THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF KURDISH ETHNO-NATIONALISM IN IRAN

by

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ACROYNMS

AKP: Justice and Development Party

ISIS: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

KDP: Kurdistan Democratic Party (Iraq)

KDPI: Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran

KNC: Kurdish National Council

Komala: Organization of Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan

Komala J.K.: The Committee of the Resurrection of Kurdistan

KRG: Kurdish Regional Government

KRI: Kurdistan Region of Iraq

PJAK: The Kurdistan Free Life Party

PKK: Kurdistan Workers' Party

PUK: Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

PYD: Democratic Union Party

RKDPI: Revolutionary Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran

SAIRI: Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq

SAVAK: National Organization for Security and Intelligence

YDG-H: The Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement

TABLES AND FIGURES

ABSTRACT

This project provides a comprehensive analysis of the Kurdish ethno-nationalist movements of Iran. Drawing on in-depth interviews with Kurdish experts, leaders and members of major Iranian Kurdish organizations, and archival data:

First, it will be argued that the level of political expression in an ethno-national community is dependent on its organizational resources, the opportunity structure of its environment, and its subjective assessment of the chances of success. The major Iranian Kurdish ethno-nationalist uprisings only emerged in significant form at times when the Iranian state was weak: the 1920s (armed revolts), 1945-1946 (ethno-nationalist separatism), and the early 1980s (full-scale war). These were all instances when the state's willingness and capacity to repress were severely compromised, when powerful allies were available, the institutionalized channels were closed, and Kurdish leaders had a high level of optimism about the prospects of insurgency.

Second, focusing on Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran, I look at the dual dimensions of ethnic mobilization: individuals' decision to participate in conflict, and the effect of organizational recruitment strategies on this decision. I argue: first, individual decisions are motivated by family conditions, friendship networks and emotional relationships, prison experience, grievances, material and nonmaterial incentives; and second, the organization proactively engages in recruitment strategies and determines the processes through which individuals can learn about its activities by engaging young individuals in clandestine urban cells in Iran, on social media, and in prison.

Third, I look at the geopolitics of ethno-nationalist insurgencies to argue that the Kurdish problem has not been isolated from regional developments, and certainly is not immune to outside interference. Ultimately, the common state policy of the regional powers (Iran, Iraq, and turkey) to use each other's Kurdish population has resulted in the divisiveness amongst the Kurds and has served as an impediment to the formation of a coherent and unitary Kurdish front.

Keywords: Kurds, Kurdish ethno-nationalism, ethnic conflict, Kurds in Iran

RÉSUMÉ

Mon projet de doctorat fournit une analyse complète des mouvements ethno-nationalistes kurdes en Iran. S'appuyant sur des entretiens approfondis avec des experts kurdes, des dirigeants et des membres des organisations kurdes iraniennes, et sur des données d'archives, je soutiens:

Le niveau d'expression politique dans une communauté ethno-nationale dépend de ses ressources organisationnelles, de la structure d'opportunités de son environnement et de son évaluation subjective des chances de succès. Les principaux soulèvements ethno-nationalistes kurdes iraniens ne sont apparus sous une forme significative que lorsque l'État iranien était faible: c'est à dire pendant les années 1920 (révoltes armées), 1945-1946 (séparatisme nationaliste) et le début des années 1980 (guerre totale). C'était tous les cas où la volonté et la capacité de répression de l'État étaient gravement affaiblies, lorsqu'une aide extérieure importante était disponible, le système politique institutionnalisé était fermé et les dirigeants kurdes étaient très optimistes quant au résultat de l'insurrection.

En mettant l'accent sur le Parti démocratique kurde d'Iran (PDKI), j'examine les deux dimensions de la mobilisation ethnique: la décision des individus de participer au conflit et l'effet des stratégies de recrutement organisationnel sur cette décision. Je soutiens: premièrement, les décisions individuelles sont motivées par les conditions de la famille, les réseaux d'amitié et les relations affectives, l'expérience de la prison, les griefs, les incitations matérielles et non matérielles; et deuxièmement, l'organisation s'engage de manière proactive dans des stratégies de recrutement et détermine les processus permettant aux individus de se familiariser avec ses activités en engageant de jeunes individus dans des cellules urbaines clandestines en Iran, sur les médias sociaux et en prison.

Le problème kurde n'a pas été isolé des développements régionaux, par conséquent, il n'est certainement pas à l'abri des ingérences extérieures. En fin de compte, la politique étatique commune des puissances régionales (Iran, Irak et Turquie) consistant à utiliser la population kurde de l'autre a suscité la discorde parmi les Kurdes et a constitué un obstacle à la formation d'un front kurde cohérent et unitaire.

Mots-clés: Kurdes, ethno-nationalisme kurde, conflit ethnique, Kurdes en Iran

IN MEMORY OF FARZAD KAMANGAR
(1978-2010)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1   CONTRIBUTION TO ORIGINAL KNOWLEDGE

The Kurds, between 30 to 40 million, comprise the world's largest stateless people. The Kurdish population in the Middle East is mainly spread across over four nation-states: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Kurdistan is divided into four regions; including parts of Western and North-western Iran, North-eastern Syria, South-eastern Turkey and Northern Iraq where Kurds live. Although the area of land commonly referred to as Greater Kurdistan spans over these four countries, its territories have historically fluctuated and its exact boundaries have been unfixed and subject to contentious debates. Nor do the Kurds constitute a homogenous population, as there is a significant degree of heterogeneity amongst the Kurds along religious and linguistic lines.

Recent developments in the Middle East, that is the Syrian civil war and the rise of ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) during which Syrian Kurdish towns and villages came under a massive attack from ISIS militants, have turned the world's attention towards the Syrian Kurds in Konanî. Moreover, the resurgence of the civil conflict between Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in 2015, and the independence referendum in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) have made the "Kurdish Question" the focus of public attention around the world. Although this attention is much needed and welcomed, Syria, Turkey, and Iraq are only three of four states with a significant Kurdish population. Moreover, post-US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iran has become an increasingly important player in Middle Eastern geopolitics. These geopolitical changes necessarily have an impact on the Kurds, especially those residing in Iran. However, while the U.S.-Iran relations have received much attention from the international community, little attention has been paid to the domestic political situation in Iran and especially to Iran's ethnic and religious minorities. More specifically, the stories of the Iranian Kurds are largely unknown and unheard of worldwide. As Iran's importance rises due to its role in post-

Ba'athist Iraq, the ongoing nuclear debates, and its strategic connections with Syria and with anti-Israel organizations in Lebanon and Palestine, it becomes more important than ever to understand the complex nature of internal politics within this state. A number of Kurdish groups and organizations claiming to stand for the rights of their co-ethnics who see themselves as victims of state-directed oppression have become increasingly active in and outside Iran, organizing a range of campaigns from peaceful protests to guerrilla actions. However, Iran continues to frame the demands for Kurdish rights and representation and subsequent manifestations of Kurdish ethno-nationalist efforts as a threat to its territorial integrity and continues to suppress the Kurds' demands. The result has been decades-long conflict, death, displacement, imprisonment, and execution of thousands of Kurdish fighters, activists, and civilians.

The main purpose of this research is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Kurdish ethno-nationalist movements of Iran by examining the mutual interplay of the following factors: opportunity structures, movement organizations and their recruitment strategies, micro-level incentives motivating individuals to join ethno-nationalist organizations, and the geopolitics of ethno-nationalism in order to provide a more complete account of ethno-nationalist insurgencies. Although none of the levels of analysis discussed here provides by itself a satisfactory account of ethno-nationalist movement formation and their challenges to the state, applying them in isolation may prove useful. By examining a single phenomenon, Kurdish ethno-nationalist resurgence in Iran, from each of these levels of analysis, one can get a better sense of the limitations and contribution of each approach. The goal of this synthetic approach is to provide a holistic explanation of the extent and forms of ethno-nationalist by emphasizing the interaction between the micro- (rank and file participation), meso- (organizational strategies, resources, and

recruitment), and macro- (political opportunity structures, and geopolitical factors) levels of analysis.

Further, as stated above, this project focuses on the Iranian Kurds, an understudied Kurdish population (about eight to ten million). The under-representation of the Iranian Kurds in academic writings might be partly due to the closed nature of the Islamic regime and difficulty in access to information in Iran, and partly due to a lack of international awareness about the Iranian Kurdish movements. This study attempts to address this gap by presenting a comprehensive analysis of this largely overlooked yet integral part of the Kurdish issues in the Middle East.

Moreover, one of my main concerns in this project is to gain a clearer, more complete picture of the people and the phenomenon I hope to illuminate through my research. My goal is to use my power as a researcher to give center stage to the unheard minority voices. To that end, I employ qualitative research method as it allows for an analysis of the research problem from the perspective of the respondents' lived experiences. Therefore, one of the primary goals of this research project is to bring to the fore the perspectives of the individuals too often marginalized and silenced within their communities.

Lastly, the original data gathered for this project uniquely include the experiences of the Kurdish activists, Kurdish organization leaders and rank-and-file, historians, regional experts, and former Iranian government officials. This rare study is very well suited to the identification of the mechanisms and processes that underlie the shifting character of Iranian Kurdish ethno-nationalist insurgencies over time and will further deepen sociological understandings of ethno-nationalist insurgencies in general.

2   CONTRIBUTION OF AUTHORS

I hereby confirm that the author of this dissertation is the sole contributor to the chapters of the present work. Further, this dissertation has been prepared without the contribution of any co-authors, or co-researchers.

3   INTRODUCTION: THE KURDS OF ROJHELAT

It is estimated that roughly about 8-10 million of the Kurdish population live within the current boundaries of Iran. The Kurds constitute between 10-15 percent of Iran, a country that is ethnically divided amongst several groups of peoples including Persians, Azeris, Kurds, Lurs, Baluchis, Gilaks, Arabs, Mazanis, and Turkomans. Due to lack of reliable statistics, partly because of the absence of systematic census data, and partly because of the changing and ambiguous boundaries of ethnic identity, the precise size of Iranian Kurdish communities is unknown. The Kurds are the third largest ethnic group after the Azeris and Persians. Persians, although making up less that 50 percent of the population, are the largest ethnic group residing in Iran. Notably, Shi'a Persians, although dominating Iran, do not constitute the majority of the population.

The majority of the Iranian Kurdish population inhabit Western and North-western regions of the country, a piece of land commonly referred to as Rojhelat (Western Kurdistan). The actual boundaries of Iranian Kurdistan, much like those of the Greater Kurdistan, are subject to debate due to ethnic mixings, displacement of ethnic groups, and other historical and socio-political factors. However, it is commonly believed that the Kurdish regions of Iran span over the country's four administrative provinces: the province of Kurdistan in center west, the province of Western Azerbaijan in north west, and the provinces of Kermanshah and Ilam in south west. Although the province of Kurdistan is almost entirely inhabited by Kurds, other provinces are divided along further ethnic lines: in Western Azerbaijan and Ilam, for example, the Kurds co-exist with Azeri and Lur populations, respectively. Moreover, there are about 2.5 million Kurds in the northeastern province of Khorasan who have been relocated to the area in the 16th century during the Savafid Era. These Kurds, although ethnically and historically connected to the rest of

the Kurds, are geographically isolated from the Greater Kurdistan. For the purpose of this study, whenever discussing Iranian Kurdistan, I refer to all four provinces of Kurdistan, Kermanshah, Ilam, and Western Azerbaijan (cumulatively referred to as Rojhelat) and I exclude from this definition the Kurds of northeastern Iran. For a map of Kurdish inhabited regions of Iran see *Figure 1*.

