
Book Review

'Kurdistan' would be a monstrosity

by Joseph Brewda

The Kurds: A Concise Handbook

by Mehrdad R. Izady

Crane Russak, Bristol, Pa., 1992

267 pages, hardbound, \$39.95; paperbound, \$15.95

Crane Russak, a publishing house often rumored to be tied to the CIA, has just published a comprehensive overview of the Kurds, the ethnic group of 20 million which straddles Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey, but which has no state of its own. Interest in this obscure Iranic, primarily Muslim, people has increased since the 1991 war against Iraq.

This book, which contains 42 highly detailed historical and demographic maps, and eight detailed charts, accompanied by an elaborate cross-reference system, is quite useful for an English reader in obtaining a look at Kurdish history, politics, and culture. Prof. Mehrdad R. Izady, of the Department of Near Eastern Languages at Harvard, is certainly well versed in the subject. But, as Izady is an acknowledged associate of Dr. Vera Beaudin Saeedpour, whose Kurdish Library and Museum of Brooklyn, New York has more than a little to do with ongoing intelligence games in "Kurdistan," prudence is also required in evaluating his conclusions.

Immediately following the 1990-91 Anglo-American-French war against Iraq, a Kurdish insurrection in their base in northern Iraq, was triggered by the CIA, British, and French intelligence, with considerable aid from Saudi Arabia and Israel as well. The uprising was crushed, as was the simultaneous Iranian-linked Shi'ite revolt in southern Iraq. Two hundred thousand Kurdish refugees fled into Turkey, and perhaps a million into Iran. At least some of these refugees were fleeing as much from the tribal chieftains leading the rebellion as from the Iraqi Army.

In the spring of 1991, the U.N. Security Council endorsed a French-sponsored resolution authorizing a U.S.-led occupation of northern Iraq, nominally intended to protect the Kurds from "Iraqi genocide." This resolution was the first ever authorizing military and related action within the borders of a sovereign state to deal with a purely internal

matter. The cynical argument was that "human rights" supersedes sovereignty. Last fall, Kurdish tribal leaders Mahmud Barzani and Jalal Talabani, both on the Anglo-Americans' payroll, declared an "autonomous" Kurdistan in northern Iraq. Clearly some Anglo-American strategic planners are considering carving out oil-rich "Kurdistan" from Iraq.

While Izady compiles useful data otherwise generally inaccessible, he fails, in his history of Kurdish nationalism, to report its most important feature: It is largely an externally sponsored movement intended to destabilize the region. In fact, there has been no significant Kurdish nationalist revolt in the last 150 years that was not run by British intelligence.

To take just one example, the 1925 revolt of Sheik Said (a leader of the Naqshabandi Sufi order) was directed by Kinahan Cornwallis, a descendant of the famous general who surrendered to the American revolutionaries at Yorktown in 1781. Sheik Said was a pawn of a British effort to destabilize the new Republic of Turkey, which Mustapha Kemal Ataturk had formed in 1922. The British sparked another revolt, led by Gen. Mustapha Barzani, the father of today's Kurdish rebel Mahmud Barzani in 1927.

The British hated Ataturk because he sought to make Turkey a modern nation, and had saved it from the dismemberment envisioned in the 1920 Treaty of Sevres. Since Ataturk was successful, and served as a model for regional leaders opposed to British imperialism, the British kept up their game. Part of the game was to make eastern Anatolia into a greater Armenia and Kurdistan. The British also tried to use the Kurds to destabilize the Pahlevi dynasty of Iran. The founder of that dynasty, Reza Shah (the father of the last Shah of Iran), emulated Ataturk. For the same reason, the British have deployed the Kurds to wreak havoc in Iraq, which also has a commitment to building economic infrastructure.

Throughout the book, one is given all the reasons normally put forward as to why Kurdistan should be a state. The Kurds have a shared history, language, culture, etc. Repeated deportations and massacres of the Kurds over the millennia, including in the recent period by the Arabs and Turks, it is said, also show the necessity and justification for such a state.

But if merely a shared identity and history were an adequate basis for forming a state, one could carve out hundreds of new states in the world. Bloody regional wars, leading the world in the direction of a third world war, would be the result. This process is particularly clear in the case of "Kurdistan": As it straddles Iran, Iraq, and Turkey, attempts to create it might lead to war amongst all three. Unless a people has a universal mission that supersedes regional and supranational geopolitical maneuverings, one might conclude that it has no legitimate right to found a nation-state, and will probably not succeed in doing so in any case. One of the minimal qualifications that the Kurds must demonstrate, if one could say that they had a right to form a sovereign state, is that their leadership stop being paid lackeys of the British, American, and French establishments, and instead imitate Ataturk.