan Socialist Party, Sami Abderrahman’s Kurdistan People’s Democratic Party, the small socialist PASOK Party and the Kurdish regional branch of the Iraqi Communist Party.<sup>98</sup>

Essentially these organizations had the same goal in mind: ideally, an independent state, but, in absence of that, a significant status of autonomy that provided not only social and political freedoms, but physical protection of life itself. This front would not last long.

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<sup>97</sup> Lawrence, 5.

<sup>98</sup> John Bulloch and Harvey Morris, *No Friends But the Mountains: The Tragic History of the Kurds*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 6.

The historical opportunity offered by the period of de facto statehood, though much infrastructure and political maturization occurred, was largely wasted due to the bloody civil war between Masoud Barzani's KDP and Talabani's PUK peshmerga. The landmark elections in May 1992, much advertised to the world as a watershed democratic moment, ended with the KDP having a sliver of an advantage over the PUK, the numbers showing a 45% to 43.6% victory.<sup>99</sup> A power-sharing agreement was instituted, though the way in which it was arranged essentially split the autonomous region into two halves and only served to cripple the efficiency and effectiveness of the new government. In a paper presented at a regional conference in 1993, Dr. Salahhadin M. Al-Hafeed, the Minister of Finance and Economics in the power-sharing Kurdish government, also argued that the combination of Saddam's blockade and the UN embargo sanctions placed on the whole of Iraq were causing much conflict.<sup>100</sup> The parties had begun to bicker over the scarce resources. The PUK was increasingly disturbed by the KDP's control over a key border crossing into Turkey, providing Barzani with an economic advantage he refused to share.<sup>101</sup> These disagreements, added to the unwieldy power-sharing system and an ever-diminishing pool of resources, led to a frustration that was easily ignited into a civil war. The fighting began on May 1, 1994, in an innocuous dispute between a landlord and tenants, and the violence quickly escalated, spreading through the Kurdish region.<sup>102</sup>

Though hundreds, maybe thousands, of people lost their lives in the conflict, the political casualties and lost opportunities are quite notable as well. In May 1991, President George H. W. Bush issued an authorization to 'remove' Saddam Hussein, and provided 40 million dollars towards that goal.<sup>103</sup> Though the American CIA officers are probably just as

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<sup>99</sup> Lawrence, 65.

<sup>100</sup> Salahhadin M. Al-Hafeed, "The Embargo on Kurdistan: Its influences on the Economic and Social Development," paper presented at a regional conference, (c.1993), 26.

<sup>101</sup> Lawrence, 73.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 67.

guilty for leaky intelligence sources, Kurdish elites bungled the operation with their incessant focus on their own power struggle. In an interview with journalist and author Quil Lawrence, Qubad Talabani lamented the lost opportunities during the civil war, saying, “God, if we would not have done that...I would say we would be independent today.”<sup>104</sup>

Learning the lesson of division, the same Kurdish leaders who had tried to kill each other less than a decade before tied themselves together in the very fabric of the new Kurdistan Regional Government. In an atmosphere of confusion and chaos, when other ethnic, religious, or political groups had contested or completely absent leadership, the Kurdish political elite was established and unified. “Seeing that they were the only functioning part of the country encouraged the KDP and PUK to cooperate, and the rivals refrained from fighting over a few key posts in the Kurdistan Regional Government.”<sup>105</sup> Throughout the constitutional negotiations and related political arguments, Jalal Talabani and Masoud Barzani have put the past behind them in order to secure the common interests and goals of the larger nationalist movement. Powers, however, seem to align more quickly than the people. Though much of the Kurdish public is now being heavily influenced by international travel, urban professional life, and diaspora connections, citizens still find themselves largely divided in two spheres of influence. One of the best example of this can be found in the Kurdistan’s two, incompatible cellular networks run by their respective parties. As one Kurdish citizen poetically warns, “This unity is based on egg shells.”<sup>106</sup>

### **4.3 Allies and Enemies: Joining the Shia, Flouting Turkey**

‘The Kurds have no friends but the mountains.’ This old cultural proverb is brought up again and again to explain the historical lack of trustworthy allies for the Kurdish nation. In the domestic sphere, we will be paying special attention to the role of the Iraqi Shiite

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 313.

<sup>106</sup> [Source wishes to remain anonymous], email message to author, May 14, 2008.

Arabs. Widening our focus to an international scale, many state and international actors come into play. However, of particular interest concerning the development of the Kurdish movement, is the changing relationship between Turkey and the United States.

#### 4.3.1 Domestic Friends

The Arab Shia Iraqis make up around 60% of the Iraqi population.<sup>†</sup> Historically oppressed by the minority Sunni Arabs, who made up a preponderance of the Baathist officials, the Shiites had relatively little interest in the Kurdish nationalist movement and preferred to focus on their own problems. Yet, in 1991, these problems collided and formed the uprising, which may or may not have been ‘called for’ by President Bush. Though the ‘no-fly’ zone north of the 36<sup>th</sup> parallel receives much historical and political attention, very few mention the complementary zone established by the same international coalition south of the 32<sup>nd</sup> latitude meant to protect the revolting Shia population.<sup>107</sup> Despite the common enemy, the two groups did not cooperate outside of international exile conferences. This situation stands in stark contrast to the circumstances, which emerged soon after the American invasion.

Stemming from the knowledge of their own sheer numbers, Shia Iraqis were largely overjoyed at the thought of a traditional, majoritarian democracy following Saddam’s oppressive regime. However, the Shia political scene was and still is full of divisions and disagreements, keeping their political weight below the needed majority voice. The Kurdish leaders realized that their unity and political position essentially made them ‘kingmakers,’ and decided to approach the Shiite leaders to form an alliance of sorts. Despite the lack of any substantial common ground, the Shiites and Kurds do share the historical experience of Saddam’s oppression. In early Leadership Council negotiations, Masoud Barzani paid a

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<sup>†</sup> This number is a rough estimate based on various sources. Currently, there are no reliable, exact statistics on the ethnic composition of Iraq.

<sup>107</sup> “Iraq: No Fly Zones Interactive,” *The Guardian UK Online*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Iraq/flash/0,9223,488793,00.html>. Accessed May 21, 2008.

historic visit to the SCIRI leaders, Ayatollah Sistani and Ayatollah Mohammed Baquir al-Hakim in order build better domestic relation and promote a potential alliance of interests.<sup>108</sup>

This internal alliance allowed the Kurds to manipulate their situation in order to push for their interests in the Constitution. The Kurdish desire for a weak central government with strong federalist, devolved powers found an ally in the Shiite negotiators and leaders. Despite their status as a majority in the whole of Iraq, the Shiite elite realized that regional powers could provide them with more control over the significant oil sources in the overwhelmingly-Shia provinces.<sup>109</sup> As Larry Diamond, a key CPA staff member involved in the constitutional process, remembers, “The Shiites gave the Kurds significant regional autonomy, including the ability (in effect) to keep much of the peshmerga intact, and the veto at the center that they wanted; the Kurds, in turn, agreed to a strong prime ministry that the Shiites were destined to control.”<sup>110</sup> Yet, the absence of Sunni cooperation was almost as fortuitous as the presence of the Shiites. Indeed, Galbraith agrees that the Sunni boycott of the January 2005 elections provided the opening needed for the new Kurdish-Shia alliance to come into full power.<sup>111</sup>

#### 4.3.2 *Just a Pawn?*

International allies have always played an important part in both the creation and destruction of Kurdish nationalist opportunities. Though the Americans are credited from leading the international coalition that provided the ‘no-fly’ protection and are thanked endlessly for destroying the main enemy (Saddam) to Kurdish-Iraqi interests, they, along with other international ‘friends,’ are not trusted. For decades the Kurdish nationalist movement has been used almost as a pawn in larger political games, as seen in the treaty fiascos of the 1920s and the Israeli-Iranian support of the 1960s.

