



APPENDIX A Psychosocial Conditions in the Kurdish Autonomous Region of Iraq.

§A1 Kurdish Contexts of Life in Kurdistan.

Technically, Kurdistan does not exist as a recognized state within the United Nations. Physically, psychologically, and emotionally, however, Kurdistan has existed since the 11th century, so we are informed by the Seljuk chronicles. Kurdish dynasties, emirates, principalities, and chiefdoms were established from the 8th to the 20th centuries, and most were short-lived administrations of Kurdish nationality, such as the Kurdish state (1918–1919), Kingdom of Kurdistan (1921–1924), Kurdistansky Uyezd (1923–1929), Republic of Ararat (1927–1930), and Republic of Mahabad (1946).¹ The *imagined* state of Kurdistan generally comprises the following four regions which the Kurds named after the four cardinal directions: **Bakur** (*northern Kurdistan*) located in southeastern Türkiye; **Başûr** (*southern Kurdistan*) located in northern Iraq; **Rojhilat** (*eastern Kurdistan*) located in northwestern Iran, and **Rojava** (*western Kurdistan*) located in northern Syria. Kurdish bloodlines run



Figure 1 The Imagined Realm of Kurdistan

¹ (Bengio, 2014)



Figure 2

interconnectedly throughout the four regions of their homeland. Families commonly maintain continuity and community across borders of the political states divide them.² Unlike other minorities, Kurdish peoples of the four provinces consider themselves to be part of Kurdistan, even as they acknowledge that their part is under the control of a non-Kurdish political state. The leadership collectives within each of the four provinces deal with their political masters using every available political, social, diplomatic, and armed resistance resource to ensure their cultural survival. The four Kurdish provinces are linked by internal and external organisations and institutions dedicated to preserving and modernizing the Kurdish language, culture, and national identity. The emblem in figure 4, for example is the Washington Kurdish Institute (WKI), a non-profit, research and educational organization based in Washington, D.C., founded in 1996 by Dr. Najmaldin Karim, a Kurdish leader, and neurosurgeon.³ The importance of this interconnected Kurdish community across boundaries of 4 political states is that each province must be understood both separately and in relation to the others to comprehend the phenomenological experiences of its members, whether for the better or worse. Figure 3 offers a simplified illustration of the current state of Kurdistan, its social, political, and military governance, and or armed resistance. Starting with the top left, the Kurdistan Communities Union serves as a political, social, and cultural-ideological umbrella for nearly all Kurdish movements, parties, and organisations, both armed and unarmed. Although Abdullah Öcalan is the group's leader, due to his imprisonment the organization is led by an assembly called Kurdistan People's Congress (Kongra-Gel), which serves as the group's legislature. The Assembly elects a 31-person Executive Council, led by a dual co-chair system, with one position reserved for a man and the other for a woman. The executive council selects the commander-in-chief of the People's Defence Forces (HPG), which is the PKK's official armed wing, now operating only against Türkiye. In Başûr N. Iraq, the Kurdish Peshmerga are the official security force of the Kurdish Regional Government and are part of the Iraqi Armed Forces. In Rojava NE Syria, the YPG/YPJ are part of the Syrian Democratic Force which is under the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. In Rojhilat, the armed opposition groups fighting the Iranian security forces have an uncertain relationship to the KCK. In theory, this umbrella organisation is the intended structure that allows the four Kurdish provinces to act in highly coordinated sociopolitical and military actions, while reducing risk from its controlling political states. In practice, however, the relationships between Kurdish Bakur, Başûr, Rojava, and Rojhilat, are far more complex and volatile. The next four subsections provide a very brief overview of each of these four Kurdish narratives.

ŞA1.1 Kurdish Rojava – Kurdish Region of north and eastern SYRIA.

The KRG and the Autonomous Administration seek to transform their territorial authority into a sustainable reality, mainly by formalizing it and gaining internal and international recognition. The KRG has come a long way in reaching this objective because of its longer experience as a constitutional entity that assumes statist powers such as security, governance, and revenue generation within its territory. The United States currently has approximately 900 soldiers working in Northeast Syria and Erbil, the capital of the KRG, in



Figure 3 Syrian Kurdish (west) Rojava

² (Roy, 2005)

³ (Mansour, 2016)



support of the Syrian Defense Forces SDF of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, in opposition to the Syrian Regime of Bashar al-Assad. The peoples involved in this SDF, AANES, and who inhabit these Syrian spaces are majority Sunni Arab and minority Sunni Kurdish.⁴ The Kurdish members of these communities, however, play a dominant role in both the autonomous administration and fighting the Islamic State and the Assad Regime. Officially, the SDF is Syrian, rather than ethnically based, but its most effective military units are not only Kurdish, but filled out with Kurdish fighters whose combat experience was gained in battles with the Turkish and Iranian armies, and against Al-Qaeda in Iraq.^{24F}⁵ Having worked with the Rojava SDF recently, I was struck with their 'whole-of-society' makeup, from old to young and a high representation of women in the ranks, both in mixed units and all women's units. A Free Women's Units Star (YJA Star) commander has said the unit has lost 112 fighters in 2020. According to YJA Star central commander Zozon Cewlik, his all women unit conducted 110 independent operations against the Islamic State and Turkish-backed forces, killing 316 and losing 112 of their own soldiers.^{25F}⁶ YJA Star is a women's wing of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), operating under the feminist philosophy of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan. The Kurdish men and women both in and out of the PKK, SDF, PJAK, KDPI, and Peshmerga are often to be found working, socialising, and fighting, on either side of international political borders, which they see as curiosities rather than obstacles.

§A1.2 Kurdish Rojhilat – Kurdish Region of IRAN.

After the fall of the Shah of Iran in 1979, the first armed Kurdish resistance movements formed, taking advantage of the possibility of Kurdish self-rule. As the Shi'a based theocracy began to consolidate power and subdue Iran's minority populations, more Kurdish Derek militia formed and consolidated with existing Kurdish resistance movements under the PKK and KCK. Figure 11 illustrates some of the armed resistance movements fighting the Iranian Shi'a Theocracy. Notice that all are based in the mountainous regions of the Iraqi Kurdish region. In 2004, the Kurdistan Free life Party (PJAK), under the philosophical leadership of Abdullah Öcalan, was established

to liberate the Kurdish people in Rojhilat from persecution by the Shi'a Islamic Theocracy in Tehran. Affiliated with the PKK, the new armed political movement, sought 'democratic autonomy' for the Kurds within the existing state boundaries in the Middle East. The Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps that protects the Mullahs' hold on power, have conducted a multi-generational campaign to subdue and pacify the Kurdish peoples of Rojhilat, the Iranian Kurdish Province. The IRGC arrests, imprisons, tortures, and murders Kurdish citizens at an even higher rate than the other ethnicities of Balochi, Arab, Persian, and Azeri. The IRGC does not confine its attacks within Iran, and often conducts cross-border attacks on the Kurdish people in Başûr province, if they are thought to be Rojhilat, or are in any way supporting the Rojhilat peoples. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) routinely launches attacks (albeit mostly unsuccessful), against PJAK personnel, logistics, and targets the headquarters of the KDPI and Komala in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI).⁷ Iran has attempted to forcibly move its Kurdish population away from the oil and natural gas fields and into ethnic camps, where they can be more easily controlled. Kurdish opposition groups rejected these attempts and increased their capacity to physically resist. The Kurdistan Democratic Party of