Notably, geographically speaking, the Kurds have occupied various types of land: mountainous areas, plains, and urban centers. The Zagros mountain chains, stretching from the northwest to the southeast of Iranian Kurdistan, divide the region into plains and isolated mountainous areas. Historically, the mountainous Kurds, inhabiting the northwest of Iranian Kurdistan, have been pastoral nomads. Although pastoralism has almost entirely disappeared in the region, there still exist a strong tribal element amongst these Kurds. The persistence of the tribal element has been despite the forceful sedentirization of the Kurdish tribes caused mainly by restrictions placed on movements of Kurdish nomads during the Pahlavi reign (1925-1979) in Iran. Iranian Kurds who live on the plains have historically dwelled in villages and urban centers. The villagers' main economic activities have consisted of pastoralism and mostly agriculture, their main agricultural product being rice, tobacco, barley, and wheat. The urban Kurds have been shopkeepers, traders, government employees, and teachers. The main Kurdish ethno-nationalist movements have emerged from the urban segment of the Kurdish community which often finds itself at odds with the Kurdish traditional tribal leadership. It is, however, important to notice that urban Kurds have often maintained their connections with the tribal chieftains, mainly for political purposes.

Although Iranian Kurds are predominantly a Muslim people, there exists a great deal of religious heterogeneity amongst them. While there is no reliable statistics on the precise

population of each religious affiliation, the main split is known to be between Shi'a and Sunni Kurds. There is, however, a minority of Iranian Kurds who are Ahl-i Haq, Christian, Baha'I, and Yezidi. It is important to realize that non-Shi'a Kurds, living in a majority Shi'a country, have often found themselves subject to two lines of discrimination: one along ethnic lines and one along religious lines.

Moreover, linguistically, Iranian Kurds are divided into various spoken dialects, all of which are of Indo-European roots and not always comprehensible to one another. While Kurmanji dialect is spoken in the northern areas of Iranian Kurdistan, the Kurds of the southern Rojhelat predominantly speak Sorani, Gurani, and Southern Kurdish dialects. And lastly, culturally, the Kurds are more similar to Persians than to Arabs or Turks. Therefore, due to cultural affinities that exist between Persians and Kurds, the boundaries of cultural exclusion and inclusion have not been as alienating for the Kurds of Iran as they have been for the Kurds of Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. Hence, while the Iranian state has historically allowed space for a cultural, but not political, expression of the Kurds, the Kurds of Iraq, Turkey, and Syria have been, more often than not, banned from practicing their cultural traditions such as celebrating Nowruz (the New Year), wearing traditional Kurdish clothing, and choosing Kurdish names for their children.

Since the early 20th Century, and the emergence of nationalization and modernization processes in Iran, the Kurds have struggled for the recognition of their political rights. The Kurdish ethno-nationalist insurgency has historically been influenced by the repressive nature of state policies as well as by the regional and international politics. Therefore, in order to move beyond a limited explanation of the rise of ethno-nationalism, this study analyses Iranian Kurdish insurgencies not just in relation to the central state and how the interaction with the state

influences the phenomenon under study, but also in relation to external regional and international forces and their impact on the Kurdish question. By looking at Iranian Kurdish ethno-nationalist movements in relation to their internal, national, regional, and international contexts, this study looks at the forces that have been responsible for the shifting nature of Kurdish insurgencies in Iran in a systematic, and rigorous way. In analyzing the nature of the Iranian Kurdish ethno-nationalism not as a unitary project with a deterministic beginning and end but as a heterogeneous force which has manifested itself in various forms of claim making, this study presents a much-needed explanation of key factors that have influenced the shape and content of the Kurdish question in Iran.
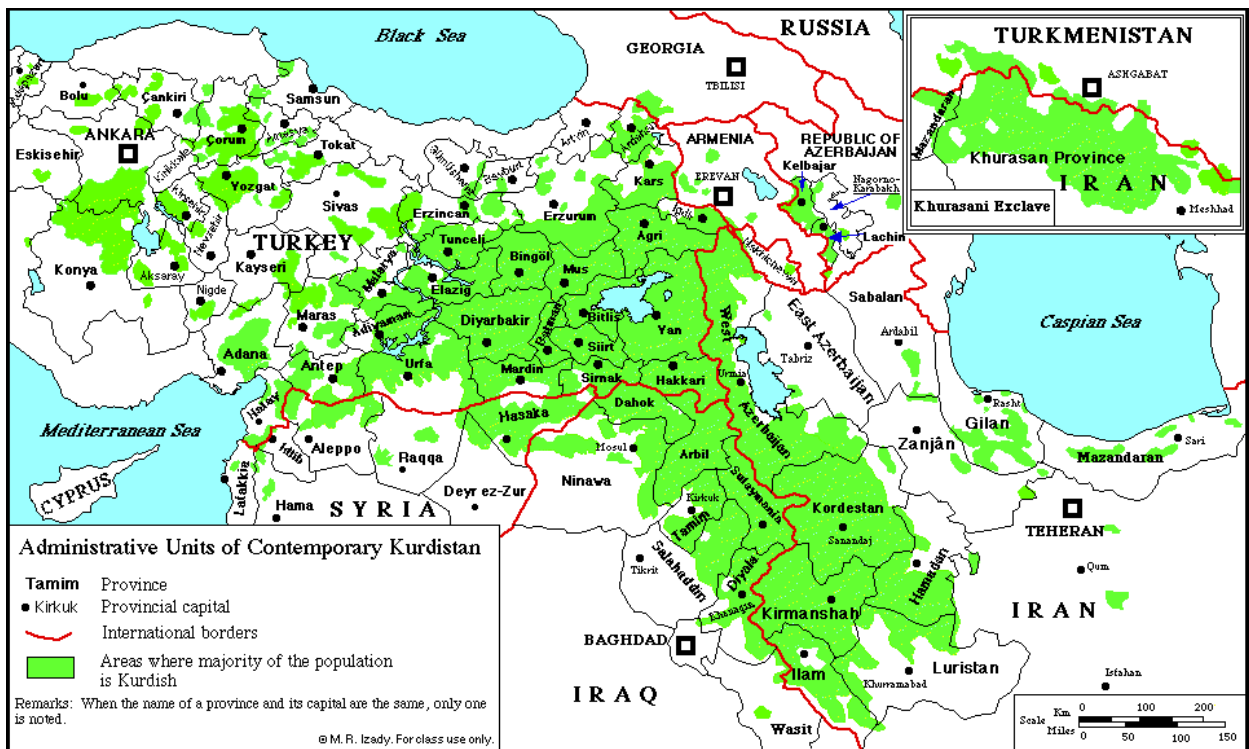
Figure 1: Kurdish-inhabited regions of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria

Retrieved from https://www.britannica.com/topic/Kurd

4   THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF KURDISH ETHNO-NATIONALISM IN IRAN

The study of nationalism and national identity formation has become further complicated with the rise of ethno-nationalism; the idea of making nationalist claims based on descent. Ethno-nationalism is a form of nationalism whereby a group differentiates itself according to its cultural, historical, and/or descent-based origins. One of the most important debates in the literature on ethno-nationalism is why a group's ethnic identity becomes politicized and what accounts for ethno-nationalist insurgencies. In the existing literature which has developed considerably since the 1990s, different schools of thought on ethno-nationalist mobilization are distinguishable: The primordialist-culturalist perspective, for instance, focuses on ethnic mobilization along the lines of strong group identity based on shared group traits and historical memories. From this perspective, the main determinant for an ethnic group's mobilization is a common culture shared by the members of the group.[1]

As Fearon argues, for primordialists "ethnic groups are naturally political, either because they have biological roots or because they are so deeply set in history and culture as to be unchangeable 'givens' of social and political life. In other words, primordialists assume that certain ethnic categories are always socially relevant, and that political relevance follows automatically from social relevance."[2] Although most scholars in this school of thought do not espouse the idea that ethnic identity is formed on a biological basis, they assume shared cultural traits as an explanation for ethnic mobilization.[3] In other words, the fundamental assumption is

[1] Harrison, L. E. (2000). „Why culture matters."Pp. xvii-xxxiv in LE Harri-son–SP Huntington (eds.): Culture matters; Oberschall, A. (2000). The manipulation of ethnicity: from ethnic cooperation to violence and war in Yugoslavia. *Ethnic and racial studies*, *23*(6), 982-1001.

[2] Fearon, J. D. (2006). Ethnic mobilization and ethnic violence. *The Oxford handbook of political economy*, 852-868, p. 4. Retrieved from: http://www.seminario2005.unal.edu.co/

[3] Allahar, A. L. (1996). Primordialism and ethnic political mobilisation in modern society. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *22*(1), 5-21; Oberschall, A. (2000). The manipulation of ethnicity: from ethnic cooperation to violence and war in Yugoslavia. *Ethnic and racial studies*, *23*(6), 982-1001, p. 982.

that ethno-nationalist insurgencies are formed as a natural reflection of a group's cultural traits. From this perspective, even though political and economic factors might play a role in the process of mobilization, it is ultimately the group's cultural attributes that serve as the foundation of its ethno-nationalist mobilization.

Several criticisms have challenged the primordialist-culturalist perspective: first, the assumption that an entire ethnic group can be characterized by a shared cultural attribute is problematic. Second, some critics contend that the primordialist-culturalist argument is tautological as it assumes that, on the one hand, an ethnic group's identity is determined by common culture and, on the other hand, the members of the group have the same cultural traits because of their shared ethnicity. A third stream of criticism argues that cultural and ethnic identity are not fixed traits, they are socially constructed and can change over time. Of importance in this process is the role played by elite and entrepreneurs. Lastly, this view does not take into account the timing and circumstances of ethno-nationalist uprisings. Nor does it account for factors explaining different levels of political expression in an ethno-national community. It is important to understand why ethnic identity becomes activated and politicized in certain contexts but not in others, and what motivates an ethnic group to intensify its claim-making behavior from inactivity to electoral politics, from elections to protest, and from protest to armed conflict.