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<sup>108</sup> Diamond, 41.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 167.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 171.

<sup>111</sup> Galbraith, 189.

The betrayal of international ‘allies’ has become a reoccurring nightmare for the Iraqi Kurds and has made them wary of international assistance over the years. Perhaps the most recent reminder of their precarious position involves the 1991 failed uprising. British officials had held talks with the Kurdish leadership and other regime opposition in London in late 1990 and early 1991.<sup>112</sup> This sudden political opening was interpreted by the Kurds as implicit support for regime overthrow. Then, on February 16, President Bush made a public statement that would eventually ignite a firestorm that would forever change Kurdistan, saying:

There’s another way for the bloodshed to stop. That is for the Iraqi military and the Iraqi people to take matters into their own hands, to force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside, and comply with the UN, and then region the family of peace-loving nations.<sup>113</sup>

The President would always deny that his statement was intended to call for a revolt, but the effect was immediate. The Kurds of the north and the Shia of the south, did rise up, but the US and the rest of the international community left them to fend for themselves.

Despite this historical pain, the Kurdish elite understood the opportunity set before them in 2003, and swiftly aligned themselves with the American politicians and military. Through various methods we will examine in later chapters, the Kurdish leaders have pushed the moral, economic, and political connections between their interests and the American government’s plans for Iraq. Yet the Kurdish citizens understand this a tenuous alignment and even fear another betrayal from the US, one reluctantly admitting, “An independent Kurdistan is in the hands of the USA.”<sup>114</sup>

One of the factors that hold the potential for ruining the chances for independence (as it has historically) is Turkey and its importance in regional political alliances. Henri Barkey, in his book on the role of Turkey in Middle Eastern politics, describes a set of seven

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<sup>112</sup> Bulloch and Morris, 10.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 11-12.

<sup>114</sup> [Source wishes to remain anonymous], email message to author, May 13, 2008.

key factors that define the Turkish-Iraqi relations. Despite being published in 1996, the issues that he names are still the overriding concerns in the countries' relationship. He enumerates:

“Water resources, the oil pipeline and other economic interactions, the Kurdish question, issues of boundary determination and maintenance, the new regional security environment, the relationship of Turkey and Iraq to the U.S. and Europe, and finally, the impact of domestic politics in both countries on their foreign policies.”<sup>115</sup>

Though Barkey admits that the Kurdish question is the most important factor, he presses that other economic and strategic choices often offset the Turkish position towards the Iraqi Kurds.<sup>116</sup> Many scholars, including Barkey, once thought that the Turkish government would never accept any true, legitimate measures of autonomy for the Kurds of northern Iraq. Indeed the Turkish elites have always been wary of any measures that might induce their own Kurdish minority population to rise up. Yet, the Turkish government, despite diplomatic protests, has allowed the Kurdistan Regional Government to establish itself and flourish. This confusing acceptance can only be explained through Barkey's other factors, namely the economic and political advantages of a more moderate stance.

Robert Olsen, in his book *The Goat and the Butcher: Nationalism and State Formation in Kurdistan-Iraq since the Iraqi War*, gives various reasons why Turkey began to accept the idea of a Kurdish region in a federal Iraq and started to treat the KDP and PUK as representatives of this regional government.<sup>117</sup> Some of these reasons included the developing relationship between the Kurdish peshmerga and the American military, growing arms seizures and supplies, and impending negotiations on the future of Turkey in the European Union.<sup>118</sup> One can watch this struggle in the choice between a more Western, modern stance

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<sup>115</sup> Henri J. Barkey, ed., *Reluctant Neighbor: Turkey's Role in the Middle East*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute for Peace, 1996), 46.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

<sup>117</sup> Robert Olsen, *The Goat and the Butcher: Nationalism and State Formation in Kurdistan-Iraq*, (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2005), 3.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

and a nationalistic, aggressively religious attitude play out in Turkish internal politics as well.<sup>119</sup> To Olsen, it seems that the modern Turkey is winning. However, the contest isn't over. Recent missile attacks and incursions of Turkish troops into northern Iraq have heightened the tensions on both sides, and in the United States, who is trying to referee the quarrel centering over the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK).

The PKK was formed under Marxist-Leninist ideology in the late 1970s and made demands of an independent state for Kurds in Turkey.<sup>120</sup> Their conflict with the Turkish government began in 1984 and escalated till over 37,000 people were killed. After the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, was arrested in 1999, the PKK declared a ceasefire and attempted to moderate their methods and demands. Yet, five years later, the PKK has resumed attacks on Turkish military interests, continuing to use the formidable mountains in northern Iraq for hideouts and training bases.<sup>121</sup> Despite the fact that all parties, including the KRG, agree on the PKK's status as a terrorist organization, the actions taken by the Turkish military against the PKK rebels inside Iraqi borders are quite contentious. The Iraqi government considers the cross-border raids to be a violation of Iraqi sovereignty and demand that Turkish officials use diplomatic means to engage Iraq in an agreed-upon solution.<sup>122</sup> The Turkish government has, however, remained aggressive in their relations, particularly with the KRG, preferring to make public statements through shutting off the electricity lines that flow from Turkey into KRG cities instead of formal political engagement.<sup>†</sup> KRG Foreign Minister Falah Mustafa Bakir explains further in a public statement:

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<sup>119</sup> "Two Faces of Modern Turkey," *BBC News Online*, (19 July 2007), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6906010.stm>. Accessed May 12, 2008.

<sup>120</sup> "Profile: The PKK," *BBC News Online*, (15 Oct. 2007), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7044760.stm>. Accessed May 12, 2008.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> "Iraq condemns Turkish air attack as a violation of sovereignty," *International Herald Tribune Online*, (17 Dec. 2007), <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/12/17/africa/turkey.php>. Accessed May 12, 2008.

<sup>†</sup> In a trip to Erbil, Kurdistan-Iraq, in January 2008, I witnessed the electrical shortages first-hand. Most everyone in Erbil has a generator on hand and has accepted their use as a daily normality. The largest hotel, the

One thing the KRG has pushed for is four-party talks. We have suggested US-Turkey-Iraq-KRG talks to solve this issue. But it is ironic that the one country in the world that chooses to ignore our constitutionally mandated government is also our neighbor. We are disappointed by this attitude and call upon Turkey to move with the times and accept the KRG as a regional partner...And for this reason, we need to deepen our economic relations with Turkey, to act as further buffer against bilateral tension in the relationship in the future.