Figure 4 Iranian Kurdistan (east) Rojhilat

⁴ (Benjamin et al., 2018; Dray, 2015; Groupe d'études géopolitiques, 2023;)

⁵ Firat News Agency (ANF)

⁶ (Jangiz, 2020) Netjes & van Veen, 2021

⁷ (Haqiqi, 2014; KDPI, 2014)



Iran (KDPI), PJAK, PAK, and Komala Kurdish parties, and the Organization of Iranian Kurdistan Struggle are among the most important oppositional Iranian Kurds in the KRI.⁸ "Disarming or gathering us in camps is not accepted in any way, and it is a red line for us", Khalid Wanawsha, a member of KDPI's central committee said.⁹ The nature of Kurdish society that is divided by political state lines, results in significant amounts of unregulated cross-border trade between related Kurdish villages and between families and clans. The Kurdish people who support this cross-border trade are called "kulbars" by Kurds, but are referred to as smugglers by Iran, Türkiye, and the Iraqi Federal Government. Kurdish Kulbars transport goods and supplies for both the civil Kurdish economy as well as the armed resistance economy. The job is dangerous due to harsh weather, mountainous terrain, land mines and Turkish, Iranian, and Arab-Iraqi border patrols. In 2019, 50 kulbars were reportedly killed and 144 injured by border guards.¹⁰ From a Kurdish perspective, their resistance fighters are Peshmerga fighters, rather than militants. These 'militant-Peshmerga' have been involved in the War in Iraq between 2014-2017, fighting the Islamic State along with other Kurdish forces. During my service in Iraq and Syria, I have provided training assistance to Peshmerga from Iraq, Syria, Türkiye, and Iran, as part of formal USA support to local forces during their struggle against ISIL in Deir ez-Zur, Kirkuk, Erbil, and Al Hasaka.



Figure 5 Kurdish Armed Resistance Movements in Iran

⁸ (Salami, 2022)(Mukriyan, 2022)

⁹ (van Wilgenburg, 2023)

¹⁰ (BADAWI, 2022) Netjes & van Veen, 2021



§A1.3 Kurdish Bakur – Kurdish Region of TURKIYE.

The Kurdish story in Turkey is perhaps, one of the darkest narratives of this region and the fact that they have maintained a sense of solidarity and identity is a testament to human endurance. Turkish Kurdistan or Northern Kurdistan (Bakurê Kurdistanê) is the southeastern part of Turkey where Kurds form the predominant ethnic group. The Kurdish Institute of Paris estimates that there are 20 million Kurds living in Turkey, most of them in the southeast. Their historical placement in the Taurus mountains dates to 1527 in an area called *Vilayet-i Kurdistan*. Their

principalities were absorbed into the Ottoman Empire which collapsed after World War 1. After the war ended, the Allies initially planned to provide a homeland for the Kurdish peoples in the lands of eastern Türkiye. The founder of the modern state of Türkiye, a military officer named Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, reconquered those Kurdish regions and forced the Allies to accept the Treaty of Lausanne in 1927, creating the borders of the modern Republic of Türkiye.¹¹ The remainder of the Kurdish areas were assigned to the new British and French mandated states of Iraq and Syria. At the San Francisco Peace Conference of 1945, the Kurdish delegation proposed consideration of territory claimed by the Kurds, also to no avail. Ultimately, the Kurds were left without a self-ruled region. From the 1920s onward to the present day, the Kurdish peoples of southeastern Türkiye have been engaged in a multigenerational

separatist campaign against the Turkish government. Tens upon tens of thousands of

people have died on both sides. The Kurdistan People's Congress (Kongra-Gel or KGK, formerly the Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK) is a Kurdish separatist group primarily active in part of northern Iraq and southeastern Turkey.¹² Composed mostly of Turkish Kurds, the group in 1984 began a campaign of armed violence, including terrorism, which resulted in over 45,000 deaths. KGK and Turkish forces clashed repeatedly in 2011 and 2012, including an attack in October 2011 that killed 24 Turkish troops and was the deadliest incident since 1993.¹³ KGK also stepped up its kidnapping campaign against Turkish state employees and soldiers, which included the unprecedented abduction of a Turkish parliamentary deputy in August 2012. The KGK's imprisoned leader, Abdullah Ocalan, in 2012 began negotiating for a peace agreement with the Turkish Government. Negotiations continued into 2014, though KGK leaders expressed frustration, charging the Turkish Government failed to establish legal and constitutional guarantees.¹⁴ The accompanying cease-fire endured despite clashes and tensions in southeast Turkey sparked in part by the construction of Turkish military outposts that Kurdish supporters allege undercut the peace process. Clashes in July 2015 between Turkish security forces and KGK resulted in nationwide detentions of alleged KGK members and a wave of Turkish airstrikes against the group's camps and weapons stores in northern Iraq. Renewed KGK violence against Turkish authorities had resulted in the deaths of at least 11 police and army members as of late July 2015. The historical record of the Kurdish – Turkish relationship is not encouraging. The Turkish government repeatedly used armed military force to put down rebellions and from 1925 to 1965, the entire area was placed



Kurdistanê

¹¹¹¹ (Ibrahim & Gürbey, 2000a)(Glynn, 2021)

¹² (Ismael, 2022)(Khalidi, 2020)

¹³ (Gurel, 2023)(English, 2021)

¹⁴ (Ibrahim & Gürbey, 2000a)



under martial law and closed off from the remainder of the country.¹⁵ The military government enacted harsh measures that only inflamed the captive Kurdish population. Kurdish place names were changed to Turkish cultural words. The use of Kurdish language was outlawed, the words Kurds and Kurdistan were erased from dictionaries and history books, and the Kurds were only referred to as Mountain Turks.¹⁶ Politicians were often prosecuted and sentenced to prison terms for speaking Kurdish. In 1983, several provinces were again placed under martial law in response to the activities of the militant separatist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). A guerrilla war took place through the rest of the 1980s and into the 1990s. By 1993, the total number of security forces involved in the struggle in southeastern Turkey was about 200,000, and the conflict had become the largest counter-insurgency in the Middle East, in which much of the countryside was evacuated.¹⁷ Thousands of Kurdish-populated villages were destroyed, and numerous extra judicial summary executions were carried out by both sides. While the estimates vary, at least 40,000 people were killed in the violence and hundreds of thousands more were forced to leave their homes. The PKK's founder and leader, Abdullah Öcalan was captured in Kenya in 1999, which brought the organisation to the negotiating table with the government in Ankara, supported by the European Union. The EU's encouragement resulted in the introduction of a greater degree of official tolerance for Kurdish cultural activities, and the violence came to halt in nearly all of Turkish Kurdistan. This period of calm lasted only until the current President of

Kurdish Bakur PKK – Türkiye.