Rejecting the premordialist view of ethnicity, some scholars instead view ethnic identity as one of many political identities that a group can assume. Moreover, political identities are socially constructed and can change under different circumstances and over time. However, even though national and ethno-national identities may be constructed, the historical, cultural, and political realities of each group affect the boundaries of its identity. For instance, national and

ethno-national group identities may be bounded by groups' objective features such as language, tradition and religious affiliations. These objective features provide the basis upon which ethnic mobilizations are drawn and therefore limit the ability of ethnic entrepreneurs and the self-expression choices that these groups make. Nonetheless, as Anthony Smith argues, while ethnic groups' identity is formed on the basis of some shared pre-historical past, not every group's identity becomes salient. Smith goes on to suggest that the politicization of ethnic identity only occurs during particular circumstances which he calls "revival periods." While Smith's approach shifts the focus of analysis to contextual factors and allows for a less deterministic account of ethno-nationalism, it fails to explain why during these "revival periods" some ethnic groups' identity becomes salient while others' do not.[4]

Some scholars[5] view the politicization of ethnic identity as an outcome of unequal division of resources along ethnic lines. Michael Hechter,[6] for instance, suggests that loyalties and conflict along ethnic lines may be the result of widening economic inequalities between the core and the ethnically-distinct periphery. However, critics of this approach have pointed that while economic inequalities are prevalent in numerous ethnically-based societies, the politicization of ethnicity is not. Moreover, the level of an ethnic group's claim-making behaviour does not seem to be dependent on the group's level of economic disadvantage. In fact, more recent research has pointed to the emergence of ethnic mobilization in places where economic disadvantage is at a lower level compared to other regions in the state.[7] Moreover, social movement theories suggest no relationship between relative deprivation and the timing,

[4] Smith, A. D., & Smith, A. D. (1981). *The ethnic revival*. CUP Archive.
[5] Drury, B. (1994). Ethnic mobilisation: Some theoretical considerations. *Ethnic mobilisation in a multi-cultural Europe*, 13-23; Bonacich, E. (1972). A theory of ethnic antagonism: The split labor market. *American sociological review*, 547-559; Blauner, R. (1969). Internal colonialism and ghetto revolt. *Social problems*, *16*(4), 393-408.
[6] Hechter, M. (1975). The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century.
[7] Samarasinghe, S. D. A., & Coughlan, R. (Eds.). (1991). *Economic dimensions of ethnic conflict*. Pinter, p. 4.

and level of collective behaviour.[8] As resource mobilization theorists have argued, in order for a group, including an ethnic group, to be able to engage in collective action, movement organizations and entrepreneurs with access to material and non-material resources are needed.[9]

While an ethnic group's identity may be bounded by the shared historical and cultural realities of the group's past, its identity becomes salient when a group perceives its exclusion from the dominant culture or political structure. From this perspective, although inherent racial, cultural, and historical ties can provide the foundation of a group's ethnic identity, the resurgence of ethno-nationalist claim-making should be attributed to culturally and politically exclusivist nationalist policies that "other" a group, thereby creating an us-them dichotomy. Hence, from this view, the politicization of ethnic identity is unlikely before the resurgence of some exclusive nationalist projects. Therefore, it is the characteristics of the larger political structure, i.e. the state, that determines and shapes the politicization of an ethnic group's identity. This view has been espoused by some scholars of Kurdish ethno-nationalism who attempt to connect the exclusivist linguistic, cultural, and political policies employed by central states to the emergence of Kurdish uprisings.[10]

This statist view is strongly associated with Ernest Gellner, who, in his analysis of the nation-building process in the Empire of Megalomania, argues that the differentiation between the center and periphery occurs as result of certain aspects of nationalism in modernized and industrialized societies.[11] The exclusion from the center triggers "blues to emerge in a red society." Along the same line, applying Gellner's theory to the Kurdish question in Iran, Iraq,

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8 Piven, F. F., & Cloward, R. A. (1995). Collective protest: a critique of resource-mobilization theory. In *Social Movements* (pp. 137-167). Palgrave Macmillan, London.

[9] McCarthy, J. D., & Zald, M. N. (1977). Resource mobilization and social movements: A partial theory. *American journal of sociology*, *82*(6), 1212-1241.

[10] See Natali, D. (2005). *The Kurds and the state: Evolving national identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran*. Syracuse University Press.

[11] Gellner, E., & Breuilly, J. (1983). *Nations and nationalism* (Vol. 1). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

and Turkey, Entessar argues that the political elites in these countries centralized the political structure and adopted exclusivist nationalist policies.[12] As a result of this internal colonialism and the exclusion of the Kurds from political power, the Kurds have felt relatively deprived and, therefore, mounted several challenges to the political center. Along the same lines, Abbas Vali argues that Kurdish ethno-nationalism has emerged as a set of reactions to highly discriminatory policies and practices adopted by their respective states' dominant groups (Arabs in Iraq, Turks in Turkey, and Persian in Iran) that excluded the Kurds on the basis of their ethnic identity.[13] The marginalization of the Kurds occurred as a consequence of the institutionalization of the dominant group's national identity and the implementation of discriminatory economic and social policies in Kurdish regions. This has led to a growing sense of "otherness" amongst the Kurds. According to Hassanpour, "otherness has become tied to the state elites' exclusionary language policies. As a result, language became the defining identity marker of an aggressive dominant state culture, which in turn, fractured Kurdish identity along linguistic lines."[14]

Although these views improved the existing literature on ethno-nationalist insurgencies by placing greater emphasis on the role of the state and the political center and by moving beyond the premordialist accounts, they provide little explanation on the role played by the ethnic periphery in the process of politicization of ethnic identity. While structural factors relating to states' exclusivist strategies can certainly marginalize and aggrieve an ethnic group, what is less evident is how the latter reacts to such strategies. For instance, Vanly shows the Kurds in Iraq have become the victims of the ruling classes' "colonialism."[15] Similarly, Jafar argues that the internal colonialism of Kurdistan has made it impossible for the Kurds to

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[12] Entessar, N. (1992). *Kurdish ethnonationalism* (pp. 67-68). Boulder: Lynn Rienner Publishers.
[13] Vali, A. (1996). Kurdish Nationalism. *Identity, Sovereignty and Violence in Kurdistan (Tauris, London, 1998)*.
[14] Hassenpour, A. (1992). Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan, San Francisco : Mellen Research University Press, p.67.
[15] Vanly, I. S. (1993). Kurdistan in Iraq. *People without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan*, 153-210.

successfully challenge the existing relations of domination and subordination.[16]

More complex views have emerged within the same state-centric stream of thought to explain the processes of identity politicization. These arguments point to ethnic groups as active agents rising against and reacting in different ways to state's centralizing policies. For instance, Hamit Bozarslan shows how different subgroups of Kurds such as landowning elites, working classes, religious groups, peasants, and bureaucrats formed different relationships with their central state and each other.[17] According to him, these diverse relationships which were formed on the basis of distinct group interests and varying state approaches to these groups have influenced the nature of Kurdish ethno-nationalist identity that each group has assumed, ultimately resulting in the politicization of some, but not all, Kurdish groups' identities.

Moreover, structural changes resulting from state policies implemented in ethnic periphery can shape the forms that ethnic identity can assume. More specifically, McDowell argues that while the creation of modern nation-states in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey entailed the formation of Kurdish ethno-nationalism, the ensuing urban-tribal divide (a consequence of industrialization and modernization) led to further divisions between the state and the Kurds and between Kurdish groups.[18] A similar line of argument has been provided by Koohi-Kamali who demonstrates how in Iran the Pahlavis' policies uprooted the economic and social structures of Iranian Kurdish society and encouraged a modem form of Kurdish nationalism led by urban elite.[19] Therefore, one implication of this approach is that context matters as it shifts the very political boundaries on the basis of which ethno-national identity find its meaning.

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[16] Jafar, M. R. (1976). *Under-underdevelopment: A regional case study of the Kurdish area in Turkey* (No. 24). [Social Policy Association in Finland].

[17] Bozarslan, H. (1993). *La question kurde*. La Documentation française.

[18] McDowall, D. (2003). *Modern history of the Kurds*. IB Tauris.

[19] Koohi-Kamali, F. (2005). The development of nationalism in Iranian Kurdistan. In *The Kurds* (pp. 144-160). Routledge.

What has not been systematically explored, however, is the temporal aspect of nationalism and changes in political structure over time. In other words, nationalism is not a one-time transition to statehood. Rather, the very nature of the state continually changes over time, leading to different structures of opportunities for ethnic groups. In other words, while political context matters and shapes the character of ethnic identity, it rarely remains unchanged and fixed. Taking modern nation-state building projects in the Middle East as an example, one can discern several contextual shifts at different points in modern history. For instance, the nationalist strategies that were pursued in pre-revolutionary Iran on the basis of the "Aryanness" of Persian identity were very distinct from the post-revolutionary state's nationalism which centered around a hybrid notion of national identity combining certain aspects of Shi'a Islam and Persianness. The shifts in the nature of state nationalism might also result in shifts in the opportunity structure and the available opportunity structures to co-opt and contain ethno-nationalist claim-makings.

Yet another problematic view in the study of ethno-nationalism in general, and Kurdish ethno-nationalism in particular, is the assumption that nationalism (and by extension, ethno-nationalism) is a linear process that goes through certain developmental stages before reaching the end stage.[20] Such a view is prevalent amongst the scholar of Kurdish studies. Oslon, for instance, argues that Kurdish ethno-nationalism which started with Sheikh Said rebellion in Turkey has undergone four stages that cumulatively develop as a consequence of the interactions between the Kurds and regional powers.[21] Koohi-Kamali shows how the transition from nomadic societies marked the "beginning of a process of Kurdish national consciousness which

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[20] Hobsbawm, E. J. (2012). *Nations and nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality*. Cambridge university press; Tiryakian, E. A., & Nevitte, N. (1985). Nationalism and modernity. *New nationalisms of the developed West*, 57-86; Deutsch, K. W. (1966). *Nationalism and social communication: An inquiry into the foundations of nationality* (Vol. 34). mit Press.

[21] Olson, R. (2013). *The emergence of Kurdish nationalism and the Sheikh said rebellion, 1880–1925*. University of Texas Press.

culminated in the establishment of the Kurdish Republic in the Mahabad region (1946)."[22]

While these debates attempt to unpack the underlying social and political mechanisms of Kurdish ethno-nationalist insurgencies, they present nationalism as a project with a deterministic beginning and end, and ethno-nationalist conflict as its inevitable outcome. Moreover, these accounts fail to explain the various forms of claim making (from electoral politics, to armed conflict) that Kurdish ethno-nationalism has assumed throughout modern history in all three nation-states.

Although Ernest Gellner presents nationalism as an episodic project, his view only accounts for the move from agricultural to industrial societies as the backdrop for this project. Close to Gellner's account, Abbas Vali's study of the formation of Iranian Kurdish identity focuses on the stages of ethno-nationalist developments in the transition from agrarian to capitalist societies.[23] He argues that agrarian structure of Persia did not allow for the emergence a class of urban intelligentsia and a developed economic structure that would form the basis of Kurdish national consciousness. It is only after the growth of capitalism in Persia that such developments occured. Despite the overall usefulness of this framework, it is less clear how this framework will account for the rise of ethno-nationalism in transitional stages of development, prevalent in the Middle East, during which the social structure is neither entirely industrialized nor entirely agrarian.