Bakir's recognition of the potential of economic benefits to ease nationalistic tensions is well-placed in Barkey's framework and holds promise for dealing with an increasingly EU-focused Turkey. However, the Iraqi Kurds have no doubt that their neighbor will always have its fingers stretched into their affairs.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

Pulling the myriad of events, alliances, and interests into a coherent framework to analyze the impact upon the Kurdish nationalists as a social movement is a notably difficult task. What we can conclude from this attempt is, first, that the era of de facto independence and the 2003 US invasion of Iraq served as large openings or breaks in the political structure, changing the state's capacity for repressive action against the Kurds. Second, the lack of unity in the Kurdish leadership damaged the potential progress that could have occurred prior to, but especially during the de facto autonomous period. Yet, the lessons learned from this are currently being applied, fostering a united political (if not social) front to gain the most from the new Iraqi state. Lastly, we can deduce that the presence of both internal and external allies played a significant role in the progression of the Kurdish movement. The lack of pre-2003 domestic support contrasts greatly with the impact of the Shiite-Kurdish alliance after the invasion. The absence of committed external allies before 1991 is evident in the amount of repression that the international community allowed to be used against the Kurdish population of Iraq. Also, no one can refute the effect of American involvement in assisting

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Erbil International (locally known as the Sheraton, though no connection with the hotel chain), has also adopted this way of life. I was having a conversation with a KRG official in the hotel lobby when the power went down. In the 20 seconds it took for the generators to engage, he never paused in his speech or acknowledged that we were in the dark.

Kurdish leaders towards legitimate political positions. Similarly, we must also recognize the potential that Turkey holds to either make or break a viable Kurdistan, as a region or a state. However, all of these conclusions do not adequately explain the developments of the Kurdish movement from a guerrilla warfare group to a legitimate political powerhouse. We also need to understand the internal workings of the Kurdish nationalists as a social movement organization.

## Chapter 5 – Resource Mobilization

As we established in the theoretical background chapter, Dieter Rucht’s definition of mobilization involves forming structures through which to perform certain operations targeted at issue-specific actors as well as the general public. These activities often require human and financial capital.<sup>123</sup> As seen in Rucht’s typology below, he identifies three kinds of mobilization actors: social movements, interest groups, and parties.

*Figure 1 : Rucht's Typology of Mobilizing Agents<sup>124</sup>*

	<b>Social Movements</b>	<b>Interest Groups</b>	<b>Parties</b>
<b>Mode of Operation</b>	Protest Actions	Representation of members in politics	Occupation of political offices
<b>Main Resources</b>	Committed adherents	Expertise, money, access to decision-makers, refusing to cooperate	Voters
<b>Structural Features</b>	Networks of groups and organizations	Formal organization	Formal organization

This table, though it provides clear and extremely helpful factors that can aid in understanding mobilization, is too simplistic, ignoring the repertoire of actions a group can take that often blur the lines of his typology. The Kurdish nationalist movement is a perfect example of such a group, particularly since the movement developed to consist of several groups in varying ranges of formality and structure. However, if used as a starting guide point, Rucht’s ideas can offer analytical clarity and an interesting picture of how some movement organizations overlap into political interests and bureaucratic politics. The categories that he uses can serve as a framework to provide comprehensive understanding of an organization’s mobilizing structures, practices, and resources. His typology also lends itself to the study of development. I will be using this structure to examine the Kurdish nationalist movement’s development from a social movement through a

<sup>123</sup> McAdam et al., 186

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 187.

period of political maturization – in which it resembles Rucht’s interest group – into official political party structures.

## 5.1 Kurdish Nationalism as a Social Movement

Using Rucht’s typology to structure our investigation, a social movement is defined by three characteristics. First, its mode of operation is mostly protest action without incorporation into any legitimate political process of the state. The main resources of a social movement are its committed adherents, and the structure resembles fairly informal networks of various groups.<sup>125</sup>

The obvious focus on guerrilla warfare and armed military rebellions against the Iraqi state regimes, the leaders of the Kurdish movement made an important political decision to avoid terrorist tactics that would separate their argument from other state-less groups like Palestinian Hamas. Though the tribal militias do present a problem when trying to label the movement operations as ‘protest actions,’ the intentions of these actions are much the same: to defy the official power and promote their interests through demonstration. As Bulloch and Morris reason, “The Kurdish leaders, despite their political differences, understood very well that they would forfeit the goodwill of the world if they took to terrorism.”<sup>126</sup> Though the Kurds often engaged in armed rebellions, it most always focused on government officials and military forces.

The various movement leaders never had a problem gathering committed Kurdish fighters for the peshmerga. Abbas Vali, author of the essay “The Kurds and their ‘Others’: Fragmented Identity and Fragmented Politics,” explains Kurdish nationalism as “the politics of the affirmation of Kurdish national identity.”<sup>127</sup> This identity, he holds, was defined by the state opposition to a Kurdish identity and the regime’s attempt to impose another ‘national’,

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Bulloch and Morris, 229.

<sup>127</sup> Abbas Vali, “The Kurds and their ‘Others’: Fragmented Identity and Fragmented Politics,” in “Faleh A. Jabar and Hosham Dawod, eds., *The Kurds: Nationalism and Politics*, (London: Saqi Publishers, 2006),

often Arab, identity. Pulling from this, the movement leaders found it easy to convince their Kurdish constituents to support a nationalist social movement, building a large resource pool of Rucht's 'committed adherents.' We must also recognize the traditional patron-client relations of the Kurdish tribes, with the leaders providing important services and goods in exchange for loyalty to their personal power.

In examining the structure of the Kurdish nationalist movement before the 1990s, one can see a mostly tribal structure, with a focus on the strength of the Barzani clan<sup>†</sup> – who would come to great official power through the KDP. Though the diaspora was growing and becoming better educated abroad, the mobilization largely followed these tribal lines and disputes. Of the first Kurdish student group established in Europe in 1956, known as the KSSE, most of the members were from Iraqi and Syria Kurdistan.<sup>128</sup> The movement grew quickly and followed Mullah Mustafa Barzani's armed revolt with great interest. Later, when Barzani's KDP gave birth to the splinter opposition PUK, the student group split in a similar manner, establishing the AKSA as the PUK-version of the KSSE.<sup>129</sup> The party structures, imbedded with a good deal of tribal mentality as well, have developed into two identical bureaucratic systems that essentially divided Iraqi Kurdistan down the middle and created the atmosphere for civil conflict. Today, this tribal structure is much weaker, due to a more urban, educated public and the return of the diaspora – who normally lack tribal affiliation – to Kurdistan. This process was gradual, however, and can be seen through the next stage of movement development.

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<sup>†</sup> Though not included in accounts of the Anfal genocide, almost 8000 men and boys of the Barzani tribe were abducted and killed by Saddam Hussein's orders in the early 1980s, on suspicion of collaborating with Iranian military forces. The mass grave providing forensic evidence of their violent death was found in 2004. *Frontline World* story "Saddam's Road to Hell" is provides excellent coverage of the effort to find these missing men. See <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/iraq501/index.html>.