The Partiya Karkerê Kurdistanê (PKK) is a Kurdish militant political organization and armed guerrilla movement which historically operated throughout the four provinces of Kurdistan. In an agreement with the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq, the PKK ceased combat operations in Iraq. Its fighters and military leadership are primarily based in the mountainous Kurdish-majority regions of southeastern Türkiye and northern Iraq. Since 1984, the PKK has been involved in a brutal conflict with the Turkish government. Although the PKK initially sought an independent Kurdish state, in the 1990s its goals changed to seeking autonomy and increased political and cultural rights for Kurds within Türkiye, like the existing arrangement in Iraq. The PKK is designated as a terrorist organization by Türkiye, the United States, the EU, and some other countries.

Türkiye, Recep Erdogan, took office with a vow to destroy Kurdish culture and identity.¹⁸ The PKK founder, Abdulah Ocalan, remains in prison, where he continues to be the ideological force behind the Kurdish resistance in Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Iraq. In his place, the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) was formed as an umbrella group that worked to unite or at least, coordinate the activities and messaging of the many political parties of Kurdistan.^{18F}¹⁹ This includes the Kurdish militant political organization and armed guerrilla movement Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Democratic Union Party (PYD), Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK), and Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party (PÇDK). Finland and Sweden's alleged support for the KCK, is one of the points which caused Turkey to oppose Finland and Sweden's NATO accession bid.

Figure 7 Kurdish Resistance Group PKK

¹⁵ (Ibrahim & Gürbey, 2000b; Olson, 1996)

¹⁶ (Jongerden, 2007)

¹⁷ (Ghaliand, 1993; Ibrahim & Gürbey, 2000b)

¹⁸ (Jangiz, 2020)

¹⁹ (Gunes, 2013)



ŞA1.4 Kurdish Başûr – Kurdish Autonomous Region, Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) Iraq.

At the end of the 1991 Gulf War, the Coalition established a no-fly zone over northern Iraq to provide humanitarian relief to and safeguard the Kurds who would be subjected to Iraqi air attacks. Amid the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from three northern provinces, the Kurdistan Region emerged in 1992 as an autonomous entity inside Iraq with its own local government and parliament. The population of Iraq's Kurdish Region is approximately 6.2 million, of which 80% are Kurds, spread over 38,000 km².²⁰ This region of Iraq equates to the Kurdish **Başûr (south)** region where

Figure 8 Iraqi Kurdish Başûr (south) region



Kurds have their own governing body called the Kurdish Regional Authority and Government. The KRG is complete with its own legislature, economy, (Peshmerga) army and president, who is responsible to the Iraqi Federal Government for maintaining internal security to include border control.²¹ The KRG territory has a homogeneous Kurdish population; the Arab, Turkmen, and Christian enclaves have been reduced and therefore do not disrupt its unity.²² As in the rest of Iraq, more than 70% of its territory is urbanized. Erbil (the capital) Duhok, Sulaymaniyah, and Halabja are the main urban geographical poles.²³ The region that the KRG encompasses, however, is not exactly clear and the Kurdish Peshmerga and the Federal Iraqi forces (mostly Arab Sunni and Shi'a), operate in an intermixed capacity

in regions that have mixed populations of Arab and Kurdish. Both the KRG and the Iraqi Federal government claim ownership of these regions that are disputed. As part of the so-called 'disputed territories', the KRG claims another 45,000 km² (Sinjar, the Nineveh Plains, Kirkuk, etc.). For the Kurdish people of Iraq, these locations are imbued with great emotion creating a long-running simmering conflict with the Federal Government in Baghdad, and within the Kurdish leadership in Iraq. Kurdish Peshmerga captured the areas from Saddam Hussein's army in 1991 with the assistance of US Army Special Forces operating under a US air-umbrella. After the fall of the regime in 2003, Kurdish governance controlled the disputed areas until the Islamic State (aka Da'esh) captured these areas and beyond, such as Mosul. After the Kurdish Peshmerga, Iraqi Special Forces, and Shi'a militias recaptured these areas



²⁰ (Al-Rahim, 2023)

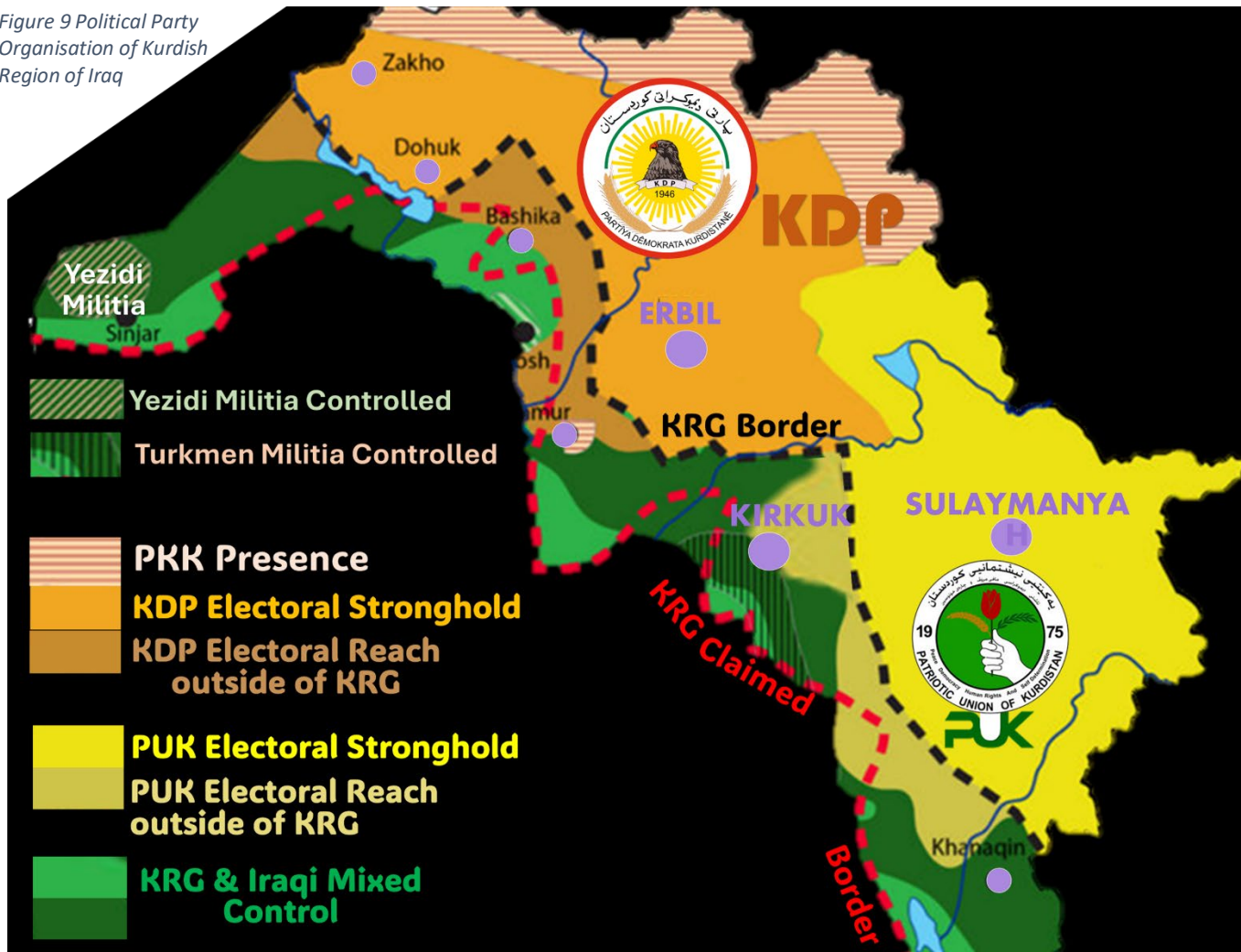
²¹ Nechirvan Barzani is the nephew of long time KRG president Masoud Barzani.

