

Kurds' interests hurt by geopolitical games

by Omar Abdul-Aziz

The main feature of the Kurdish problem is that the leaders of the Kurdish political, militant groups have never been loyal to the Kurdish people. They have turned the Kurdish people into a commodity, to be traded by regional powers and super-powers, in order to sustain a geopolitical dirty game, termed by Anglo-American intelligence circles the "Bernard Lewis plan" or the "Arc of Crisis," aimed at using the Kurds to split Iraq and destabilize Turkey and the Azeri regions in northern Iran.

The latest episode of this tragic history of the Kurdish population started at the end of "Operation Desert Storm," the 1991 Anglo-American war against Iraq which eliminated government control of Iraq's northern Kurdish regions. Britain and France, with the support of the Bush administration, established a UN-administered Kurdish enclave in northern Iraq, under the provisions of "Operation Provide Comfort."

A 'one-world government' precedent

Operation Provide Comfort is the first time the UN has ever intervened into the internal affairs of a state without at least the nominal formal request of the government concerned. It therefore has broad importance in the creation of a one-world government. The French ambassador to the UN justified this arrangement under the doctrine that "human rights supersede national sovereignty." This doctrine was first announced at a 1987 Paris conference attended by the late President of France François Mitterrand, his wife Danielle Mitterrand, and then-Mayor of Paris Jacques Chirac.

Danielle Mitterrand is the head of the France Freedom Foundation, which has long aided the terrorist Kurdish Workers Party (PKK). In winter 1995, she testified before the U.S. Congressional Human Rights Caucus on a report on a foundation fact-finding trip to "Kurdistan" in August 1994. The report complains that after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920 recognized the Kurds and promised them their own state. However, this was not implemented—the rise of Turkish nationalist leader Kemal Ataturk made the treaty a dead letter. However, "since this time, the Kurds have battled to achieve some form of self-determination," the report said. It demanded that Turkish, Iraqi, and Iranian "Kurdistan" be protected from "genocide" carried out by their respective governments, and called for the creation of an International Criminal Court to try government officials.

Although Kurdish nationalism is a British creation, two can play the game. In 1946, the Soviets founded the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad, in northwest Iran, near the Russian border, as part of their effort to take over Iran. The leaders of the republic were Qazi Mohammed, who was executed after its collapse, and Mustafa Barzani, who temporarily fled to Russia. After receiving military education in Soviet Russia, Barzani returned to the region in 1961 to lead a bloody struggle against the central government in Baghdad. The struggle ended in 1970 with a national accord granting limited autonomy to the Kurds in northern Iraq. In 1974, however, Barzani rebelled again, demanding more power over the oil-rich city of Kirkuk. Barzani ended up being sold out by Iran and the Soviets, his main allies. The 1975 Iraq-Iran "Algiers" agreement deprived Barzani of his influence in northern Iraq, resulting in his fleeing, together with his tribe, to Iran.

Yet, showing the "derivative" nature of Kurdish operations, Barzani later became an operative of the Israeli Mossad, under the control of Gens. Moshe Dayan and Rehavam Zeevi. Barzani later died in the United States.

The rivalry between today's fighting factions, the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (PDK), led by Barzani's son Masoud, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), led by Jalal Talabani, dates to 1968, when Talabani, then assistant to Mustafa Barzani, split from the PDK to negotiate a separate deal with Baghdad. This left deep scars in the relationship between these two factions. The tradition of changing allies among the PDK and PUK continues to this day.

The Kurdish regions of northern Iraq have always been a problem for Baghdad, and were constantly subject to Iranian-organized insurrection. During the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war, Iran and Syria armed Barzani's PDK, which occupied many areas along the 550-mile Iraqi-Turkish border. Iran, Syria, and Soviet Russia also armed Talabani's PUK, which operated around Kirkuk. Attacks on oil pipelines and refineries were used to pin down Iraqi troops in the north. Simultaneously, Syrian President Hafez al-Assad, an Iranian ally, established PKK camps in northern Iraq on the border with Turkey, in the same general area as the Barzani clan, with which the PKK was then, temporarily, allied. As a result, virtually all the border region between Iraq and Turkey was under the control of Kurds controlled by Syria and Iran.

Mafia-like fighting

Operation Provide Comfort and the no-fly zone provided a safe haven for all Kurdish groups targeting Iraq, Turkey, and Iran. To convince the Turkish government to continue hosting the Western aircraft observing the no-fly zone, the UN turned a blind eye to illegal oil transport worth \$1 billion per annum from Iraq to Turkey through the Kurdish area. This provided huge sums of cash for the two Kurdish parties, which were taxing the oil tankers passing through Zakho on the border between Iraq and Turkey. The money was used to arm and recruit poverty-stricken Kurds, putting the whole region

under mafia-like control. Eventually, fighting broke out between the PUK and PDK after accusations of fraud by both sides.