<sup>128</sup> Bruinessen, "Transnational Aspects," 9.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

## 5.2 Developing as an Interest Group

The Kurdish movement had, up until 1991, been a rebel-based, paramilitary organization with some political characteristics. Yet, the experience of *de facto* statehood allowed the Kurds to further develop their organization to better meet the needs of a new emerging political opportunity structure. Suddenly facing the opportunity to run their own unofficial state, more formal organization internally and externally would be needed. This process was a difficult one, and not ‘complete’ according to Rucht’s clear-cut model of an interest group. The mode of operation we will be looking for involves the movement leaders pushing their way into the prevailing political structures. The resources of an interest group are much wider than a social movement, including expertise, money, and international political access. The ability to be uncooperative with the main regime, a tactic that can also exist in a social movement structure, is another resource valuable to the Kurds. Yet, the structure itself is very different and much more politically mature, with more formally organized structures and lines of command.<sup>130</sup>

To understand the change in mobilization strategies, we first must recall the openings in the political opportunity structure provided by the ‘no-fly’ zone and Saddam’s economic blockade of Kurdistan-Iraq. Where civil society efforts were once crushed with brutal force by the regime, *de facto* independence allowed a new space for growth in several arenas, most notably the resources of the movement. Though the Kurdish leaders were essentially locked out of Baghdad’s politics, they utilized the well-placed, educated diaspora to wiggle their way into the back halls of international politics, engaging in paradiplomatic efforts to push their interests. Both the PUK and KDP had party representatives living in Washington, D.C., among other important political capitals.<sup>131</sup> Benedict Anderson, in *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World*, explains the growing trend of

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<sup>130</sup> McAdam et al., 186-187.

<sup>131</sup> Lawrence, 63.

active ethnic diasporas and connects it to the emergence of “long-distance nationalism.”

Anderson attributes this phenomenon to capitalism, technology, and globalization, believing that the ease of travel and communication allows immigrants to hold on to their culture rather than assimilate. These long-distance nationalists, if organized into a politically charged diaspora community, can have a serious impact on international affairs as well as domestic politics and can play incredible important parts in the mobilization and opportunity structures. Martin Van Bruinessen, in his essay regarding “Transnational Aspects of the Kurdish Question, remarks on the activity of the diaspora, saying:

In their new places of residence, a large portion of them have retained or rediscovered a strong sense of Kurdish identity and instead of gradually merging with the host populations or other migrants from the same wider region they have organized themselves in Kurdish diasporas. Due to a combination of political factors and technological developments, these diasporas have increasingly become (re-)oriented towards the part of Kurdistan and the state of origin.<sup>132</sup>

Bruinessen also offers an important connection between exile and nationalism, pointing out those persons in exile, whether forced or by personal choice, tend to be intellectuals or opposition leaders, who can utilize their new freedom to renew contacts and spread their ideas.<sup>133</sup> Oddly enough, their position was also pushed through a Shi’ite Arab named Ahmed Chalabi, an exiled banker who established the Iraqi National Congress – an alliance of various Iraqi opposition groups, mostly exiles – and was, arguably, the largest single influence for the Bush administration’s 2003 invasion.<sup>134</sup> Never given a front-door welcome, the Kurds nonetheless increased their political repertoire and international standing.

This type of ‘back-door’ diplomacy practiced by non-state actors is known as paradiplomacy. In the traditional diplomatic realm, relations between actors in the international community are normally reserved for sovereign states. Yet, with the intensification of the global market economy and the increasing use of federalist

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<sup>132</sup> Bruinessen, “Transnational Aspects,” 4-5.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>134</sup> Lawrence, 67.

arrangements, the line for sovereignty is becoming quite blurred. Francisco Aldecoa and Michael Keating, in their book *Paradiplomacy in Action: The Foreign Relations of Subnational Governments*, make a significant effort to develop the field of paradiplomacy, what they define as the diplomatic relations of non-state actors, whether they are regional organizations or sub-state units. Aldecoa and Keating confine their theoretical applications to recognized federal units or official autonomous regions. However, they miss out on many interesting and perfectly applicable cases of ethnic nationalist movements and their dialogue with various states other than the one in which they reside; a perfect example being the Kurdish movement's new relations with the international community after the protective zone was created in 1991.

The period of de facto independence, though an important opportunity, was not utilized to its full potential. The civil war between KDP and PUK forces proves that the transition from a loosely conglomerated social movement to a more official interest group is not a quick or painless move. Nawshirwan Mustafa, who served as Talabani's deputy party head while he was in exile, describes the problem simply, saying:

Imagine for a person who has been against the central government all their life – for fifteen years or thirty years they live in caves or mountains. They were against law and order, wanted to destroy the state. Suddenly they become the master of the land? They should change from freedom fighters to statesman? It's not easy.<sup>135</sup>

Despite the violent growing pains during this important time of transition, it would seem as though the Kurdish elites finally made the move from rebels to politicians, through not cleanly. The true change into legitimate political offices and parties operating under rule of law would not occur until after the American invasion.

### **5.3 Legitimization of Political Parties**

The increasing political maturization that took place during the 1990s was even more pronounced during the lead-up to and during the US invasion in 2003. Turning into official,

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 62.

legitimized parties, accepted into the state political structures, allows the movement to operate through official political offices. Rucht lists the main resources of these offices as “voters,” showing some inherently Western culture bias as he ignores tribal culture and non-Western forms of democratic government. However, the idea of “voters” is easily translated into generalized public support, whether through ballot or other means. The structural features of an official party and an interest group in Rucht’s typology do not differ much, other than increased formality and added legitimacy that come from being accepted into a larger political system.<sup>136</sup> Applying this framework to the Kurdish movement blurs the lines between interest group and political party, forcing one to question whether Rucht is correct in separating these two actors so clearly.

The American government acceptance of the Kurdish political leaders from the very beginning of the process, starting with Garner, Bremer, and following through to present day politics, established the legitimacy of a political party based on an ethnic nationalist movement. The international media also added to the authenticity of Kurdish politics through their use of the diaspora, specifically the two Kurdish representatives in the US, Hoshiyar Zebar and Barham Salih, who extolled upon Kurdish democratic experience.<sup>137</sup> The opportunity provided through a constitutionally mandated federal system imbeds Kurdish politics as a legitimate section of Iraqi democracy. This legitimacy became a resource in itself during the constitutional talks. Masoud Barzani, having built a formidable political consensus among the various Kurdish politicians, had the Kurdish National Assembly issue an official endorsement of a certain set of demands they felt were “nonnegotiable [and] minimal.”<sup>138</sup> This political commitment from a constitutionally legitimate body backed Barzani’s demands in the official negotiations in Baghdad. “When he told the Arabs and the Americans that Kurdistan preferred no constitution to one that did not meet their demands, they had every

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<sup>136</sup> McAdam et al., 186-187.

<sup>137</sup> Lawrence, 204.

<sup>138</sup> Galbraith, 196.

reason to believe him.”<sup>139</sup> The fact that, after 2005, Jalal Talabani was elected as President of Kurdistan also gave the Kurds great bargaining power and influence in further negotiations.

Considering this, Rucht’s naming of ‘voters’ as a resource for these official political parties does meet with substantial evidence. Talabani, Barzani, and other smaller parties, including the Islamists, convinced 80% of their eligible Kurdish voters to cast their ballot for a common Kurdish Coalition electoral list in the first national election.<sup>140</sup> However, it is incomplete as the sole resource. Here, the Kurdish nationalist parties continue to use the resources they developed during the de facto autonomy as key practices to reach their goals. During the constitutional negotiations, the Kurds brought in outside experts, such as Peter Galbraith and other ‘friends’ in the international community, to increase their influence and power in the complex consultations with the American CPA.<sup>141</sup> Galbraith had advised them on this point, explaining the advantage of using negotiators instead of direct leader participation in the talks. “Leaders rarely understand all the nuances of a text and, when they sit at the table, they are under pressure to give an immediate answer.”<sup>142</sup> Utilization of the diaspora and their contacts and expertise went beyond politics, crossing into the economic realm. In October 2008, the Kurdistan Regional Government will host the 4<sup>th</sup> annual Erbil International Fair, an economic tradeshow designed to draw investors, attract industry development, and generate connections between Kurdish businessmen and the international community *without going through Baghdad first*.<sup>143</sup> Keating and Aldecoa point out the frequency of these paradiplomatic relations in federal states, “where the division of powers, giving exclusive competence to the federation, often clashes with the desire on the part of the federated units to project their domestic responsibilities abroad.” This type of activity is a

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 197.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 259.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 239.