²² (Ghaliand, 1993)

²³ (Phillips, 2013)



Figure 9 Political Party
 Organisation of Kurdish
 Region of Iraq



from Daesh in 2017, the areas have largely been under the control of the Iraqi Armed Forces. The importance of these disputed territories will become clear in figure 15, showing the security and conflict relationships between the Kurdish Peshmerga, the Iraqi Arab army, the Turkish and Iranian Armed forces operations on Iraqi soil. The Kurdish **Başûr** is the only autonomous region of Iraq, making the government in Baghdad a 'Federalist' government.²⁴ During the worst years of the violent insurgency in Iraq (2003-2010), social, political, economic, and security conditions in this Kurdish autonomous region remained relatively peaceful. New automobile dealerships, banks, restaurants, shopping malls, operated as if the war in the southern part of the country was in... a different country. This was, however, mostly a result of perspective as the internal tensions affecting the Kurdish autonomous region were always present. Then, and now, the two political parties in Kurdish Başûr that matter are the PUK, led by the Talabani family-clan and the KDP, led by the Barzani family-clan.²⁵ Together, the PUK and the KDP hold sway over more than 75% of the electorate in Iraqi Kurdistan. The PUK and the KDP are geographically aligned in their electoral base. The Kurdish Region of Iraq (KRI) is governed by the autonomous KRG under the Iraqi Constitution. The KRG is responsible for the governorates of Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, and Dohuk.²⁶ The KRI is the only constitutionally recognised autonomous region. The Constitution permits the KRG to have their own executive,

²⁴ (Jaff, 2022)

²⁵ (Ali Saleem, 2024)

²⁶ (Aydogan et al., 2024)



legislative and judicial powers, aside from those exclusive to the federal government. They are allocated an equitable share of national revenues and are permitted to establish and organise their own internal security forces, such as police. KRG's regional legislative assembly in Erbil is separate from the Iraqi Federal legislative assembly in Baghdad. The KRG assembly is made up of 111 seats, ten of which are reserved for minorities (5 for Christian, 5 for Turkmen), and 30 % of which are for women. Under the Constitution, the KRG has considerable powers to legislate a range of areas including health services, education, policing and security, environment and natural resources, housing, trade, industry, social services, transportation and roads. The Kurdish Parliament may also amend the application of Iraq-wide legislation falling outside of exclusive federal powers. Several parliamentary committees also support the government in areas such as health, housing, human rights, civil affairs, women's rights, education, integrity and labour rights.²⁷ As a result of different political factions, Peshmerga groups' operating procedures are neither standard nor uniform and they frequently do not coordinate with each faction taking orders from their political command. The Peshmerga factions are politically divided and 'deeply partisan', and an instrument of political patronage for the PUK and KDP's respective political bureaus. An atmosphere of mistrust between the main political parties in KRI exists, with each perceiving their own factions of the security forces as a line of defence against political rivals. In Kurdish Iraq, the Kurdistan Judicial Council is independent of the KRG Ministry of Justice, however the executive branch has, on occasion, politically influenced sensitive cases. Judges are routinely appointed based on partisan affiliation as an important aspect, other than merit. My research found that the Kurdish population of KRG does not make use of the police or the courts. Other interviews found that internally displaced persons generally mistrust the KRG forces and do not approach police as an individual complainant, preferring to access justice through family, clan, and or political party-based affiliations. There are no signs of 'systematic mistreatment' of Arab IDPs by the police or courts on account of their status or belonging in the north. However, collective punishment of IDPs upon security incidents is common and scapegoating sometimes occurred. There were some UNHCR reports that PMU and KRG forces detained children accused of terrorism, subjecting them to beating and abuses. Both Arabs and Kurds were at risk of arbitrary detention and torture from the Asayish. Despite legal protections under the 'press law' No 35. of 2007, which prohibits imprisonment, harassment, or physical abuse of reporters, journalists state that it is used arbitrarily by the 'ruling elite to stifle dissent' and that security forces harassed news outlets critical of the KRG leadership. Kurdish authorities have detained political opponents and have violently suppressed demonstrations, and political demonstrators and journalists have been beaten. According to the UN, there is an 'overall mistrust in the criminal justice system' in Kurdistan with respect to the lack of effective investigations and the atmosphere of impunity, particularly regarding attacks on media professionals. Access to the rule of law in the areas governed by the KRG is dependent on ethnic and religious affiliation, tribe, connections, family and relatives, and it is very difficult, if not impossible, for an individual to access many personal and property rights outside of family, clan, and political party. Despite all these shortcomings, the KRG is considered to be an "actor of protection" in maintaining civil order and protecting Kurdish communities from foreign, especially VEO, violence. Persons



Figure 10 Female soldiers of the YPJ, Women's Protection Force

²⁷ (EUAA, 2019)



who are perceived as associated with ISIL, political opponents unprotected by organised political parties, LGBTIQ persons, and individual society members may be at acute risk in relation to harmful traditional practices, as well as honour-based and domestic violence. Absent significant public outcry, the police, justice, and military forces of the KRG may be unwilling to provide protection. Kurdish residents who hold USA, UK, Canadian, or other European Passports, are normatively afforded greater levels of protection and are somewhat insulated from outplays of politically based violence from the PUK and the KDP, but not necessarily from the PKK.

§A2. Formal Borders (Iraq-Iran-Syria-Türkiye) between an Informal Kurdistan.