Building off of the above-mentioned arguments and focusing on Iranian Kurdish ethno-nationalism, in the present work, I identify ethno-nationalism as an uneven project and argue that the politicization of ethnic identity and various forms of ethno-nationalist claim making does not

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[22] Koohi-Kamali, F. (2005), p. 198.
[23] Vali, A. (1994). Genèse et structure du nationalisme kurde en Iran. *Peuples méditerranéens*, (68-69), 143-164.

follow any fixed patterns of political development. Instead of presenting ethno-nationalism as a linear historical process, I argue that an ethnic group can assume multiple forms of ethno-national expression and claim-making behaviours at different points in time. Furthermore, although inclusion and exclusion from state power play a critical part in the generation of ethno-political conflict, I argue that a deeper understanding of ethno-nationalist conflicts requires an approach that integrates these core factors while bridging the gaps between the literatures on social movements and ethno-nationalism. In other words, I argue that ethno-nationalist struggles must be seen as another form of social movements. From this perspective, in addition to ethnically-based grievances shaped by the exclusive policies of the state, one must take into account the extent of social and mobilizational resources that give a community the capacity to organize, the structure of the political opportunities that channel and constrain the mobilized group's potential behaviour, and the group's subjective assessment of their environment and opportunities for success. For example, the attention to the openings in the very structure of politics, the organizational readiness of an ethnic group, and ethno-nationalist leaders' subjective assessment of their chances of success may help account for the sudden upsurge or long periods of dormancy in an ethno-nationalist movement. This particular combination of factors may also clarify why Kurdish nationalist claim-making behaviour manifested itself in a certain manner in one political context but not in another.

In the first section of the present work, I delve deeper into the factors that motivate an ethnic group to intensify its claims-making behavior- from inactivity to electoral politics, from elections to protest, and from protest to armed conflict. I use qualitative data (archival data and interviews) to look at different phases of Kurdish mobilization over a period of more than a hundred years from early 1900s to early 2010s. My dependent variable is the level of political

expression in an ethno-national community which can vary in intensity and, therefore, can take on the following attributes: inactivity, electoral politics, protests, and armed conflict (changing between sustained war or sporadic guerilla warfare). I argue that the intensity of the Iranian Kurds' claim-making behaviour depends upon three independent variables: organizational resources, the opportunity structure of the political environment, and the groups' subjective assessment of their chances of success. I suggest that these three inter-dependent variables have a significant impact on the generation, escalation, and de-escalation of ethno-nationalist politics and will help us predict which features of the political environment tend to have an escalatory impact on conflict, and which others generally have de-escalatory effects.

Furthermore, I suggest that the temporal aspects of the periods of closure and opening must be accounted for. This temporal aspect allows for the analysis of ethno-nationalism in relation to the amount of time during which ethnic groups are granted legal political and cultural space. For instance, while Iranian Kurds have been granted moderate degrees of cultural space, and rights to political organizing, their access to such rights has been far from continuous. In some circumstances, Kurdish ethno-nationalists have been permitted to mobilize politically before they faced periods of closure. Along the same lines, in other instances, new openings and opportunities have followed periods of closure. This continuous opening and closure of the political opportunity structures has resulted in a great variability in claim-making behaviour of Kurds in Iran. This is especially noticeable when one compares Iranian Kurds' ethno-nationalist efforts with that of Kurds in Turkey until very recently, where there was almost no changes in the political space over time.[24] This approach allows me to analyze periodization of Kurdish nationalist mobilizations during the time frame under study (early 1900s-early 2010s).

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[24] Romano, D. (2006). *The Kurdish nationalist movement: opportunity, mobilization and identity* (No. 22). Cambridge University Press.

Moving beyond the macro-foundations of ethno-nationalism, I suggest that it is of theoretical and analytical importance to delve deeper into the micro- and meso-level explanations of ethno-nationalist movements. Ethno-nationalist organizations rely upon human resources and often must face the challenge of raising forces and manpower. The existing literature has explored the micro-foundations of collective political violence, and the specific constraints and challenges that non-state organizations face: gathering funds, recruiting combatants, enforcing commitment of rank and file. It is important to note that the strategies implemented to solve these challenges might have important implications for the outcomes of ethno-nationalist conflicts (such as the intensity of conflict or the sustainability of the organizations over time).

However, the existing literature also points to a number of research gaps: participation as a mechanism is rarely theoretically developed, and typically not grounded in systematic and empirical studies. Few authors have looked at the rebel groups and a number of different tactics available to them to recruit individuals. However, this view overlooks the fact that ethno-nationalist organizations can employ proactive methods to ensure participation. Therefore, I suggest that there are two dimensions to understanding mobilization in an ethno-nationalist context: while the first dimension deals with individuals' decision to *participate* in conflict, the second dimension concerns how organizations' *recruitment* strategies can affect this decision. Answering these questions is central to understanding the dynamics of conflict, since the ability of ethno-nationalist organizations to mount a challenge against the center, attain concessions, and survive as credible challengers is dependent on success in mobilizing fighters.

Therefore, in the second section of the present work, I examine the meso- and micro-level mobilizational aspects of the Kurdish ethno-nationalist movements in Iran. Focusing on the most prominent Iranian Kurdish organization, Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), this paper

looks at the dual dimensions of mobilization: Therefore, the independent variable must be understood in terms of two main indicators: *participation* and *recruitment*. By analyzing the multiple paths that prospective fighters followed to the KDPI camps, I attempt to improve the existing explanations of participation and recruitment and suggest how these new insights may have important implications for our micro- and meso-level understanding of ethno-nationalist mobilization. My conclusions are based on the analysis of rich data from in-depth interviews with female and male rank-and-file combatants (*Peshmerga*), and high-ranking male and female members of the KDPI.

I argue that individuals' incentives to join an ethno-nationalist organization are not solely ideological ones. In fact, there is no single reason underlying individuals' decisions. However, although individuals' paths to the organization might vary, it is possible to discern some general patterns and common issues from individuals' accounts. These can be summarized into seven categories: (1) Family conditions; (2) Community and kinship ties; (3) Friendship networks and emotional relationships; (4) Prison experience; (5) Grievances (ethnic and ideological); (6) Unemployment/financial incentives; and (7) Gaining position and status. Moreover, the fact that the organization relies on kinship factors for the recruitment of new members, creates a web of ties and networks among prospective members and existing members of the organization, and further accelerates the process of joining the organization. Further, the organization proactively engages in recruitment strategies: rebel organizations often determine the processes through which individuals can learn about the organizations and engage in their activities. Based on its members' and leaders' accounts, it can be discerned that the KDPI has three main methods of recruitment at its disposal: (1) Engaging young individuals in its risky activities in Iranian Kurdistan; (2) Media effect; (3) Prison activities. However, drawing on in-depth interviews with

the organizational leaders, I show that once potential members join the KDPI, they are not immediately recruited as member. The path to membership is in fact a time-taking journey requiring and testing members' commitment and loyalty to the organization.

So far much of the focus has been on the role played by micro, meso, and macro factors in shaping ethno-nationalism from *within*. Of equal importance are factors affecting ethno-nationalist endeavours from *without*. More specifically, the Kurdish question in the Middle East has not been isolated from regional developments and was not immune to outside interference. In fact, throughout the past century the Kurds have frequently been used, often for geopolitical gains, by the regional state powers that transcribe the borders of Kurdistan. Therefore, macro-level geopolitical considerations and policies have played a crucial role in the forms that Kurdish ethno-nationalist movements have assumed. However, there is a theoretical vacuum on the impact of geopolitics on ethno-nationalism in the extant literature.

While this topic is largely overlooked in the existing literature on the rise of ethno-nationalism (or nationalism for that matter), one recent contribution does look into this question: In his book *Shattering Empires* (2011), Michael Reynolds studies the politics of the Ottoman–Russian rivalry from 1908 to 1914, and explore the ways the quest for geopolitical security entangled the two at the level of "low politics."[25] According to Reynolds, both Ottoman and Russian empires were contiguous states that shared mixed populations that crossed their borders. The mixed population compositions of the two empires created an unusual dynamic wherein attempts of one to secure its borders destabilized the other's. Reynolds examines Russia's policies toward Eastern Anatolia and highlights the way inter-imperial rivalry shaped local identities and politics through the introduction of the concept of the national idea.

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[25] Reynolds, M. A. (2011). *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires 1908–1918*. Cambridge University Press.

This geopolitical competition, Raynold argues, played a substantial role in the organization and conduct of politics in Eastern Anatolia as local Kurdish and other actors adapted to the new framework in pursuit of their own objectives. Therefore, Ottoman and Russian geopolitical rivalry and insecurities interacted in a particularly complex form in Eastern Anatolia which "constituted a double borderland where the two empires blurred into each other in a zone distinct from the centers of both."[26] Interstate competition pushed the two centers to extend their power into this zone. Complicating this matter, however, was the fact that the region's primary inhabitants, nomadic Kurds and sedentary Armenians, were ambivalent towards Istanbul and engaged in conflict with each other over land and other interests. The weakness of the Ottoman government pointed to its inability to contain the conflict. External pressure pushed it to support the Armenians, but domestic political calculations required the appeasement of the Kurds.

The Russian Empire, faced with the inability of the Ottoman government to contain the conflict, was presented with a dilemma. Although Russia benefited from the weakness of its rivalling neighbour, it feared that in the event of an Ottoman collapse, a "failed state" might be formed on Russia's southern border and might further destabilize its turbulent Caucasus. Further, a more important concern was that another European power might fill the vacuum to Russia's south and use the Kurds and Armenians against Russia. The Russians therefore acted proactively by finding common grounds with and making alliances among Ottoman Kurds who were resisting the Ottoman center's centralizing efforts.

Reynolds, however, adds that the inhabitants of the Kurds were by no means passive bystanders in this imperial geopolitical game. They adapted and mobilized in response to the

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[26] *Ibid*, p.46.

actions of state power and local rival groups. In this multilayered competition, states and non-state actors adopted the national idea to legitimize and frame their politics. The geopolitical calculations of the Russian empire in the early 20th century, therefore, resulted in certain policies that encouraged and reinforced the development of Kurdish ethno-nationalist sentiments and uprisings.

However, while Reynolds detailed account primarily focuses on the way in which geopolitical considerations might facilitate the emergence of ethno-nationalist movements, I argue that the opposite may also hold. Geopolitical concerns and rivalries felt by Iran, Iraq, and Turkey have necessitated a set of state policies to use the rival country's Kurdish populations against their respective states. These policies have proven to be detrimental to the Kurdish ethno-nationalist efforts as they have resulted in the divisiveness and lack of trust amongst the Kurds.

The third section of my thesis, therefore, analyzes the Kurdish question as a security matter for the case of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey by investigating the implications of the Kurdish question on Iran-Turkey, and Iran-Iraq relations since the early 20th century until very recently and their impacts on the character of the Iranian Kurdish ethno-nationalist movements. I argue that internal politics, organizational strategies, and movement entrepreneurs are not the only factors affecting Kurdish ethno-nationalism in Iran (and more generally in the Middle East). The Kurdish question in Iran has not been isolated from regional developments and has not been immune to outside interference. In fact, regional powers have used various Kurdish groups of their rivaling neighbors as pawns in their geopolitical games. Therefore, geopolitics has played a crucial role in the forms that Kurdish ethno-nationalist movements have assumed in all three states. The Kurdish question, which has historically been important for all the states in the region

with a Kurdish population (Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria[27]) to varying degrees, has informed

relationships between these states in a multifaceted manner, aiding cooperation while at the same

time causing conflict.