<sup>142</sup> Galbraith, 163.

<sup>143</sup> “Erbil International Fair 2008,” *IFP Iraq*, [http://www.ifpiraq.com/ifp\\_agent/show\\_overview.aspx?id=83](http://www.ifpiraq.com/ifp_agent/show_overview.aspx?id=83). Accessed May 14, 2008.

conscious effort to build up the infrastructure and international business reputation of Kurdistan, specifically as the ‘other’ Iraq (a key public relations campaign which will be investigated in the section on cultural framing).

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

Though Rucht may have intended his typology to serve as a means for categorization of social movements, the factors and features with which he builds his theories are more useful when used to investigate the inner workings of a movement. Though clean examples of each type of organization – social movement, interest group, or political party – do exist, the Kurdish nationalist movement shows the development of a social movement organization over time, as it evolves to meet the needs of its people and the requirements of the structure in which it operates. Though the purpose of this chapter, and of this paper, is to answer questions about the Kurdish-Iraqi movement in particular, I believe one will find the most successful social movements are indeed those that allow for change in structure, resources, and mode of operation as necessitated by the situation.

## **Chapter 6 – Cultural Framing**

To effectively mobilize a constituency, movement elites must engage their audience in a dialogue that encourages participation, making the goals and actions of a movement match with the values and cultural constraints of the targeted public. Recalling that cultural framing is “...conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action,”<sup>144</sup> we are searching for attempts to incorporate the Kurdish identity into the political movement processes, or vice versa. Martin Bruinessen, a leading expert on Kurdish identity, recognizes that this is not an easy task for an identity that is so mixed with other important personal distinctions, such as tribe, family, and diaspora connections. He explains:

What unites them is not any set of objective, economic, political or cultural criteria, but only the awareness among many of them that they constitute one people. The awareness of which was the rise of Kurdish nationalism. To the extent that the Kurds feel one and have an awareness of a common destiny, they are a nation. But for each individual Kurd, the Kurdish nation is not the only entity with which he feels he shares a common destiny.<sup>145</sup>

The tenuous nature of Kurdish identity can be most accurately seen through the lens of the division across state borders. Though there is substantial intra-Kurdish support that does transcend international lines, the political and social differences in development and circumstance have split the Kurdish nation. Efforts in framing issues most often revolve around problems specific to the Kurdish minority of one country, rather than ‘Greater Kurdistan.’

Snow et al. offer an extremely useful typing of frame alignment processes that includes four categories: frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, and frame transformation.<sup>146</sup> These can help us to recognize the relevant cultural frames and the attempts by the Kurdish elite to utilize, change, or create completely new frames to mobilize

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<sup>144</sup> McAdam, et al., 6. As quoted in Romano, 21.

<sup>145</sup> Bruinessen, in Atabaki and Dorleijn. 26.

<sup>146</sup> Snow et al., 238.

the movement resources effectively. Frame bridging links “ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem,”<sup>147</sup> allowing a SMO to tap into previously inactivated emotions or sentiments. Amplification clarifies and energizes a certain issue-specific frame, providing an interpretive connection between the target group and a recent event.<sup>148</sup> Frame extension addresses the problem of the movement’s inability to reach certain pools of potential constituents by “extending the boundaries of its primary framework so as to encompass interests or points of view that are incidental to its primary objectives...with the values or interests of potential adherents.”<sup>149</sup> Though this involves some stretching of frames, it is not nearly as extensive as the fourth and final process, frame transformation. Here, Snow et al. ask what a movement organization could do when their activities and beliefs do not match up to a group’s traditional life frames. They find that “new values may have to be planted and nurtured, old meaning or understandings jettisoned, and erroneous beliefs or ‘misframings’ reframed in order to garner support and secure participants.”<sup>150</sup> Though framing and re-framing process are continuously in use from various actors and angles, cultural breaks, disruptions in the political or social situation, can open up opportunities for new frames and perceptions to be put forth.<sup>151</sup> After this opening in the political structure, elites, either old or new, have a chance to “attempt to define the issues, invent metaphors, attribute blame, [and] define tactics,” according to new social perceptions.<sup>152</sup>

Under the Iraqi flag, past and present, we must first examine the tools through which the Iraqi-Kurdish leaders project their messages to Kurdistan, namely print and broadcast media. After setting for the means by which they accomplish their framing, we will consider

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 239.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 243.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 245.

<sup>151</sup> McAdam et al., 268.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 269.

both internal, domestic framing and external, international public relations efforts.

Throughout this investigation, special attention will be paid to the important cultural breaks provided by both the de facto autonomy (including the violent events leading up to it) and the 2003 US invasion. We will also study the substance of the frames, specifically the way in which the Anfal campaign is utilized, as well as their aims.

## 6.1 The Tools of Framing: Media

Though Kurdish language broadcasts were first made available under the Baathist regime during the 1970s and 1980s, this was really only to allow for Kurdish cultural entertainment under official government supervision as well as for controlled information and propaganda purposes.<sup>153</sup> This changed with this uprising of 1991, when rebels targeted the government broadcast stations, seeing them as a tool of Saddam's regime. Ann Zimmerman's *Middle East Report* article, "Kurdish Broadcasting in Iraq," details this key political opportunity provided by the de facto independence period and the new attempt at framing Kurdish identity and issues through television broadcast.<sup>154</sup> Various Kurdish television broadcasts, owned and operated by the main Kurdish political parties, were created shortly after the de facto autonomy took hold. Though all of the parties delighted in showing international films and news programs that Saddam's censors would never have allowed, they put their own spin on their broadcasts according to their party views. Zimmerman explains that the PUK channel was more apt to show films about Baath regime crimes:

Since its first broadcasts in October 1991, the PUK channel has featured these films on a daily and weekly basis, reflecting PUK determination to convince northern Kurds to shut all doors to future negotiation for Saddam's return. The other parties are less sure of the West's reliability and the limits on Saddam, and their stations rarely show 'Saddam's Crimes.'<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Ann Zimmerman, "Kurdish Broadcasting in Iraq," *Middle East Report*, No. 189, (Jul – Aug 1994), 20.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

With each party funding their own television broadcasts and newspapers, news was controlled to cast the respective party as the rightful leader of Kurdistan. Despite a significant change in political circumstance, this media arrangement continues to today.

Kurdistan TV, a satellite station, began broadcasting in 1999 and gave itself the task to “communicate the cultural and political aspirations of the state of Kurdistan to the local population in Iraq as well as to the broader international community via satellite.”<sup>156</sup> The goals and values expressed by the KTV company match exactly with that of the current cultural frame, balancing a desire for independence with the current political situation:

KTV has worked to achieve Kurdistan’s prime goal of the right to self-determination. It has also promoted the concepts of federalism, cooperation among different peoples and nations, and strongly condemns terrorism...