The Iraqi-Syrian-Turkish-Iranian border is one of the most geopolitically unstable areas in the world.²⁸ The disintegration of the central state authority in Syria and decentralisation of power to the Kurdish

Autonomous Region in Iraq, has led to a surge of multiple militant groups seeking to fill the vacuum. These groups often identify with an ethnic or sectarian identity shared by populations living across the border. For the first time since the formation of the modern state in Iraq and Syria, a variety of Kurdish forces came to dominate portions (albeit small) of the borders between Syria & Iraq, Iraq & Türkiye, and between Iran & Iraq. This significant geopolitical shift, which Hasan and



Figure 11 Chaotic-Porous-Fluid Borders of Iraq, Iran, Syria, & Turkish Kurdistan

Khaddour characterise as the formation of Kurdish-to-Kurdish frontiers, has changed the nature of civil-social, political, and military life in greater Kurdistan.²⁹ The Kurdish soldiers of all four provinces (men and women) are referred to as Peshmerga internally. Kurdish Soldiers. Externally, the Turkish government views all Peshmerga in Syria as members of the terrorist PKK. The Iranian government views all Peshmerga in Iraq as members of the terrorist Khabat, KDPI, PAK, Komala, or PJAK. The Iraqi KRG views all Peshmerga as members of a broad, albeit, quarrelsome, family of greater Kurdistan where the intra-ethnic rivalries are shaped by the geopolitics of the four countries that their ethnic nation is divided into.



Figure 12 Rojhilat Resistance (Iran) fighters inspect their village and compound in northern Iraq after an Iranian attack.

At any given moment, the KRG may conflict with leaders of the PKK because of diplomatic relationships with Türkiye, while at the same

time, being dependent on those same PKK Peshmerga fighters to support the Syrian Defence Forces of the AANES from being overrun by the Russian backed Syrian regime. Nothing is straightforward in Kurdistan and dichotomies are the norm

²⁸ (Leezenberg, 2017) ICG Staff Middle East Report N. 136, 2013;

²⁹ (Hasan & Khaddour, 2021a)

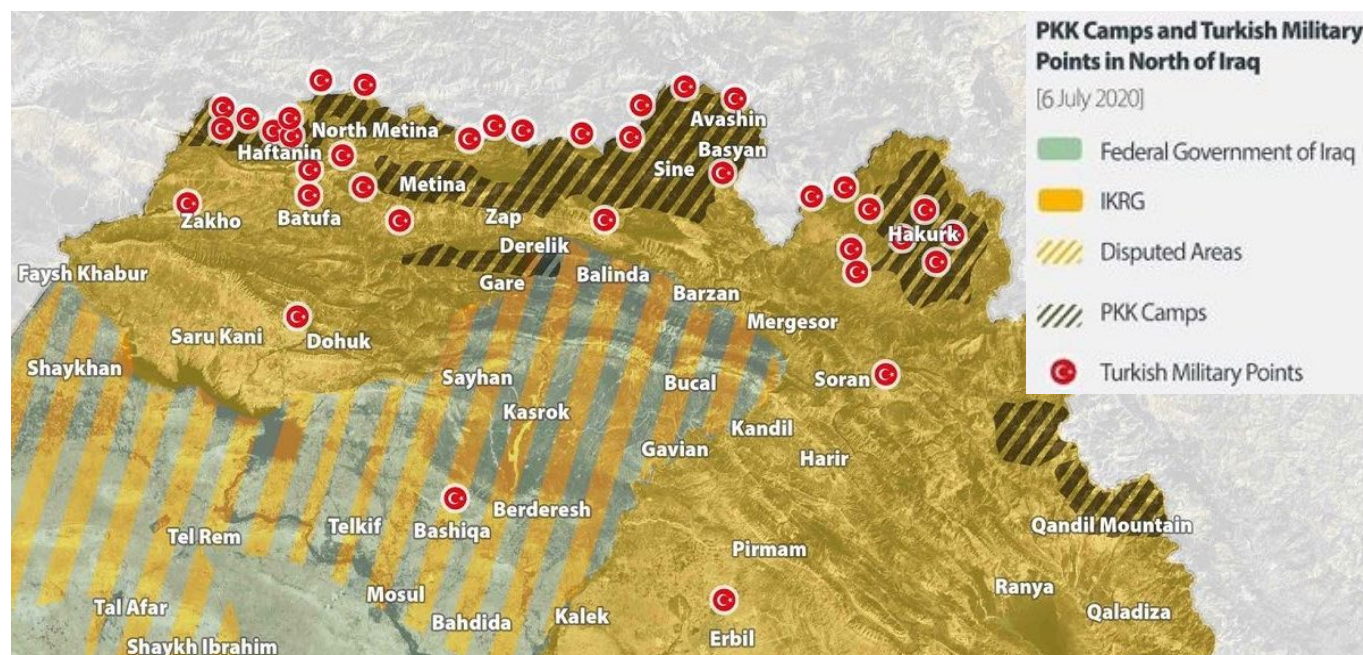


Figure 13 Graphic map of Turkish Military Intrusions into Iraq's Kurdish Autonomous Region

of all relationships and situations. The Kurdish borders of these four states is entirely porous, even while the KRG expends massive energies balancing a nearly impossible task. This task is to support the Kurdish resistance to Iranian, Turkish, and Syrian Ethnic cleansing. In November of 2022, for example, Türkiye bombed Kurdish forces in Syria and the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) in Northern Iraq in retaliation for the attack in Istanbul that the Turkish president, Recep Tayeb Erdogan, believed to be the work of the PKK. Türkiye also declared its intention to launch a major ground offensive against the Syrian Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration of Northern and Eastern Syria (AANES). At the same time, Iranian missiles were fired at the headquarters of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran, which is in exile in Iraqi Kurdistan.³⁰ In December 2022, during the official visit to Tehran by Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Soudani, the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, threatened to launch a ground offensive against the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) if the Iraqi government did not improve its control over the border with Iran.³¹ The Iranian regime claims that the Kurds, and more particularly the Kurdish refugees in Iraq, are responsible for the anti-regime demonstrations that have swept Iran since the murder of the young Kurdish woman, Mahsa Amini, by the religious police. The simultaneous actions by Türkiye and Iran against Kurds in Syria and Iraq attest to the deep complexity of Kurdish existence, under pressure from four political states. Both countries have large Kurdish minorities (20% in Türkiye and 10% in Iran) and they have no desire to see these minorities claim autonomy as well. Turkish military forces have invaded and established military occupation points, which the KRG works with to deconflict and prevent armed contact with the KRG's formal Peshmerga, whilst pushing PKK fighters and units towards the approved conflict against the Islamic State and the Russian & Iranian backed Syrian al-Saad regime.³² Iraq-based Iranian Kurdish insurgents are the epicentre of a coordinated Iran-led campaign to force the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to toe its security policy by launching missile attacks against Kurdish Iraqi towns that are suspected of harbouring Kurdish Iranian resistance fighters.³³

³⁰ (Mukriyan, 2022)

³¹ (BADAWI, 2022; Leezenberg, 2017; Salami, 2022)

³² (Glynn, 2021; Hasan & Khaddour, 2021a)

³³ (BADAWI, 2022; van Wilgenburg, 2023)



§A2.1 Kurdish Interrelationships – Social, Political, and Military.