On the one hand, Iran, Iraq, and Turkey have had similar problems with their Kurdish

populations and therefore, have shared a common interest in suppressing Kurdish separatist

tendencies. On the other hand, while these neighbouring countries have at times assisted one

another in countering the threat of Kurdish nationalism by signing several formal and informal

alliances; in times of major clashes of interests between these neighbours they have also

repeatedly supported uprisings among each other's Kurdish populations. Kurdish political

organizations in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey have, at one time or another, relied upon the external

support of a neighbouring state, and consequently, most have become highly dependent on it, to

the extent that their major mobilizing decisions were highly influenced by their foreign sponsors.

Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that geopolitical factors have played an enormously

important role in shaping Kurdish ethno-nationalist movements. Relying on archival documents,

in-depth interviews with experts, and Kurdish organizational elites, I argue that the prevalent

state policy motivated by geostrategic calculations has encouraged regional powers to use the

Kurds against each other. This has added to the divisiveness amongst the Kurds and has served

as an impediment to the formation of a coherent and unitary Kurdish front. More specifically, the

Iranian Kurds have often found themselves isolated from and distrustful of Iraqi Kurds. For

instance, the KDPI found itself increasingly alienated from the KDP, whose leaders collaborated

with the Iranian government during the civil conflicts of the 1980s to bring the Iranian Kurdish

territory under the control of the revolutionary government. Iranian Kurds "felt betrayed by those

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[27] For most part, I leave the Syrian case out of my analysis. However, it must be noted that the same trends and mechanisms can be seen in the Syrian case.

[they] had historically considered as their brothers and allies."[28]

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[28] Interview ID 038, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2017.

5   METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The main purpose of this research is to analyze Kurdish ethno-nationalism in Iran from a multitude of macro, meso, and micro perspectives. To that end, I employed a qualitative case study approach as the methodology of this research. A case study approach is an "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident."[29] It is a "bounded system" that helps researchers contribute to knowledge on a specific issue,[30] and to improve the theoretical understanding of the topic under study.[31]

The qualitative case study approach provides several advantages in the process of research: one of the primary advantages and strengths of this approach is the ability to combine a number of data collection methods, including interviews, participant observation, and archival research.[32] Moreover, this approach allows the researcher to be directly involved in the data collection process, gain first-hand insight and "in-depth understanding of a situation and meanings for those involved,"[33] and offer rich analytical explanations supported by "holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events."[34]

In addition, the existing state-sponsored empirical, statistical and survey data on Iranian Kurds is very limited and unreliable. Due to restrictive state policies, researchers are not permitted to conduct impartial and independent research about ethnic groups in Iran. Therefore, since extensive empirical evidence to explain the phenomenon was missing, a qualitative case study method seemed most appropriate to generate rich explanations of Kurdish ethno-

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[29] Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. Sage publications, p. 13.
[30] Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications.
[31] Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education. Revised and Expanded from" Case Study Research in Education."* Jossey-Bass Publishers, 350 Sansome St, San Francisco, CA 94104.
[32] *ibid.*
[33] *ibid.*, 3-8.
[34] Yin, R. K. (2017), p. 3

nationalism in Iran.[35] Moreover, minority cultures have a history of voicelessness in Iran. The stories of the Iranian Kurds are unknown and unheard worldwide. Therefore, one of my main concerns in this project was to gain a clearer, more complete picture of the people and the phenomenon I hope to illuminate through my research; and to use my power as a researcher to give center stage to the unheard minority voices. To that purpose, I employ qualitative research method as it allows for an analysis of the research problem from the perspective of the respondents' lived experiences. More specifically, the primary aim of the interviews was to hear from respondents about what *they* thought was important about the research topic and to hear it in their own words.

5.1 Data Collection

The qualitative data gathering process consisted of semi-structured interviews, participant observation in selected settings and events, and archival research. This approach allowed for the triangulation of data and a more rigorous and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.

5.1.1 Interviews

As Rubin and Rubin state, "design in qualitative interviewing is iterative. This means that each time you repeat the basic process of gathering information, analyzing it, winnowing it, and testing it, you come closer to a clear and convincing model of the phenomenon you are studying."[36] The interviews became a vital source of information for the issues investigated in this research and a great opportunity to obtain in-depth information about the complex processes of Kurdish ethno-nationalist movements of Iran. While I did have a particular topic about which

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[35] Lune, H., & Berg, B. L. (2016). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Pearson Higher Ed.
[36] Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2011). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Sage.

I planned to talk to the participants, the questions were open ended and were not be asked in exactly the same way or in exactly the same order to each and every respondent.

The interviews conducted in this study were in-depth and semi-structured based on an interview guide (*Appendix I*). I conducted interviews with three groups of people: former government officials in Iran, members of Iranian Kurdish nationalist organizations, and Kurdish journalists/academics. The interviews were conducted during separate trips to Iran (fall 2016), Turkey (summer 2017), and Kurdistan Region of Iraq (summer 2017, and summer 2018). I used the snowball sampling method to identify study participants. In this form of sampling, the researcher "intentionally selects participants who have experienced the central phenomenon or key concept being explored in the study."[37] The individuals I interviewed are considered to be experts in Kurdish issues in Iran, or have actively taken part in Iranian Kurdish ethno-nationalist organizations. The wide range of interviewees allowed the study to draw on a diversity of opinions and experiences.

The Issues of Access and Trust

As an outsider, I was able to establish a degree of trust with the respondents due to my key informants' positions and their relations to the subjects of this study. During the early stages of the research when I attempted to contact potential participants on my own, I encountered considerable suspicion (due to being ethnically "Persian"), however, my gatekeepers, well-respected members of Kurdish communities as well as a top-ranking member of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran, explained to the respondents the general aims and rationales of the research and were vital in gaining their confidence. Consequently, the participants welcomed me, and many stated that it was important for them to tell "their stories." As a former student-activist

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[37] Creswell, J. W. (2002). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative* (pp. 146-166). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, p. 173.

in Iran, my access to the subjects residing in Iran was made possible through my pre-existing networks and ties with Iranian feminist, student, and ethno-nationalist activists as well as former government officials.

Lastly, the original data gathered for this project uniquely include the experiences of the Kurdish activists, Kurdish organization leaders and rank-and-file, historians, regional experts, and former Iranian government officials. This rare study is very well suited to the identification of the mechanisms and processes that underlie the shifting character of Iranian Kurdish ethno-nationalist insurgencies over time and will further deepen sociological understandings of ethno-nationalist insurgencies in general.

During my time in the fields, I was able to recruit research participants through the personal contacts that I had established prior to my visits. Those who participated in the study were asked to recommend other potential participants who may also be qualified to take part in the study. Snowball sampling, therefore, was a valuable and safe method to identify a diverse group of individuals and experts in locations where the closed political structure limits researchers' access to study participants. Moreover, when reaching out to the members of Kurdish organizations, having a previous participant vouch for the trustworthiness of the research helped new potential participants feel more comfortable about being included in the study.

In total, I conducted 78 interviews with individuals who met the requirements and agreed to participate in the study. Since the focus of a qualitative study is quality, rather than quantity, my main goal was not the maximization of the number of study participants, rather, I aimed for the "saturat[tion] with information" about the topic.[38] The list of interviewees includes:

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[38] Padgett, D. K. (2016). *Qualitative methods in social work research* (Vol. 36). Sage Publications, p. 145.

1. Rank-and-file male and female members of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI): 38 interviews in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (June-August 2017, and July-August 2018).

2. Top-ranking members of the KDPI: 18 interviews in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (June-August 2017, and July-August 2018).

3. Top-ranking members of Komala: 5 interviews in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (August 2017, July-August 2018).

4. Top-ranking representatives of PJAK: 2 interviews in in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (August 2018).

5. Field experts (historians, regional experts): 5 interviews in Iran (November-December 2016).

6. Former government officials (Ministries of Foreign and Internal Affairs): 5 interviews in Iran (November-December 2016).

7. Kurdish activists: 5 interviews in Iran (December 2016).

For a complete breakdown of the interviews see *Appendix II.*

To establish contact and set up interviews, I used several methods depending on the context: First, I reached out to the members and leaders of the Kurdish organizations in person and during my visits to the organizations' camps and offices in KRI. The initial access to the organizations was made possible through my personal contacts. Once visiting the organizations' camps, I was invited to attend several organizational events during which I solicited the members' participation in the study. I then asked each participant to refer me to other members of the organization who would be willing to take part in the study. The time and location of the interviews were set up at the convenience of the participants. Most of the interviews with the

rank-and-file members of the KDPI were carried out in residential areas of the organization's camp and in the members' houses. The interviews with the organizational leaders (KDPI, PJAK, and Komala) were conducted in the leaders' offices.

Second, I used telephone calls to reach out to academics, journalists, and former government officials as email correspondence was an ineffective and, at time, unsafe method of communication. While conducting interviews, I refrained from writing down or recording any personal information anywhere for the sake of the participants' safety.

All of the interviews were conducted in one session and lasted between 35-45 minutes each, and almost all of them were carried out in Persian. During the time of the interviews, participants were reminded that they could choose to not answer or skip any of the questions, could quit the interview whenever they wished and that there would be no obligation for them to respond to all of questions. Those who consented to be interviewed agreed to answer questions about their personal information such as their ethnicity, age, city of residence when living in Iran and the year they left their hometown (in the case of organizational members). See *Appendix I* for complete interview guides.

The use of snowballing sampling in the recruiting of the interview participants prevented the researcher from taking an active role in the selection process, hence, eliminating bias in the recruitment stage. The selection of three groups of actors (academics, government representatives and members of Kurdish organizations) also ensured the diversification of opinions and experiences included in the study.

5.1.2 Archival Research

Another data collection method that I employed in this project was archival research. I used three types of archives:

1. I gathered and used journalistic and media accounts which were online and hard copies of "written and recorded material produced for general or mass consumption"[39] which included newspapers and magazines;

2. I analyzed available declassified government reports, and official documents;

3. I also relied on books and memoires written by important figures within Iranian Kurdish organizations.

A full list of documents is available in the bibliography section of this thesis. The collection of these sources occurred either through online research or during my field trips to Iran (National Library, Archive Centers of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ministry of Intelligence, and Majlis (Parliament)) and Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Archive Center of the KDPI).

5.1.3   Participant Observation

Another source of data that I relied upon was the observational evidence that I gathered during my fieldtrips to the camps of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran in KRI in summer 2017 and summer 2018. The information gathered in this way contributed to the triangulation of the data and the robustness of the research.[40] During the course of this study, I attended a total of 11 events organized by the KDPI including public gatherings, ceremonies, and Kurdish history and politics courses (for a complete list of the attended events see *Appendix V*). Since the events were held in Kurdish language, and due to my unfamiliarity with the language, the members of the organization volunteered to translate the conversations, speeches, lectures, etc. orally into Persian. I took detailed notes during these field observation sessions. These observations complemented the issues that were discussed and brought up in the interviews. They also

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[39] Berg, B. L. (2004). Methods for the social sciences. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences. Boston: Pearson Education*, p.191.
[40] Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.

provided deeper insight into understanding the problems and issues that Iranian Kurdish organizations are facing in exile, and the ways in which they frame their grievances and train their recruits to become loyal and committed members of the organizations. Moreover, these events were particularly helpful in understanding the ethno-nationalist grievances and struggles from the organization's point of view.