The status which Kurdistan enjoys today is the result of the long, hard struggle which its people have endured in their fight to establish a free, democratic, multicultural, and independent state.<sup>157</sup>

However, there is much question and criticism regarding this media. In an article for the Kurdish Media: United Kurdish Voice – an independent website that gathers news articles from various Kurdish sources – Dr. Hussein Tahiri presents the evidence that the KDP established KurdistanTV in order to counter attacks from a new pro-PKK satellite channel.<sup>158</sup> He also suggests that the PUK established its channel KurdSat shortly after to compete with the KDP’s new tool.

Even though the political structure has evolved to focus much more on Kurdish unity under the Kurdistan Regional Government, these media outlets, along with dozens of newspapers, are still funded through the parties. The one and only independent newspaper, *Hawlati*, reports that it constantly operates under severe political pressure. Editor Faisal Khalil explains, “Both the PUK and the KDP are trying hard to penetrate the *Hawlati* staff

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<sup>156</sup> “KurdistanTV,” *KurdistanTV*, <http://www.kurdistantv.net>. Accessed May 3, 2008.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> Hussein Tahiri, “Kurdish War Goes to Sky,” *Kurdish Media*, (3 January 2000), <http://www.kurdmedia.com/article.aspx?id=7896>. Accessed May 5, 2008.

and lure, even bribe, our staff to stop working for the newspaper."<sup>159</sup> In 2007, the United Nations Mission Assistance in Iraq (UNAMI) criticized the Kurdistan Regional Government for its repeated harassment, arrests, and legal actions taken against journalists.<sup>160</sup> The UN believes that the strict laws against slander are abused for political purposes, hindering journalists who wish to report on government corruptions or be critical of policies and politicians. Though the KRG recognize that freedom of the press is an integral part of the democracy they are trying to build, UN liaison Dindar Zebari expressed the government's commitment to controlling media, saying, "What happens is that legal procedures are followed against some who overstep the standards of the journalism profession."<sup>161</sup> This attention to journalistic content and determination to utilize media sources to spread a government message brings us to the question of the content of the KRG's political frames and what they are trying to accomplish through these activities.

## 6.2 Internal: Framing Division versus Framing Unity

The current cultural framing efforts of the leaders of the Kurdish nationalist movement can be seen through a paradoxical lens of both division and unity. In the past, Kurdish identity had a clear enemy, the regime that was trying to erase the existence of a Kurdish nation. Though negotiation and collaboration did happen with these ideological opposites, the Kurdish movement consistently framed itself as fighting for a distinct Kurdish nation, independent and free. There are two key cultural breaks, corresponding with openings in the political opportunity structures that allowed for redefinition and reinvigoration of Kurdish national identity and the cultural frames surrounding it – the Anfal Campaign and the 2003 invasion.

Immediately after the Anfal Campaign ended, the Kurdish-Iraqi population was

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<sup>159</sup> As quoted in David Axe, "Propagandistan: Iraqi Kurdistan is Free – But its Media Sure Isn't," *WorldPress.org*, (5 April, 2006), <http://www.worldpress.org/Mideast/2308.cfm>. Accessed May 3, 2008.

<sup>160</sup> Reuters, "U.N. criticizes Iraq's Kurdistan on press freedom," *Reuters AlertNet*, (25 April 2007), <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/BAY554793.htm>. Accessed May 11, 2008.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

devastated, both spiritually and physically. The loss of over 150,000 Kurdish lives in such a violent, yet systematic manner sucked any hope for future struggles out of the movement as well as leaving thousands of children orphaned, women widowed, families dislocated, and villages sick with the lasting effects of chemical gas. The obvious, and now legally proven<sup>†</sup>, target for the organized military campaign was those of Kurdish nationality, though a number of Iraqis of other ethnicities were killed as well. The massive amount of refugees fleeing northern Iraq during the uprising of 1991 stemmed from an overwhelming fear of retaliation by Saddam's regime.<sup>162</sup> This event qualifies as a perfect example of a collective national trauma, a violent event that takes place in front of or directed at a mass audience that is often followed with the need for collective coping mechanisms and new perceptive frames that incorporate this event into social memory and collective action plans. According to Jeffrey C. Alexander, one of the authors of *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*:

Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.

Connecting his theories with Benedict Anderson's, Alexander places the notion of a collective traumatic event in the realm of the 'imagined community,' writing that a group trauma does not exist without social belief in its existence. In order for a cultural trauma to be considered relevant, four questions must be answered: "What actually happened?" Who are the victims? How does the wider audience relate to the immediate victims? Who is to blame? These four criteria can be seen as the building materials for constructing strategic cultural frames through which social movements promote and organize their actions. Mass trauma is

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<sup>†</sup> In a criminal court case in the Netherlands, a prominent Dutch businessman, who sold chemicals used in the gas attacks at Halabja and other villages, was convicted of complicity in war crimes. Though he was officially acquitted of the additional charge of complicity in genocide, the acquittal was based on reasonable doubt regarding his personal knowledge of the use of his chemicals, not whether the Kurdish gas attacks were defined under genocide. Legal experts, including the attorneys working on this particular case, agree these proceedings set an important legal precedent for the international recognition of the Anfal Campaign as genocide. See <http://www.krg.org/articles/detail.asp?smap=02010200&lngnr=12&asnr=&anr=17055&rn=73>.

<sup>162</sup> Lawrence, 52.

the perfect example of an immediate cultural break, but opportunity can only be seized when a group recognizes it as their chance and agrees upon a specific interpretation of it – with certain ensuing responses. The following period of de facto autonomy gave the Kurds an opportunity to utilize cultural frames to incorporate the event into their nationalist movement, providing a public means to process the painful personal memories. Yet, this opportunity was largely wasted with the continued violence of the intra-Kurdish struggles.

The second cultural break, the US invasion of 2003, provided a second chance for the Kurdish leaders to redefine a unified, Kurdish national identity. Claiming this particular political opening as an opportunity for peaceful democratic autonomy took priority over personal power struggles. The intensification and reprioritizing of Kurdish national identity, in the framework of a multi-national Iraqi state, can be seen in number of different arenas since the invasion, and almost all involve the Anfal genocide as an integral piece of Kurdish-Iraqi identity. As Nechirvan Barzani, the current Prime Minister of the KRG, explained in a public statement, “This legacy of genocide will remain with us...[as] a part of all we think and do... We must make the memory of our sacrifices a driving force to build our future.” With the new availability of international forensic experts and scientific equipment, many of mass graves have been uncovered. On January 14, 2008, the Kurdistan Regional Government held a massive ceremony for the remains of 371 victims. Regional and international media showcased the rows of coffins, draped with the Kurdish flag (notably not the Iraqi flag), with crowds of mourning women and children.<sup>163</sup> In Alexander’s opinion, these communal acts provide “some collective means for undoing repression and allowing the pent-up emotions of loss and mourning to be expressed.”<sup>164</sup> In the vein of strategic framing with the goal of unity in mind, it is important to observe that, though the ceremony itself was held in KDP-

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<sup>163</sup> Shamal Aqrawi. “Ceremony mourns victims of Iraq's "Anfal" genocide.” *Kurdish Globe Online*. 15 January 2008. <http://www.kurdishglobe.net/displayArticle.jsp?id=0160756B8FF85192A678DDD09B7D2A60>. Accessed 27 March 2008.