As difficult as the task of Iraq's Kurdish leaders appears to be, in practice, it is even worse. On one level, The Kurdish Regional Government of Iraq is a homogenous Kurdish organisation that draws its elected officials from the two primary political parties of PUK, or Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, led by Bafel Talabani, and the KDP, or Kurdistan Democratic Party, led by Masoud Barzani, the current President of the Kurdish Autonomous Region.³⁴ Yet their foreign interest focus is different. The PUK is also the sponsor and affiliate of the Syrian Democratic Progressive Party of Syria which feeds to Syrian Autonomous Administration of NE Syria. The KDP is also the sponsor of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria, which also feeds elected officials into the AANES, which also staffs the Rojava Syrian Defence Force.³⁵ This relationship brings the KRG into direct conflict with Türkiye, as they see little to no difference between the Kurds of the Syrian Defence Force and the PKK.^{34F}³⁶ The Kurdish region of Iraq sits within the Zagros Mountain foothills and reaches its highest point of

Kurdish Başûr civil Society Perceptions

One is hard-pressed to find Kurdish research assistants who are willing to help conduct research about the PKK, PJAK, Khabat, Komala, PAK, or other Kurdish Iranian-Turkish resistance groups. Civil society in the KRG region of northern Iraq has historically perceived the Kurdish resistance as an 'all of society' fight for survival, with equal parts pride of agency and fear of being thought traitorous to their ethnic family. Kurdish civil society in the four provinces are just too interconnected, and when one part of the Kurdish family is under violent threat, all parts react emphatically. The KRGs official stances of 'non-support' to the PKK and, to a lesser extent, the Rojhat collection of Kurdish militant groups, allowed the KRG President Barzani and Iraqi President Talabani, to maintain autonomous Kurdistan's balance between Baghdad, Ankara, and Tehran. These two leaders employ political divides between Arab-Persian and Sunni-Shi'a, to prevent formations of dissent and negative opinion from gaining traction against their homeland. As well, the Kurdish capacity for economic growth and capacity are liberally used to assuage one side or another to maintain their illusion of neutrality and operating space in the centre of the 4 provinces to maintain continuity.

3,607m at Gundah Zhur, on the border with Iran. Similarly, the Taurus Mountains span the Iraqi and Turkish borders, and the mountainous regions of Kurdistan's four provinces has allowed their resistance fighters to survive the combined armies of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria for more than a century. These mountains are not merely hideouts for the Kurds, they are their historical living spaces, despite their inaccessibility. The cities and towns in these mountains are incredibly lush and beautiful, despite the extreme hardships endured by the Kurdish people and their resistance fighters. The graphic in figure 15, shows the depth of Turkish penetration into Kurdish Regional Government territory. Turkish army forces routinely conduct uncoordinated and unapproved cross-border raids against suspected Kurdish villages suspected of harbouring PKK cells. At times, these cross-border raids involve the death of **Başûr** civilians and damage to villages and town, resulting in counterattacks by the Peshmerga against Turkish military forces. My field experience has been that these clashes remain unpublicised and unacknowledged, with the Federal Government in Baghdad pretending not to notice.³⁷ The KRG maintains a delicate relationship between the armed Kurdish resistance organisations that are based in the mountainous regions of Iraq's Kurdish region and the governments of Iraq, Iran, and Turkey. The KRG leadership struggle to manage operations so as not to overly compromise its position with Baghdad, which receives constant threats from both Ankara, Tehran, and Damascus over the Kurdish fighters. The **Başûr** province of Kurdistan provides most of the logistical support to the PKK's armed resistance in Kurdish **Bakur**. The PKK's funding is drawn from a vast network of Kurdish Diaspora and thus is not a financial drain on the otherwise most economically prosperous part of Kurdistan. The logistical provisions to the PKK using diaspora funding, is an important part of the KRGs domestic GDP.^{36F}³⁸ It is important to note that the KRG does not provide direct support to the operations of the PKK, despite their sociopolitical-cultural-logistics operations in KRG areas of control. The KRG enforces Kurdish laws equally regardless of provincial origin. The Bakur (northern) Kurdish political parties that underly the PKK are often in competition with the Kurdish political parties

³⁴ (Hasan & Khaddour, 2021a)

³⁵ (Hasan & Khaddour, 2021a, 2021b; Ismael, 2022)

³⁶ (Gunes, 2013; Jongerden, 2007)

³⁷ In 2021, I was based out of Erbil, the seat of KRG as a U.S. Advisor.

³⁸ Dr. Saed Kakie, KRG Green Party, former Deputy Iraqi Minister of Elections, providing research support to the author.



of Başûr and Rojava for influence and ideology, however slight the differences may be. This lack of direct support, however, has not historically translated into armed opposition to the PKK. It is safe to assert that the members of the KRG and most of the Kurdish population in the Başûr region (on some greater or lesser level) understands their fight against Türkiye to be in defence of the survival of Kurdish national culture-identity. The Kurdish fighters from the PKK also helped prevent the immanent takeover of Erbil by the Islamic State in 2014-15. The unifying fight against the Islamic State brought the KRGs Peshmerga together with the AANES's SDF and the PKK to halt the violent extremist onslaught towards Kurdish regions in northeast Syria and northern Iraq, even as the VEO moved southward into Arab areas of Iraq and Syria. Throughout much of 2010 through 2020, the PKK's presence in northern Iraq was tolerated and their contributions to battling the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda were enough to balance out the cost of covering for, and surreptitiously supporting, an insurgent organisation fighting against a NATO Member – Türkiye.

ŞA3. Psychosocial Conditions in Iraqi Başûr Kurdistan.