The fighting was stopped twice through U.S.-mediated cease-fires. But the hatred continued, all for the benefit of Hafez al-Assad's control of all Kurdish factions. A strategic "exchange" took place in April 1996, when Barzani's PDK jumped into the lap of al-Assad, breaking a long period of Iranian sponsorship and control. Simultaneously, Talabani became the ally of Iran, breaking with Syria. The advantage to Syria of coopting Barzani, is that the "Barzan" region in northeast Iraq, in the corner near Iran and Turkey, and the area along the Iraqi-Turkish border, is under the control of the Barzani tribe. This region is the PKK's most strategic base for launching attacks against Turkey.

In April 1996, former Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit called for replacing Provide Comfort with a U.S.-Turkish treaty, eliminating British and French troops from the area. Turkish press commented that this is needed, because the British and French are intent on creating a Kurdish state in northern Iraq, which also threatens Turkey. In fact, since the French-proposed enclave was created, the Syrian-patronized PKK increased its presence in northern Iraq, and has dramatically increased its war in Turkish southeast Anatolia. Most of the 19,000 Turks and Kurds who have died in that war since its outbreak in 1984, have been killed since 1991.

During his visit to Iran in August 1996, Turkish Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan proposed to hold a regional conference to find a solution for the "power vacuum" in northern Iraq, and Turkey and Iran agreed to close the PKK camps in Iran. But this "exchange" is becoming the biggest threat to stability in that region. A regional solution would end both the UN mandate over Iraq, and Syria's regional destabilization schemes.

The Iraqi incursion into Arbil on Sept. 3, based on a call for help from the Barzani group, plays into the hands of Syria. The Syrian regime has been trying to get closer to Baghdad in recent months. Official and unofficial delegations have been shuttling back and forth between Baghdad and Damascus through the Kurdish area under Barzani's control. The Turkish reaction to this new situation came through showing support for the U.S. strikes against Iraq, and announcing that Turkey will build a security "fence" along the Iraqi-Turkish border, inside Iraqi territory, to prevent new attacks by the PKK from bases inside Iraq.

So far, Erbakan's initiative for a regional settlement of the Kurdish problem has been stalled. Improvement in Iranian-Iraqi-Turkish relations, based on economic cooperation and building major infrastructure projects, has been undermined. The Kurdish people, who inhabit one of the richest and most strategic regions in the world, will suffer the consequences of the treason committed by the Kurdish political groups, and the geopolitical destabilization schemes of Syria's al-Assad on behalf of the Anglo-French "Entente Bestiale."

Russia's crisis enters lull before the storm

by Konstantin George

The apparent calming down of some key features of the Russian crisis during late August and early September should not be cause for complacency in the West. The announcement by the miners union on Aug. 26, cancelling a threatened general strike, temporarily averted the eruption of a social explosion. And the achievement of a sort of "peace" in Chechnya, has also contributed to the seeming lull. On most fronts, this lull, beginning with the most crucial front, the economy and state finances, will soon vanish, because none of the underlying causes propelling the Russian crisis have been ameliorated, let alone removed.

First, let us look at the Chechen crisis, which throughout the summer has been a key lever in the power struggle among the "three Caesars" under the ailing President, or senior "Augustus," Boris Yeltsin—Gen. Aleksandr Lebed, Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, and chief of Presidential Administration Anatoli Chubais.

The Chechen peace agreement negotiated by General Lebed is a potential breakthrough, assuming it can be implemented. However, it is only a first step toward eliminating not only Chechnya, but the Russian North Caucasus as a whole, as a conflict region. Lebed succeeded in stopping the fighting and implementing a complete withdrawal of Russian forces from Grozny and all parts of Chechnya where rebel forces operate. By physically separating Russians and Chechen rebel forces, the war, as a military battle between Russian forces and Chechens, has apparently been ended.

But the myriad of unsolved problems in the Caucasus region remain, and the Lebed peace agreement has not removed from power those forces in Moscow which have historically included the Russian oligarchy and nomenklatura tied to the financial and energy interests behind the Chernomyrdin and Chubais groups. These interests have promoted wars and conflicts in the Caucasus for their own venal interests. What Lebed has been able to accomplish so far has occurred despite overt sabotage of his efforts by Chubais, and a much more subtle "double game" of sabotage by Chernomyrdin.

Chubais conducts his sabotage by controlling access to President Yeltsin, with the covert blessing of Chernomyrdin. For example, on Sept. 2, Lebed, as he admitted at a press conference the next day, tried in vain to meet with Yeltsin.