5.1.4   Data Analysis

Once the interview data had been gathered, I transcribed the recordings and in cases where recordings were not available, I transferred the detailed interview notes into a Word document. All of the transcriptions were completed without any outside help. The transcriptions from all of the interviews were uploaded on a safe internet-based drive.

Once the data had been collected and transcribed, the multistage coding process began. I started with open coding: I read through the transcripts line by line and made a note of themes that seemed appropriate. At this stage, I kept an open mind, not letting the original expectations and research questions interfere with my ability to see new themes and categories. Therefore, this process was content driven as the codes were derived from the data. This process was enormously helpful in refining the data based on a series of themes and concepts in an effort to generate more general explanatory statements. Next, as I read through the open codes, I began to see commonalities across the categories or themes that I had written down. These commonalities evolved into focus coding as I merged and narrowed down the themes and categories identified in the open coding process. Notably, the transcriptions and initial codlings were completed in Persian. Next, I translated selected quotes into English for demonstration in the following chapters.

In the case of the interviews with the KDPI members and leaders, I organized direct

quotes from the participants' answers to the questions into broad categories. Then, similar

responses to the identical questions were grouped together into smaller and more specific

categories. I then constructed narratives to show what individual factors motivated active

members of the KDPI to join and participate in the activities of an ethno-nationalist organization,

and what organizational factors facilitated the recruitment process. Lastly, I used these narratives

to formulate theoretical underpinnings of ethno-nationalist mobilization as well as the links

between micro-, macro-, and meso-level factors. The data collection and analysis processes are

presented as clearly as possible for external investigation (see *Appendix III* for a sample of open

and closed coding).

5.2 Ethics of Research

Conducting qualitative research is often associated with several ethical issues: issues of

data safety, consent, confidentiality, and harm to participants. As explained above, I took a

number of steps to comply with ethical standards.

For the study participants who lived outside Iran (either in Turkey or KRI), there was

little risk of harm, and the interviews posed no greater than minimal risk to subjects. The only

risk that participants may have faced was emotional discomfort about revealing and sharing their

personal experiences living as a Kurdish minority, and for some, as Kurdish activist in Iran. For

those who resided in Iran, extremely cautious measures were taken to ensure the safety and

confidentiality of the participants. For instance, I refrained from recording the interviews that

took place in Iran, and instead developed a code-writing technique that allowed for intensive

note taking throughout the interviews. Moreover, as an extra-cautionary measure, I did not ask

sensitive questions such as those concerning the nature of the Islamic regime and its repressive

policies, which I knew, would pose potential risks to my interviewees as well as to myself. Further, as a former student activist, I am familiar with everyday social and political realities of the Iranian society and have used this familiarity to ensure my subjects' safety throughout the research process. Also, my pre-existing connections and ties to the Iranian student, feminist, and ethno-nationalist activists further facilitated the secure data gathering process in Iran.

To ensure complete confidentiality, the interview data was coded. For example, I assigned a code to each participant and his/her corresponding responses. Participants were assured that this information, as well as their answers to the interview questions, would not be disclosed to anyone under any circumstances. I also used multiple safety measures to protect the participants against loss of their confidentiality: I carefully and strictly followed a set of steps to collect, store and process data, as well as to destroy recordings, and original notes.

In addition, I explained to all of the study participants their complete freedom to withdraw from the study before, during or after the interview. All of the participants were informed about and provided with a copy of the consent form. I asked for the participants' oral consents before starting the interview and for their permission to record the interview. On multiple occasions digital recording was either not possible due to safety measures or not consented to by the participants. In such cases I took detailed and careful notes throughout the interview. I found oral consent more appropriate for the purpose of this study for two main reasons: to ensure the protection of participant confidentiality and to establish rapport with the participants.

5.3   Strengths and Limitations of the Research

This research has several strengths as well as limitations. One of the strengths of this study has been its use of multiple methods of data collection, a combination of semi-structured

interviews, extensive archival research and, to a limited degree, observation. According to John W. Creswell, research triangulation achieved by the researchers' use of multiple data sources increases the internal validity of research and adds to its robustness.[41] The multilingual ability of the researcher (Persian and English and to some extent Kurdish and Arabic) provided opportunities for close analyses of archival documents as well as in-person interaction with research participants. I was able to get directly involved in the data collection (including interviews and transcription) and data analysis processes. Such direct involvements provided me with an invaluable opportunity to gain a deeper insight into the phenomenon under study and to provide significantly detailed analytical explanations.

This research has a number of limitations. It was limited to the examination of the interviews, historical accounts available in primary and archival sources as well as secondary sources. The main focus has been to provide explanations on processes and mechanisms, rather than testing causal relationships between variables. Further, the primary interest of the researcher was the quality of information, rather than the maximization of the study participants or variables. The qualitative case study method was appropriate for this purpose. Therefore, while the main attempt in this research is to provide a holistic and generalizable approach to the study of ethno-nationalist insurgencies as highly contingent and ever-changing phenomena, the specific mechanisms and processes discussed in this thesis may be limited to the case under study.

In addition, researcher bias in the choice of study participants might be considered as one the limitations of this study. However, I took precautionary steps to limit the occurrence of such bias. For example, I used snowball sampling method to find and recruit study subjects. This

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[41] Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017).

method ensured the diversification of the interviewees and minimized the role of the researcher in the recruitment process. Furthermore, in this study relied heavily on peer reviews and debriefing sessions with other scholars in the field for comments and feedback on the analysis of the research findings. The findings of the research were presented at international conferences: Association for the Study of Nationalities (Columbia University 2017 and 2018) and Yale University Conference on Kurds (2018). The findings were later revised based on constructive comments received from various scholars at these events.

6   IRANIAN KURDS AND THE SHIFTING CHARACTER OF ETHNO-NATIONALISM

Introduction

In this paper, I ask the following question: what incites an ethnic group to intensify its claims-making behavior- from inactivity to electoral politics, from elections to protest, and from protest to armed conflict? I use qualitative data gathered on Kurdish mobilization in Iran over a period of more than a hundred years from early 1900s to early 2010s to help answer this question. I argue that the level of political expression in an ethno-national community is dependent on its organizational resources, the opportunity structure of its environment, and its subjective assessment of its chances of success. More extensive resources predispose an ethno-national community to higher levels of expression; this mobilization potential is then activated, exacerbated, transformed, appeased or crushed according to the structure of the movement's political opportunities. I suggest that the three concepts of resources, opportunities, and assessment have powerful effects on the generation and escalation of ethno-nationalist politics. Equally important is the finding that there are crucial differences in what accounts for an ethnic community's shifts in political behaviour among electoral, protest, and armed conflict. By using this analytical framework, one can better understand which features of the political environment tend to have an escalatory impact on conflict, and which others generally have de-escalatory effects.

6.1   Theoretical Framework

The existing literature on ethno-nationalist conflict is split along a multitude of theoretical lines. A first school of thought has argued that high degrees of ethnic diversity contradict the assumption of cultural homogeneity on which modern nation-states are based, and

therefore triggers waves of separatist wars and ethnic cleansings.[42] A second approach has concentrated on cultural, linguistic, geographical, or socio-demographic factors that provide national communities the identity[43] or resources[44] to mobilize and activate their potential. Yet another approach has focused on the presence of strong communal grievances among minority groups due to relative deprivation[45] in the political,[46] cultural,[47] or economic fields.[48] From a rational actor approach, Sambanis[49] uses econometric models to demonstrate that the likelihood of ethnic conflict increases in ethnically divided societies because shared ethnicity lowers the costs of collective action and mobilization for rebellion.

Although this literature on ethnic conflict points to the important underlying historical and political factors, it overlooks the main mechanisms linking such factors to ethno-nationalist conflict and mobilization. More recently, Andreas Wimmer[50] has shown that conflict is more likely when ethnic groups are excluded from central state power on the basis of their ethnic background. According to Wimmer's nation-state formation and ethnic politics theory, since nation-state relies on ethno-national principles of political legitimacy, holders of political power "have incentives to gain legitimacy by favouring co-ethnics or co-nationals over others when distributing public goods."[51] The consequence of this exclusionary state strategy is "ethnic

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[42] Gellner, E. (1991). *Nationalism and politics in Eastern Europe. New Left Review*, (189), 127; Nairn, T. (1993). Demonising nationalism. *London Review of Books*, 25.

[43] Anderson, B., & Communities, I. (1991). Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. *London, New York*, *21993*; Barth, F. (1998). *Ethnic groups and boundaries: The social organization of culture difference*. Waveland Press; Calhoun, C. (1993). Nationalism and ethnicity. *Annual review of sociology*, *19*(1), 211-239; Connor, W. (1993). Beyond reason. *Ethnic & Racial Studies,*16(3), 373-389; Coser, L. A. (1956). *The functions of social conflict* (Vol. 9). Routledge; Horowitz, D. L. (1985). Ethnic groups in conflict.–Berkeley, CA: Univ.

[44] Tilly, C. (1979). Social movements and national politics.

[45] Gurr, T. R. (1970). Sources of rebellion in Western societies: Some quantitative evidence. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *391*(1), 128-144.

[46] Horowitz (1985); Horowitz, D. L (1993). Democracy in Divided Societies. *Journal of democracy*, *4*(4), 18-38.

[47] Connor (1993)

[48] Bookman, M. Z. (1993). *The economics of secession*. Palgrave Macmillan; Horowitz (1985); Olzak, S. (2004). Ethnic and nationalist social movements. *The Blackwell companion to social movements*, 666-693.

[49] Sambanis, N. (2001). Do ethnic and nonethnic civil wars have the same causes? A theoretical and empirical inquiry (Part 1). *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *45*(3), 259-282.

[50] Wimmer, A. (2008). The making and unmaking of ethnic boundaries: A multilevel process theory. *American journal of sociology*, *113*(4), 970-1022; Wimmer, A. (2002). *Nationalist exclusion and ethnic conflict: Shadows of modernity*. Cambridge University Press.

[51] Wimmer, A., Cederman, L. E., & Min, B. (2009). Ethnic politics and armed conflict: A configurational analysis of a new global data set. *American Sociological Review*, *74*(2), 316-337. P. 321

politics" or, as Wimmer defines it, competition over access to the state power between ethnically defined groups. "Such ethnic politics may lead to a process of political mobilization, counter-mobilization, and escalation."[52]

Wimmer's notion of ethnic inclusion and exclusion helps to explain the politicization of ethnic identity. However, this perspective has two major limitations: first, it assumes that a politicized ethno-nationalism is a continuous and unidirectional process. Second, it assumes that group incentives are sufficient to produce mobilization and, therefore, it overlooks an ethnic group's organizational capacity as a precondition for mobilization. In a more recent work, Wimmer does draw on resource mobilization theory but only to conclude that excluded groups' size matters. This view reduces the organizational capacity of an ethnic group to the number of fighters that it can recruit: larger excluded groups are more able to challenge a government because they can recruit more fighters from a larger potential resource pool to sustain an organizational infrastructure.