In general, family formation in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) is deeply governed by tribal rules and regulations. As such, state protection from domestic disputes and tribal violence rarely exists. In fact, according to the "Guidance" published in December 2024 by the UK Visas and Immigration *"the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government are neither willing nor able to offer effective protection"*³⁹. In addition, local police and security agents in areas controlled by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), like the rest of Iraq, "are unwilling to get involved with what they see as a family matter".⁴⁰ In mid-2010, PUK officials told a young Kurdish journalist: "We will kill you like a dog."⁴¹ On the commonness of domestic violence in KRI, the rate in recent years has increased dramatically. This is due to amongst other things, "the lack of investigation of criminal cases as well as the protection given by the ruling parties to some perpetrators".⁴² In 2018, Nadia Riva, a news editor working for the Kurdistan 24 Satellite TV Channel reported that "clashes erupted between two Kurdish tribes in Sulaimani province," resulting in the killing of eight people, among them a child and a woman, as well as sending nine wounded others to the Rania and Sulaimani hospitals. According to the Kurdistan 24 source, the root cause of the armed clashes *"between the two tribes dates back to three years ago after elders in the area resolved the dispute."* However, the dispute reemerged recently *"after a family member was killed...stating three security members were among the injured, two of them still in a critical state"*⁴³. Although KRI law criminalized domestic violence, including physical and psychological abuse and threats of violence. However, "Activists reported sexual abuse and assault by relatives were widespread and that some victims did not report crimes due to fear of retribution by family members."⁴⁴ Youthful Anger and the Crisis of Legitimacy in Iraqi Kurdistan. "As a form of resistance, the most common response of the frustrated and angry youth is the decision to migrate. There are no official statistics for the number of young Kurds who have left Kurdistan hoping for asylum in a European country; however, since 2014, the desire to migrate has become a widespread phenomenon. Interestingly, this desire is most common among the youth in areas" controlled by PUK.⁴⁵ The lack of sociopolitical reforms critically needed to secure the basic needs of Kurdish youth in KRI and the widespread of nepotism facilitating the protection of ill-

³⁹ (p. 12) (UK Home Office, 2024)

⁴⁰ (p. 3-4)

⁴¹ (Dagher, 2010) (Dagher, 2010)

⁴² (The Danish Immigration Service, 2018, p. 9) (The Danish Immigration Service, 2018)

⁴³ Riva 2018 (Riva, 2024)

⁴⁴ (United States Embassy Baghdad, 2023) (United States Embassy Baghdad, 2023, p. 67).

⁴⁵ (Palani, 2021)



mindful and well-connected individuals with the ruling PUK authorities in the Sulaimani province, often lead the disenfranchised Kurdish youth to seek refuge abroad.⁴⁶ In July and August 2024, human rights organizations and political figures in Sulaimani province, voiced their concerns about security forces' involvement in civilian deaths during and outside their official duties, amid reports of deteriorating security under the leadership of PUK President Bafel Talabani.⁴⁷ The Kurdistan Men's Union (KMU) on Wednesday reported a rise in domestic violence against men in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq with 148 cases of violence and 13 suicides recorded in the first quarter of 2024.

*"Compared to statistics from the same period last year, the current rate of violence against men is higher."*⁴⁸ Ali also raised concerns about the eviction of elderly men from their homes. Every year, men, particularly the elderly, are forced out of their residences in the Kurdistan Region because of family conflicts where children side with their mother's clan, ultimately leading to the men's departure. Though women constitute by far the largest share of victims of physical violence and murder committed by intimate partners, would-be suitors and family members both in Iraq and across the rest of the world, men can also fall victim to violence within their homes. In 2020, Iraqi interior ministry recorded 15,000 cases of domestic violence. Of them, 9% were attacks by wives on their husbands, 7% assaults between siblings, and 10% attacks committed by children against their fathers and the remainder by male family members against females in their households. In early November 2023, the interior ministry recorded 27 cases of violence against men for the entire country except for the

Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In 2020, during the term of former Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, a draft law against domestic violence was approved by the cabinet and referred to the parliament for vote. However, it has since then been stuck in the halls of the assembly. Domestic violence in Iraq is not a recent problem; rather, it is a longstanding issue with profound historical significance, linked to the societal pressures and adherence to traditional values and customs that emphasize masculinity across all aspects of life. Statistics in Iraq have shown that approximately 1.32 million individuals face the threat of various types of gender-based violence, with over 75% of these victims being women and adolescent girls. Of these incidents, 77% are associated with domestic violence. There are four domestic violence shelters in Kurdistan for 6 million citizens. In Arab Iraq, there is only one in or a 40 million citizens. Women exposed to domestic violence in Iraq must choose either to accept the violence or to leave their families and expect honour killing. It is very difficult for them to survive, especially when the law either does not punish honour killings or usually reduces prison sentence for the perpetrator. Traditionally, it has not been the norm to report violence involving family members or partners, as it is generally regarded as a taboo subject and highly stigmatized. Intra and inter-family violence is a serious issue in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, affecting many women and families across the region. In conflict-affected regions, rates of domestic violence tend to



Erbil, Iraq – Shiraz (not her real name) has spent a total of one year inside an unmarked women's shelter in Erbil, the capital of Iraq's Kurdish region. Before coming here, the 19-year-old woman with long, dark hair had fallen in love with a man she hoped to marry – but one of her five brothers did not approve. "So, he killed my boyfriend and shot me with a Kalashnikov in our home," Hearing the shots and her screams, neighbours called the police, and Shiraz was taken to a hospital, where doctors had to amputate her right leg at the knee. She does not know why her brother objected to her boyfriend: "He never told me why ... he still has not." After spending nine months at the shelter, Shiraz returned home in hopes of working things out with her family, "but the problem was still there". "No one in my family was able to help me. They didn't want me there – they made it clear. They couldn't even look at me." She soon returned to the shelter.

⁴⁶ (Baser and Fazil, 2022) (Baser & Fazil, 2022)

⁴⁷ (Dagher, 2010; EUAA, 2019)

⁴⁸ (Shafaq News, 2024)



increase, exacerbating the challenges faced by women seeking safety and support. For instance, in the Kurdistan region, rates of domestic violence are escalating; in 2020, more than 11 000 calls for help were received on the domestic violence hotlines. Adding to that, around 900 women seek refuge at the domestic violence shelters annually. Exposure to domestic violence and abuse is a traumatic experience. In addition to physical consequences of domestic violence, literature shows that domestic violence is leaving indelible scars on the mental well-being of survivors. Adding to that, studies found that depression and anxiety among violated women are very common among violated women.⁴⁹ Laws prioritise protection of 'family unity' over justice, while impunity for 'honour killings' remains widespread and unpunished.

*"A girl was brought to us last year. Her brother had cut off both her ears and shaved off all her hair. She was under 16 or 17. This was apparently because she was using social media. That was the entire reason. His family helped him flee to Kirkuk. That's not very far. The judge called me saying we should encourage the family to take her back since the brother could not be arrested. I was livid. I ended up speaking to media and political leaders about this and filed a complaint against the judge. The girl's family took her back, but the brother was never arrested"*⁵⁰

Amnesty International charges that the authorities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq are failing to ensure that perpetrators of domestic violence are held to account, while Aya Majzoub charges that Kurdish society is teaching young people that rape, murder, and mutilating family members is acceptable if honour is involved.

§A3.1 Costs of Harboursing Kurdish Ethnic Resistance Movements.