<sup>164</sup> Alexander, 7.

dominated Erbil province, the actual burial took place the next day in Sulaimaniya, the PUK's traditional power base. Through careful orchestration of events such as this, the political elites are effectively sharing the power of the Anfal memory, inherently declaring the collective experience of genocide as a uniting force.

Though many projects and programs supported by the Kurdistan Regional Government since 2003 have involved the Anfal memory, the first International Conference on Genocide Against the Kurds in Kurdistan-Iraq is arguably the largest and most focused event involving the Anfal genocide yet. Over the course of three days in Erbil, the regional capital of the Kurdistan Regional Government, dozens of researchers, politicians, and artists presented their work involving the Anfal. The media coverage for the event was extensive, including complete television broadcasts of the opening and closing ceremonies on regional Kurdish television channels. Fuad Hussein, Chief of Staff of the Kurdish presidential office, did not mince words in a speech about the importance of such research saying, "just as our language, geography, history...form part of our national identity, so the genocide against the Kurds is the most important aspect in the formation of the Kurdish Nation."<sup>165</sup> The aims of the conference were, in essence to answer Alexander's criteria for framing. Some of the forensic research results were presented, providing scientific answers to what happened as well as identification of the victims. Much of the informal discussion, as well as a number of presentations, at the conference were centered on the progress of various legal proceedings, including the trials of Anfal perpetrators and the constitutional status of Kirkuk. Quite obviously, these events are aimed at Snow et al.'s 'frame amplification' and 'frame bridging,' seeking to emphasize certain experiences and connect them with current day events. These issues connected to the Anfal identity through frame bridging represent a danger that Dr.

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<sup>165</sup> Fuad Hussein, speech at the International Conference on Genocide Against the Kurds in Kurdistan Iraq, 26 January 2008. As Quoted in Eleni Fergadi, "Genocide; is it a question of national identity?" *Kurdish Globe Online*, 30 January 2008. <http://www.kurdishglobe.net/displayArticle.jsp?id=0120D26473B1E249ABF2838FFDBFD707>. Accessed 26 March 2008.

Zafer Yoruk, a professor at the new English-language University of Kurdistan-Hawler in Erbil and an expert on Kurdish identity politics, recognizes. In an interview with *The Kurdish Globe*, he detailed this connection between the Anfal Genocide and Kurdish identity saying:

In the process of nation building, a collective trauma may be 'selected' to play a positive bonding role, but such selection also means the emergence of 'collective personality disorders.' Simply put, if the Kurdish nation insists on building itself by relying on the trauma of the genocide, then the potential danger of seeking compensation is very real. The Kurds should definitely remember, but they should also forgive.<sup>166</sup>

This promotion of Kurdish nationality in Iraq as a unified and distinct, repressed people who share a common legacy of trauma seems contradictory to the simultaneous effort to extend and transform the existing cultural frame regarding independence to accept a federal autonomous status within Iraq. Though many groups still profess an outright goal of immediate independent status, the ruling Kurdish elite have, over time, recognized that a truly separate and independent Kurdish state not is a viable short-term goal in the given political opportunity structure. Instead, the KRG chooses to promote cultural and political autonomy as a solution for the Kurdish issue. With so many Kurdish people literally fighting and dying to promote the Kurdish nationalism in the past, the challenge of selling a more moderated idea to adherents must not be underestimated. On the same day as Iraq's first elections in 2005, an unofficial referendum took place outside of Kurdish polling stations. The ballot sported two flags, the Iraqi flag and the Kurdistan flag<sup>†</sup>, and asked, "Should Kurdistan be part of Iraq or should it be independent?"<sup>167</sup> Of the two million Kurdish voters who took part, 98% circled the Kurdish flag. With attitudes like this, the effort to convince Kurdish citizens to accept their Iraqi citizenship necessitates much attention. Falah Mustafa Bakir recently

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<sup>166</sup> Dr. Zafer Yoruk as quoted in Eleni Fergandi, "Genocide; is it a question of national identity," *The Kurdish Globe*, (30 Jan 2008), <http://www.kurdishglobe.net/displayArticle.jsp?id=0120D26473B1E249ABF2838FFDBFD707>. Accessed May 26, 2008.

<sup>†</sup> The Kurdish flag is a tricolor background with red, white, and green stripes; in the center is the 21 point yellow sun. This same flag was used for the short-lived Iranian-Kurdish Mahabad Republic in 1946. The cross-border symbolism is inherently threatening to those opposing a greater Kurdish independent state, but is also a key emblem for the Kurdish nationalist movement.

<sup>167</sup> Galbraith, 171.

provided the ‘party line’ to a crowd of Kurdish intellectuals, attempting to convince them that Kurdistan is only currently viable inside of a federalized Iraq, saying:

We must accept the reality that there is no safe and secure place in today’s world for non-states. From the former Soviet Republics, throughout Africa and Asia we have seen time and again that small, weak regions which try to “go it alone” are swallowed up – often violently – by strong neighbors. For us, there is no realistic alternative. We must and accept that our best course is to move ahead as part of a federal, democratic and pluralistic Iraq... But our leadership is remarkably united on the “red line” issues that are essential to us, and while we are happy to give and take on day to day activities, we will never compromise on our basic rights to self-rule, to democracy, and to charting our own course toward economic development.<sup>168</sup>

However, this attempt to transform the existing cultural frame to match new political realities is still not well accepted in society.

### 6.3 External: Showcasing Democracy

The Kurdistan Regional Government has become known for its expertise in international public relations, utilizing their extensive diaspora and expertise to build media and governmental connections around the world. Understanding the way in which the Kurdish leaders frame their intentions and interests is a key part of comprehending increase of Kurdish influence. Enlisting the services of Russo, Marsh, and Rogers Public Relations firm, the KRG developed a media blitz campaign entitled “Kurdistan: The Other Iraq.”<sup>169</sup> The message of the TV commercials, print ads, and public statements portrays the Kurdish region of Iraq as a stronghold of stability, economic opportunity, and thankful, peaceful citizens. In addition to thanking the USA, the television ads spread the claim that “not one American or coalition soldier has been . . . killed in the Iraqi Kurdistan region”<sup>170</sup> since the beginning of the war. Though the stated intent of this campaign was to attract economic investment and tourism, one cannot help but imagine the positive impact it had on the Kurdish relations with the Bush Administration. Perhaps there was an underlying purpose to these messages, since

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<sup>168</sup> Bakir, speech, 6 Jan 2007.

<sup>169</sup> Al Kamen, “The Iraq We Haven’t Seen,” *The Washington Post*, (26 July 2006), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/07/25/AR2006072501254.html>. Accessed May 18, 2008.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

they obviously match with Snow's frame alignment, assuring Washington that the Kurdish region wants American involvement (though only to ensure the viability of the KRG).