Although there is sufficient evidence that group identity, grievances, inclusion/exclusion from state power all play a critical part in the generation of ethno-political conflict, I argue that we could further our understanding of ethno-nationalist conflict by employing an approach that would integrate these core factors while bridging the gaps between the literatures on social movements and ethno-nationalism. In other words, I argue that ethno-nationalist struggles must be seen as another form of social movements: as social movements using identity as a basis for mobilization in the struggle for access to political power. From this perspective, in addition to ethnically-based grievances, one must take into account the extent of social and mobilizational resources that give a community the capacity to organize, the structure of the political

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[52] *ibid.*

opportunities that channel and constrain the mobilized group's potential behaviour, and the group's subjective evaluation of their environment and opportunities for success.

According to the political process theory, three sets of factors contribute to social insurgency: the level of organizational resources within the minority community, the group's assessment of the chances of successful insurgency, and the political opportunity structure within the lager political environment.[53]

First, the "political opportunity structure" (POS) refers to a set of formal and informal political conditions.[54] It includes such characteristics of the institutional environment as the state's propensity to repression or the openness of the institutionalized system (in the case of ethnic movements, the official recognition of ethnic groups or the existence of special channels for ethnic representation), the presence or absence of elite allies (or cleavages within the structure of the ruling state), the existence of potential allies (for example, availability of powerful international allies). According Sidney Tarrow, the POS comprises "consistent—but not necessarily formal or permanent—dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure."[55]

Second, a favourable political environment can only provide the opportunity for a successful collective action, it is the organizational readiness of insurgent groups that enable them to exploit these opportunities. The organizational readiness refers to the availability of tangible and intangible resources including, but not limited to, members, money, leadership, strong solidarity among members, and the existence of established associational networks that

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[53] McAdam, D., McCarthy, J. D., Zald, M. N., & Mayer, N. Z. (Eds.). (1996). *Comparative perspectives on social movements: Political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and cultural framings*. Cambridge University Press; Tarrow, S. (1994). Power in movement: Collective action, social movements and politics.
[54] *ibid*
[55] Tarrow (1994). P. 18.

can be used to link members of the minority community into an organized action.

Third, although political opportunities and organizational resources are necessary, they are not sufficient to produce collective action as they can only offer "a certain objective structural potential for collective political action."[56] What mediates the relationship between these objective opportunities and collective action is the subjective meanings that insurgents attach to their situations. As McAdam explains: "favorable shifts in political opportunities have a subjective referent: challengers experience shifting political conditions on a day-to-day basis as a set of "meaningful" events communicating much about their prospects for successful collective action."[57] The ability of activists and leaders to actively assign meaning to social reality, promote a certain understanding of reality, and intentionally choose a frame for mobilization allows them to strategically "fashion a shared understanding of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action."[58]

When analyzing ethno-nationalist struggles, scholars focus exclusively on only one form of expression, either institutional (electoral), or extra-institutional (protest or armed conflict), in isolation from the others. I argue that there is "no fundamental discontinuity" between institutional and extra-institutional politics. In fact, these forms of ethno-nationalist expression can be placed on a spectrum. This approach would yield a conceptual umbrella under which protest, armed conflict, and conventional electoral politics can each be seen as ethnic groups' "one strategic choice among others" depending on the situation.[59] This approach draws on Sidney Tarrow's notion of contentious politics, which he defines as "collective activity on the part of claimants, or those who claim to represent them, relying at least in part on non-

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[56] McAdam et al. 1996. P. 48.
[57] *ibid*
[58] *ibid*. P. 6.
[59] McAdam et al. 1996. P. 27.

institutional forms of interaction with elites, opponents, or the state."[60] From this perspective, institutional and extra-institutional means are strategic choices that ethnic groups resort to depending on their resources, political environment, and subjective assessments. Ultimately, the goal is to develop a methodological and empirical framework that will allow one to operationalize the theoretical links among the different forms of political behaviour. Applying this framework to the study of the full range of political behaviour of ethno-nationalist groups (i.e. the participation in electoral politics, protest activities, and armed conflict) will help understand whether factors responsible for ethnic groups' engagement in electoral politics are the same as factors responsible for more radical types of contentious politics and whether these several forms of ethno-nationalist politics are substitutable.

6.2   Data and Methodology

Due to space limitations, my arguments are limited to the case of Iranian Kurdish ethno-nationalist insurgencies. I nevertheless suggest that the Iranian Kurdish case as a broader case could be disaggregated into six more specific historical instances or cases of opportunities for political gains:

1. The Imperial Persia.

2. The establishment of the Republic of Kurdistan following World War II

3. The Kurdish movement during the Mossadeq era,

4. The post-Mossadeq Iran until the 1979 Revolution

5. The developments in Iranian Kurdistan in the wake of the 1979 Iranian revolution and the Iran-Iraq war

6. The decline of the movement post Iran-Iraq war followed by recent revitalization of the

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[60] *ibid*. P. 847.

Kurdish insurgency as of the mid-2000s

I use a number of primary and secondary sources to investigate the character of Iranian Kurdish movement during the above-mentioned period:

First, archival documents: I draw upon internal organizational reports, publications, and newsletters of the two major Iranian Kurdish organizations (KDPI and Komala), and CIA documents. These print data provide rich information on the historical context within which Kurdish mobilization in Iran has merged, grown, and declined. The organizational publications also provide the Kurdish organizations' assessments of their political opportunities and threats, as well as their goals and policies at a given time.

Second, semi-structured in-depth interviews: I interviewed a total of 19 top-ranking leaders of the three Iranian Kurdish organizations: KDPI (12 members), Komala (5 members), and PJAK (2 members). These interviews were carried out in summer 2017 and summer 2018 in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The KDPI and Komala members have been involved with the activities and major decision making of their organizations since mid-1970s and provided invaluable accounts of their organizations' histories as well as their organizations' activities in post-revolutionary Iran. To complement these accounts, I also consulted regional experts, Kurdish historians (3 interviews) and a Kurdish activist residing in Iran. All of these interviews were carried out during my field trip to Iran between November and December 2016.

Third, additionally, I used journalistic reports published in Iranian newspapers, as well as the New York Times, The Washington Post, Iranian and the first Iranian Kurdish publications (*Nishtiman* and *Kurdistan)* to obtain data on the historical events discussed below.

Lastly, I draw upon published biographies and memoires written by prominent figures of the Iranian Kurdish organizations (such as Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, Abdullah Hassanzadeh,

Hêmin, and Abdullah Golparian). These sources are invaluable to this research as they provide first-hand information on the party leaders' account of the history of their organizations, internal conflict within the organization, short and long-term policies of their organizations, as well as these leaders' subjective evaluation of the political environment in each of the historical phases discussed below. These biographies are accessible and are published in Persian.

The main implication of this study is that ethno-nationalism is a contextually contingent process and can express itself in multiple forms over long periods. The Iranian Kurds' ethno-nationalist insurgency has been neither a continuous nor a unilinear process. This, however, does not imply that we cannot find a patterned sequence or timing of ethno-nationalism. It is in fact possible to account for different periods of ethno-nationalist revivals in a systematic manner by looking at a combination of factors such as particular political structures that provide different incentives and disincentives for different groups and organizations within an ethnic community to mobilize.

6.3 The Stages of Kurdish Ethno-nationalist Insurgency in Iran

Stage One: Fragmentation

After the First World War, Iran (then known as Persia) was still ruled by the last king of Qajar Dynasty. Due to foreign penetration, the government was extremely weakened, and the country was divided both politically and administratively into different spheres of influence. At this time, one of the major impediments to a coherent Kurdish ethno-nationalist movement was the imperial structure of Persia which supported the traditional elite. Kurdish society was largely agrarian and fragmented, and more interested in protecting tribal, religious, and landowning interests than in manifesting Kurdish nationalism. Most Kurds aligned with the monarchy, Islam, tribes, and localities. This resulted in a very limited manifestation of Kurdish nationalism by

disorganized tribal militias. This is in contrast to the Iraqi and Turkish cases where Kurdish

nationalists founded associations and modernizing political parties and received external support

(from Europeans) to influence local populations. One example of this contrast is that around the

same time as the Koochgiri and Sheikh Said revolts in Turkey, and Barzinji revolt in Iraq, a

tribal leader in Iran, named Ismail Agha Simko, also led the first major Kurdish revolt in Iran

and took advantage of what he perceived as state weakness (lack of coercive capacity and

divisions amongst the state elites), and declared an independent Kurdish state in the areas under

his control. Nonetheless, he did not make any attempt to express a cohesive ethno-national

aspiration that would include all Iranian Kurds. In fact, Simko excluded Kurds from certain

Kurdish towns, e.g. Mahabad, and did not have the unconditional support of all Iranian Kurds:

Kurds from certain towns such as Kermanshah refused to mobilize unless they were paid.[61]

Reza Shah, a military commander who managed to overthrow Qajar Dynasty with a coup,

seized power in 1921. Inspired by Ataturk's model of modernization and nationalism in Turkey,

the Shah pursued modernizing and state building policies similar to those in Turkey. Reza Shah's

tribal policy effectively ended tribal autonomy in Iran. The policy was pursued in all tribal areas

throughout the country, including the Kurdish regions, and involved confiscating the area of land

belonging to a tribe, arresting or exiling the leaders of nonconforming tribes, forced settlement of

nomadic tribes on lands other than their traditional lands, closing borders and restricting tribes'

mobility, and prohibiting the appointment of local elites to official positions in their own

region.[62] In the period between the two world wars, some Kurdish tribes were totally destroyed

due to the Shah's accelerated policy of forced settlement. For example, as stated by Abdul

[61] Koohi-Kamali, F. (2003). *The political development of the Kurds in Iran: Pastoral nationalism*. Springer.
[62] Cottam, R. W. (1979). *Nationalism in Iran: updated through 1978*. University of Pittsburgh Pre; Vaez, N (2009), Siasat Ashayeri Pahlavi Aval [Tribal Policies of the First Pahlavi King], Nashr Tarikh Iran; Abrahamian, E. (1982). *Iran between two revolutions*. Princeton University Press.

Rahman Ghassemlou:

> "The Jalali tribe nearly vanished. Ten thousand members of the tribe living on Iran-Turkey border were displaced to the central region of Iran. Only a few hundreds returned, all the rest died."[63]

The tribal settlement policy was pursued for political and economic purposes: politically, the policy helped the government maintain a tighter control over areas in which tribal revolts were prevalent. Moreover, it made it easier to draft young male population from the settled tribes for the newly established Iranian army. Economically, the forced settlement of nomadic tribes meant the state could more effectively collect taxes from the settled tribes.

The impact of the Shah's modernization policies on the social, political, and economic life of the Kurdish tribes was two-fold: on the one hand, Kurdish nomadic tribes, whose main economic activity and source of revenue had been herding, were forced to settle, and therefore, became agrarian and lost their economic independence and self-sufficiency which had previously granted them a degree of political protection and self-control over their economic life. On the other hand, the tribal population did not receive much of the benefits of the Shah's modernization policies, for the expansion of state bureaucracies, and the setting up of modern education and communication were primarily enforced in urban, rather than rural centers. Modernization in fact had the effect of further deepening the gap between the social-economic development of tribal regions and the rest of the country.