The KRGs costs of tolerating the PKK/PJAC/PAK/KDPI/Komala presence in northern Iraq involves damage to social stability and national coherence of Kurdish life in Iraq. The Kurdish resistance organisations from Türkiye and Iran possess painful historical narratives that are quite different from those of Iraqi's Kurds, many of whom have been insulated from both the war and Saddam Hussein by American military support from the early 1990s onwards. By the nature of their violent, existential fight, the Kurdish resistance fighters negatively affect Iraqi Kurdish life, which is highly developed, first-world in terms of infrastructure, and social interaction. To the Iraqi Kurds, the Kurdish Resistance leadership and rank and file appear to be highly belligerent and almost mafia-like controlling. To be clear, the Bakur/Rojhilat Kurdish resistance movements do not 'steal' from their southern Kurdish hosts as they are well funded from the diaspora. But their presence on Iraqi soil invites attacks from both Türkiye and Iran, who have increasingly encroached onto Iraqi sovereignty in their attempt to destroy armed civil resistance.⁵¹ The Bakur Kurdish resistance (Türkiye) and the Rojhilat Kurdish resistance (Iran) use the southern Kurdish homelands as a base of logistics support and safe-haven from their oppressors. As Iran and Türkiye pressure Iraqi Kurdistan with missile attacks, assassinations, and outright invasions, the Iraqi Kurdish population suffers. For the Kurdish Bakur and Rojhilat, their ethnic kin's desire to not suffer because of their hosting of these resistance movements, is selfish and shortsighted, creating deep animosity within an otherwise coherent ethnic community.⁵² They remind their southern hosts that not too long ago, it was the Iraqi Kurds seeking safe-haven from their neighbour Kurds in Iran and Turkey as Saddam Hussein's army dropped chemical weapons on Kurdish villages, wiping out entire families.⁵³ Now, the Iraqi Kurdish losses to Iranian and Turkish attacks receive only scant attention, even when

⁴⁹ (Abas & Al-Jiboori, 2023)

⁵⁰ Aya Majzoub director of a temporary shelter in the Garmiyān region near Kirkuk on 9 September 2023

⁵¹ (Christian, 2018a, 2018b, 2019b, 2019a)

⁵² Researcher-author's qualitative interviews with Kurdish civilians 2021. (Christian, 2018a, 2018b, 2019b, 2019a)

⁵³ (Christian, 2019b, 2019a)



those most severely affected are Kurdish, because of the dichotomy of alienation-shame against their desire to survive and continue to build Iraqi Kurdistan into a first world country. As Kurdish Iraqis increasingly resist the demands of their Bakur and Rojhilat ethnic kin to help them in their fights against Iran and Turkey, the guest resistance movements quickly feel a rising tide of resentment and their own alienation-shame-anger internal conflicts. The Bakur and Rojhilat resistance movements against Turkiye and Iran, respectively, have survived for decades only because of the sheer inaccessibility of the Qandil and Sinjar Mountains, amongst others that straddle the border between Iraq and Turkiye, Iraq and Iran, and between Turkiye, Iran, and Iraq. There in the mountains, are the historical Kurdish resistance training grounds used by Kurds from all four countries during their long quest for survival. In 2021 through present, both Turkiye and Iran began moving forces and equipment into northern Iraq to take on the Kurdish resistance movements by force. The resulting damage to Iraqi Kurdish villages and families from Iranian and Turkish overkill, has deepened the Kurdish family divide, which can run through families due to the interconnectedness of Kurdish clans.⁵⁴ The pressure by Turkiye and Iran on Kurdish resistance movements in northern Iraq came to a head in 2020, when Ghazi Salih, the head of KRG security at the Sarzer border crossing in the Amedi district of Duhok province was fatally shot by unknown gunmen at his home on a Thursday evening after he returned home. Salih had been working to restrict the open flow of PKK fighters back and forth across the border and had been 'threatened' by presumably PKK fighters for some time. Both Sarzer border crossing and Galik are in Kani Masi, a sub-district of Amedi that borders Turkey. Regular clashes between the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Turkish army take place in Kuna Masi and tensions run high amidst civilian casualties. Ghazi Salih's assassination, which the KRG's security forces said was perpetrated by the PKK, as well as attacks on a key pipeline and Peshmerga soldiers in beginning in 2020, have outed long-simmering tensions between the KRG and PKK.⁵⁵ The PKK has made statements that it has no intention of leaving Iraq peacefully and would have nowhere to go except into the arms of the Turkish army. Now, officials of the KRG are openly speaking out against the long-accommodated but increasingly unwelcome Bakur PKK.⁵⁶ The intensified rhetoric—complemented by a new security agreement between authorities in Erbil and Baghdad that takes a decidedly anti-PKK stance—seems to be part of a coordinated effort to pressure the group to leave its historic hideouts in the mountains of northern Iraq. There are internal fears within the KRG that the Bakur resistance movement may resort to violence in response to KRG encroachment.⁵⁷ There are rumours that at least one KRG security official in Sinjar in 2016 was targeted in a PKK assassination attempts in recent years, causing him to be transferred to a different district. In September of 2021, former KRG President Masoud Barzani spoke out against the PKK's confiscation of land and extortion of locals in Iraqi Kurdistan. A statement by his Kurdistan Democratic Party claimed that "slavery has ended in the world but continued within the PKK."⁵⁸ In late 2020, authorities in Baghdad and Erbil—the KRG capital—finally signed an agreement to work together to reign in the PKK in Sinjar. One key part of the accord requires the removal



Figure 146 Sarzer Border Crossing, Kani Masi Village, Amedi District, Duhok Province KRG

⁵⁴ In a 2014 interview with KRGs Peshmerga Sector Six commander Maj. Gen. Sirwan Barzani, who was then fighting on the frontlines against the Islamic State, told FP correspondent Shelly Kittleson that the PKK was a major problem for the Kurds. At the time, however, the Islamic State had recently taken over vast swathes of Iraqi territory and was setting its sights on the city of Erbil, the capital of the KRG, as well. The KRG forces had enough to deal with without opening another conflict with a different group. Barzani implied—though the PKK had, admittedly, helped in the fight against the Islamic State. Five years later, in early 2019, Barzani doubled down on his claims that the PKK was a problem for the KRG but said the time had not yet come to discuss the matter publicly.

⁵⁵ (Glynn, 2021; Hasan & Khaddour, 2021a; Stansfield & Anderson, 2009)

⁵⁶ (Stansfield & Anderson, 2009)

⁵⁷ (Glynn, 2021; Gunes, 2013; Stansfield & Anderson, 2009)

⁵⁸ (Ozturk, 2020)



of their resistance fighters from the area. After the KRG and Iraqi federal government deployed 6,000 security forces to Sinjar, their coordinated action provoked an angry reaction from the PKK, with several attacks on KRG forces, facilities, and infrastructure. In the southeastern part of Iraqi Kurdistan, public opinion is starting to shift against the Bakur Turkiye resistance fighters, although support for the Rojhilat (Iran) resistance remains high.⁵⁹

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⁵⁹ (Mukriyan, 2022; Ozturk, 2020; Salami, 2022; Stansfield & Anderson, 2009)



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