However, these messages should not be, as Galbraith says, misinterpreted "as a sign that the Kurds [will] play their assigned role in building a new Iraq that [is] democratic, multiethnic, and united."<sup>171</sup> Until February 2008, the Kurdistan Regional Government refused to fly the Iraqi flag, keeping the Kurdish flag in its place. However, a compromise has been reached: the three green stars, which the Kurds held were representative of Saddam's regime, have been removed from the Iraqi flag.<sup>172</sup> Coming in a time when the Kurdish leaders were being criticized for being too demanding and divisive in Iraqi politics, the KRG used the resolution of the issue to make a pointed statement. Adnan al-Mufti, the speaker of the Kurdish National Assembly, said it "is a reply to the misunderstanding and feeling that the Kurds are far from the Iraqi government and that they are far from the Iraqi constitution."<sup>173</sup> However, there are still serious doubts and challenges about the KRG's ability to combine the external image of a willing participant in Iraqi democracy with the internal demands of an ethnic nationalist independence movement. The test for this will play out in Kirkuk.

Kurdistan Daloye, the Iraq Country Director for the DePaul University International Human Rights Law Institute, explains that Kirkuk is a main issue for the KRG and the Kurds, saying, "People believe that there should be a referendum and the outcome should be that Kirkuk will be run by KRG and become part of Kurdistan again." Most Kurdish citizens believe that the city of Kirkuk belongs to the three provinces that make up Kurdistan; the KRG's official statements confirm this sentiment. Due to the contentious nature of this issue, the drafters of the Iraqi constitution left the issue unresolved at the time, creating Article 140, which requires a referendum by the end of 2007 to determine the status of Kirkuk. This

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<sup>171</sup> Galbraith, 158.

<sup>172</sup> "Kurds hoist reworked Iraqi flag," *BBCNews Online*, (10 Feb. 2008), [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/7238114.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7238114.stm). Accessed May 18, 2008.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

referendum has been officially delayed several times for various political reasons and is due to take place in June of 2008, though no plans have been formalized. The national discourse surrounding the Kirkuk issue has been intensified by claims connecting the Arabization process to the Anfal campaign, attempting to pull the legitimacy afforded by human rights offenses to regain Kirkuk under Kurdish administration. A semi-political group called the “High Committee for Kurdistan de-Arabization” recently published the *Atlas of Kirkuk*, a booklet of highly politicized maps, writing that “maps are the identity for those who want to use it truthfully.”<sup>174</sup> These maps were drafted with the intention of supporting rhetorical arguments about the Kurdish right to Kirkuk, and hopefully forcing out the sizable Arab population. Though the Kurdish community is divided on the best way to solve the Kirkuk issue, this type of ethnic argument, with seemingly scientific backing, is finding a solid base of support and fueling aggressive nationalism. The KRG continues to use international organizations such as the United Nations to pressure the Baghdad central government to follow through with Article 140, but must also walk a delicate tightrope, keeping the balance of satisfying their constituents with a referendum but also matching up to the new international democratic standards of human rights.

## 6.4 Conclusion

Through the utilization of cultural framing techniques, everything from frame amplification to outright transformation, the Kurdish political elite are manipulating the political structures, creating opportunities, and garnering resources to further their movement efforts. This process has had its own learning curve, however. The initial creation and use of Kurdish media did not form cultural frames promoting Kurdish public unity, but rather party loyalty. The political opportunity that gave the Kurds their second chance not only changed their mobilization style but also ushered in a new conception of Kurdish identity and cultural

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<sup>174</sup> High Committee for Kurdistan de-Arabization, *Atlas of Kirkuk*, (Erbil: Kurdistan Regional Government, 2006), 8.

values. The KRG's efforts in promoting their image abroad have met with relative success. Yet this picture of a united, wholly democratic and free Kurdistan is shaky on the domestic front. As the issues of Kirkuk, oil revenue laws, and constitutional powers are discussed and hopefully resolved, the Kurdish leaders will face a great challenge in linking the external images with the internal cultural values.

## **Chapter 7 – Conclusion**

In this paper, I have attempted to utilize social movement theory – in particular, ideas regarding political opportunity structure, resource mobilization, and cultural framing – to explain the dramatic increase in political power experience by the Kurdish nationalist movement of the Kurds in Iraq. I have shown, first, that the institutional background, both the state and international systems, in which the Kurdish movement was embedded changed dramatically, providing historical opportunities for the Kurds of Iraq during the de facto independence period from 1991 to 2003 and after the US invasion of Iraq. The internal structure of the movement leadership was examined for unity, concluding that the lack of accord hurt the movement's potential during de facto independence, but also that the specific decision to unite the KDP and PUK leadership was a major reason for the current success of the Kurdish-Iraqi efforts. However, the presence of internal and external allies following 2003, specifically the Shiite constitutional deal and American support, has produced a political opportunity system with little, if any, capacity to repress Kurdish interests. This contrasts dramatically with pre-1991 Iraqi state repressive capacity as well as the lack of external support and involvement prior to the creation of the 'no-fly' humanitarian protection zone.

In closer consideration of the structure of the movement itself, its available resources, and its mode of operation, the Kurdish nationalist movement has obviously experienced great growing pains and a difficult developmental process over the past twenty years. Moving from guerilla warfare operations conducted from loosely connected tribal peshmerga soldiers to a legitimate political organization recognized by international governments has been a difficult road. My research has shown that the Kurdish nationalist movement has made this transition from a loose social movement to an interest group trying to gain political access to a formally recognized, constitutionally mandated territorial government entity. Yet, made obvious

through the KRG's use of the same peshmerga troops and the refusal to cooperate with certain Baghdad decisions, the Kurdish leaders still employ resource mobilization tactics from previous stages in its development. These strategies and devices for mobilizing the Kurds' ever-growing pool of resources (intellectual diaspora, economic development, etc.) have allowed the nationalist movement to effectively take advantage of most of the political opportunities opened to them, particularly after 2003.

The picture of mobilization and political opportunities is not complete, however, without the recognition of the significant role played by the continuously changing perceptions of Kurdish national identity, both internally for those of Kurdish ethnicity and for external actors making decisions regarding Kurdish interests. Though a collective understanding of Kurdish-Iraqi culture as a distinctive, repressed national identity has existed for many decades, the Kurdish-Iraqi elite began to strategically alter these cultural frames to foster a new political and social consensus that would be more compatible to international opinion. This meant, first, using the cultural trauma of the Anfal Genocide and the collective memory surrounding it to generate a conception of Kurdish identity that could transcend party or tribal affiliation, as well as garner international sympathy. The next challenge would prove harder: convincing the Kurdish people that autonomy in a democratic Iraq, rather than an independent Kurdish state, is the new, more possible movement goal. This political frame has been effectively spread to external, international actors, through various media campaigns. However, Kurdish citizens, still subject to divisive, party-funded media, remain fairly unconvinced on the prospects of Iraqi federalism and are still focused on a long-term goal of independence.

By investigating the Kurdish nationalist movement in the context of a social movement, with particular focus on the development of the movement over the past twenty years, I have discovered two opportunities that can be compared with each other. First, the

lost opportunity of the de facto independence is easily explained by the absence of unity, structural allies, and effective identity framing to promote peace and mobilization. This lies in stark contrast to the second opening after 2003, in which international allies provided a key opportunity for the leaders to unite, utilize their extensive resources, and begin to frame their grievances to promote a strong Kurdish identity behind which to mobilize. The continuous organizational development of the Kurdish movement in Iraq, along with excellent mobilization of resources such as a well-connected diaspora and the framing of Kurdish interests as politically desirable objectives, has allowed the Kurds to maximize their power potential in a new, transitioning Iraq.

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