

Middle East Report by Thierry Lalevée

Kurds, Iraq sacrificed to New Yalta

The geopolitical players of the "Kurdish card" look forward to dumping Saddam Hussein,—and neutralizing Turkey.

The Aug. 17 murder of Pakistan's President Zia ul-Haq, and the ruthless military campaign unleashed at the same time by the Iraqi regime against its Kurdish minority, ultimately both stem from the desire of Moscow and Washington to redraw the political map of the Middle East. Zia's death serves the Soviets' desires to neutralize Pakistan and bring the Indian subcontinent under their political sway; the Kurdistan crisis meets similar aims in the Mideast.

While there can be no equating, in terms of strength and resources, the Iraqi army and the Kurdish guerrillas—especially the 100,000 refugees who have been pushed into Turkey—in this case, everyone loses.

The crisis in Kurdistan, which overlaps Turkey, Iran, and Iraq, has already had several consequences:

1) Kurdistan has become an international issue to be handled at the United Nations level. On Sept. 13, West Germany, the United States, Britain, and Japan requested that a special U.N. team be sent to northern Iraq to probe charges that Iraq has been using chemical weapons. Other countries are working to bring up Kurdistan at the Security Council. A Security Council resolution will not affect the situation on the ground, but the political impact of having it tackle the Kurdish issue for the first time in 40 years cannot be underestimated.

2) Talks about Kurdish autonomy in the framework of the Iraqi state have been rendered meaningless. Already in 1987, the secretary general of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, Amin

Noshirwan, advocated in *Le Monde* the "dismemberment of the Iraqi state and full Kurdish independence." We can expect such declarations from other Kurdish leaders, including those who, until recently, stressed that they did not seek an independent state.

3) Syria's President Hafez al-Assad has been reinforced in the region, only weeks after he had been isolated by Jordan's decision to give up claims to the Israeli-occupied territories, and Iran's unilateral decision to accept a cease-fire with Iraq. Both decisions lost Syria major assets and confronted it with several Iraqi army divisions at its borders. Damascus has since become the headquarters of the Iraqi Kurds, and will soon host the gathering of an "Iraqi Kurdish Front."

Right after the Reagan-Gorbachov Moscow summit last May, rumors began to fly in London and Washington that the talks over regional conflicts had a "Kurdish chapter." In late June, half-page advertisements appeared in the international press, during Turkish President Evren's visit to England and the United States. The U.S. State Department, which had all but ignored the Kurds except for the short period when Barzani's Kurdish Democratic Party was backed by the Shah of Iran, rediscovered the issue. PUK head Jalal Talabani was officially invited to Washington, over protests by both Baghdad and Ankara, and held an officially sponsored seminar where he laid out his organization's aims.

Weeks later, Washington was rife with rumors of an impending crisis in Kurdistan, coinciding with an in-

creased American tilt toward Iran. Likewise, it was reported that Washington was squeezing Turkey to set up closer relations with Iran.

These reports convinced the Iraqi leaders that the United States was about to play a "Kurdish card." When Saudi King Fahd advised caution, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein replied that he would deal with the problem as "I see fit." Iraq decided that the time was ripe to deal the Kurds a fatal blow. The army was still fully mobilized. Besides conventional weaponry, some say the Iraqi army used chemical weapons such as sarin or nerve gas.

Thus Saddam Hussein fell headlong into the trap laid for him by the "Kurdish card" strategists, who obviously care little about the massacre of tens of thousands of Kurds in their geopolitical game. Ultimately the aim is to get rid of Saddam Hussein.

But what of the Kurds and Kurdistan? Washington may have been using the Kurdish issue as a short-term tactic to rig political changes in Iraq, but Moscow has a longer view. While Washington has loudly denounced Baghdad, Moscow has kept mum. If Saddam Hussein falls, Moscow will be seen as the power that didn't betray an ally. Meanwhile, most of the Kurdish movements are gathering in Moscow-allied Damascus, and leading component is the "Kurdish section" of the Iraqi Communist Party.

Moscow's links with Kurdish groups have a bigger target: Turkey. The Syrian-backed Kurdish insurgency of the PKK (Kurdish Workers' Party) of Abdullah Ocalan scored some triumphs in recent years, not the least being forcing Ankara to forge ties with Damascus in the hope of neutralizing the PKK. This can again be used on a much broader scale to do to Turkey what has been done to Pakistan—neutralize military and political power.