The implications for the organizational readiness of Kurdish communities are clear: lack of independent financial resources, imprisonment and exile of tribal leaders meant shortage of the organizational resources so necessary for insurgency. Moreover, the general characteristics of

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[63] Ghassemlou, A. R. (1980). *Kurdistan in Iran,* ed. G. Chaliand, People without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan, London: Zed Press. P. 114.

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rural and agricultural lifestyle served as another barrier to organizational development within the Kurdish community. Due to prevalence of poverty as well as overwhelming time demands of agricultural work, rural Kurds had limited time or mobilizational resources at their disposal to engage in organizational activity. The scattered pattern of rural residence restricted people's access to one another and limited the development of the communication networks. Any sustainable and organized collective action requires the recruitment of biographically available members through already established networks. Therefore, Iranian Kurds were simply too poor, too geographically dispersed, and too vulnerable to oppressive controls during this period to mobilize.

Furthermore, the political structure that emerged as a result of Reza Shah's particular type of nation-building project did not provide sufficient incentives and opportunities for the Kurds to mobilize along ethno-nationalist lines. Politically, as in Ataturk's Turkey, Reza Shah's militarization and centralization policies (which included disarming tribal militias, imprisoning dissident tribal leaders, Persianizing schools, state bureaucracy and language, etc.) excluded the Kurds as non-Persian ethnic communities.

Moreover, in the 1930s, under Reza Shah's order, the Kurdish region of Iran was geographically divided into three main parts. According to Ghani Bolourian[64] (a Kurdish political leader who was a member of the short-lived government in Republic of Kurdistan), the Kurdish region on the Iranian side was divided into Kurdistan, Kermanshah, and Ilam provinces, and northern parts of the region were annexed to West Azerbaijan province. The main reason behind such divisions was the Shah' fear of the mobilizational potentials of Sanandaj and its large body of Kurdish intellectuals, as well as his fear of Mahabad and Mukrian areas as the

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[64] Bolourian, G. (2009). *KhatIrate Ghani Bolourian* [The Memoire of of Ghani Bolourian], trans. From Kurdish by Reza Kheyri Motlagh, Tehran: Khademat Farhangi Ressa (2000). p. 29.

centers of Kurdish nationalism. The Shah, therefore, divided the Kurdistan region and appointed non-Kurdish bureaucrats and officers to run and closely monitor the new administrations.

However, culturally speaking, the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion were less alienating for Kurds in Iran (e.g. in contrast to Turkey, Iran allowed for Kurdish language to be spoken and Kurdish cultural events to be held in Kurdish communities). For example, the state's official nationalist narrative was more inclusive for Iranian Kurds as an ethnic group. Whereas Arab nationalists in colonial Iraq mobilized for a pan-Arab state and the Kemalist elite in Turkey denied Kurdish identity altogether, the Iranian political elite, including Reza Shah himself, emphasized the "Aryanness" of Persian identity which was presumably also shared by the Kurds. As Ghassemlou, the late Secretary General of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran and one of the most influential figures in Iranian Kurdish ethno-nationalist history, states in his memoire, Reza Shah's Ministry of Culture commissioned the authorship of a book by Rashid Yasemi, entitled *Kurd va peyvastegi-e nejadi va tarikhi* (The Racial and Historical Continuity of Kurds):

> "The main purpose of the book was to argue that Kurdish language and culture are not
> so distinct from and, are closely linked to, the Persian language and culture, indicating
> a close affinity between the two."[65]

Iranian Kurds, however, still faced discriminations as a non-Persian community but to a lesser degree than Kurds in Iraq or Turkey, or Iran's other non-Persian communities, such as Arabs and Turks. A number of other factors, such as the Shah's economic and agricultural policies which kept Kurdistan economically underdeveloped and the continuing importance of religion in shaping the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in Iran, provided little incentives and opportunities for the Kurds to mobilize against the government and to collectively voice their demands. Therefore, in the first half of the 20th century, Iranian Kurds did not have any

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[65] Ghassemlou, A R. (1988). *Chehel Sal Mobarezeh Dar Rahe Azadi* [Forty Years of Struggle for Freedom], Vol. I, Publication of Democratic Party of Kurdistan of Iran, p. 23.

political parties or organized socio-political organizations that could play a major role in the Kurdish society at the time. They were socially fragmented and politically inactive compared to other Kurds in the other parts of Kurdistan (Iraq and Turkey).

Stage Two: Politicization, and Independence

a. Inception

During World War II, the presence of foreign powers drastically changed the political environment in Iran. The allied forces entered Iran in 1941 and forced the pro-Axis Reza Shah to resign and leave the country. The new Shah, Mohammad Reza (the son of the dethroned Shah) inherited a weak state whose ability to repress opposition became extremely limited for a brief period of time. The presence of foreign powers in Iran changed the political atmosphere in the country: Iran was now divided into three zones: Soviet troops were in the north, British in the south and Tehran and other areas that remained unoccupied. Meanwhile, some ethnic groups, namely Kurds, were filled with hopes of achieving their nationalist aspirations. There were a number of noteworthy factors that increased the Iranian Kurds' ambition to establish an independent government or autonomous political entity within Iran.

A number of scholars point to the role played by the Soviet Union and Great Britain in introducing the Kurds to nationalist ideologies and supporting them in their efforts to gain autonomy over Kurdistan.[66] However, as some existing documents and the memoires of the Kurdish leaders suggest, the Soviets, at least initially, did not have such plans for the Kurds in Iran. For example, in April 1945, a group of Soviet representatives visited Mahabad to meet with the governor of Mahabad and Ghazi Mohammad (who was at the time a key figure within the JK). Ghazi addressed the importance of the issue of Kurdish independence and asked the Soviets

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[66] For example, see McDowall, D. (1992). The Kurdish question: a historical review. *The Kurds: A contemporary overview*, 10-32.

for their support. However, the Soviets did not express an interest in the political matters of the Kurds, and instead, stressed their visit to Mahabad was done for cultural goals, stating "we intend to establish an open cultural society."[67]

As pointed out in some reports by the British Foreign Office, generally speaking the Soviets pursued the policy of non-interference in the domestic affairs of Iran at the time, especially as long as their war interests were not threatened.[68] For the Soviets, Iran was a pathway through which food and supplies arrived for their Front with Germany and therefore the Soviets had an interest in preventing the interruption of this route. The Soviets initially did not have a clear policy towards the Kurds, and their main policy was to discourage any conflict between the Kurds and the Iranian government. Nonetheless, gradually they began to consider the Kurdish tribes as a potential military force in a possible confrontation with the Turks who were suspected by the Allies to be sympathetic to the German cause.[69]

As for the British, in 1941 and during the Allied occupation of Iran, two British officers visited Mahabad. In a meeting with the officers, Ghazi Mohammad spoke of his hopes for the formation of the Greater Kurdistan and demanded to be put in direct contact with the British government. However, the British officers, did not support Ghazi's aspirations and instead attempted to dissuade him from pursuing such goals. A letter sent to the Foreign Office by Sir Reader Bullard, the British Ambassador in Iran, further elaborates the British intentions:

> "Our [British] resolve not to encourage any Kurdish aspirations which might have unfortunate effect in Turkey as well as here [Iran] and in Iraq."[70]

Some other authors attribute the emergence of Iranian Kurdish ethno-nationalism to the

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[67] Howrami, A. (2002) *Mustafa Barzani le hendek belgename o dokoument Soviet da: 1945-58* [Mustafa Barzani in Documents of the Soviets] Political Situation: Kurdistan', Erbil: Aras Publisher, p.50; Foreign Office 624/71 (1945, October 19). Political situation: Kurdistan, No. 272, part eleven (311-350), p.157.
[68] Foreign Office (1940, February 15) 371/24560, Russia and the Kurds. No. 301.
[69] Howrami, A. (2008a). *Rojhalati Kurdistan le sardami dowem cangi cihanida: be peyi balgehnamekani archivi yeketi sovjet* [Eastern Kurdistan During the Second World War in the Soviet Archives, Sulaymania: Zheen Publisher.
[70] Foreign Office 371/27245: Iraqi-Persian Relations-Kurds. No. 5068.

grievances built up due to the suppression of the Kurds under Reza Shah's rule after August 1941.[71]Along the same lines, Farideh Koohi-Kamali suggests that one of the main reasons triggering the expression of Kurdish discontent towards the central government was the behavior of corrupt officials in the Kurdish regions of Iran. As John Cook, the British Consul in Kermanshah, reported:

> "Among all the tribes, there is indescribable bitterness against the Persian officials, particularly the military and police and a firm determination at whatever the cost, death or banishment, not to have them back in the tribal areas under the same conditions as before. Ten years of cruelty, extortion, imprisonment of their womenfolk, ruination of their flocks, their cultivation and their villages followed by two years of virtual independence during which they have had ample opportunity of seeing the cowardice and utter incapacity for proper government of their former oppressors are enough to account for all this. They ask for the same treatment as the Kurds nearby over the border in Iraq, with elementary education, fair treatment and some Kurdish officials."[72]

While the growth and development of the Kurdish ethno-nationalist movement in Iran at the time may be partly attributed to foreign allies (and specifically the Soviet influence, as discussed below), there is enough evidence to suggest that the inception of the movement was linked to indigenous factors and increased mobilizational capacity of the Kurds resulting from socio-economic changes in Kurdistan under Reza Shah.

More specifically, due to the economic and social changes resulting from modernization and urbanization policies of Reza Shah, Iran in general, and in particular urban centers of Kurdistan, experienced an expansion of some of the social groups such as the educated middle classes and people of the service sector. In fact, the tribal settlement policy of the Shah had the unintended consequence of mass Kurdish migration from rural to urban areas (and primarily to cities such as Mahabad, Sanandaj, and Kermanshah) in the long run. The existing data suggest

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[71] Borzoui, M. (1999). *O'za-e Siasi Kordestan: 1258-1325* [The Political Situation in Kurdistan: 1877-1945], Tehran: Fekr-e No Publisher, pp. 261-270.
[72] Cited in kohhi-Kamali, F. (2003), p. 96

that from 1940 to 1956, the urban population in Iran saw an increase of 10 per cent (compared to a very slow urbanization process in previous decades) while the rural population had a decrease of the same amount. Moreover, Iranian population increased drastically over the same period.[73]

The expansion of the urban population meant that a growing class of urban Kurdish residents possessed the personal resources (education, occupation, income) traditionally associated with organizational activity. In urban centers and educational institutions, Kurds were armed with new ideas such as nationalism and self-determination which were disseminated and discussed by intellectuals. Moreover, the physical proximity and improved communications which are characteristics of urban life, in addition to sheer increase in the size of the Kurdish community in urban areas led to an era of institutional development in Kurdistan. Furthermore, the abolition of the great Kurdish principalities, weakened tribal ties and relationships which, previously, were the most important means of identification for many Kurds. Therefore, the general transformation of Kurdish society following the settlement of the tribes and the urbanization, to some extent, of a section of the population are the leading factors responsible for the development of an organizational base for politicization of Kurdish identity and Kurdish insurgency at the time.

But it is also worth noting the effect of the political and military activities of the Iraqi Kurds in Iraq and in Iranian Kurdistan on the Iranian Kurds. Kurds in Iraq, under the British mandate, enjoyed relative freedom that allowed them to form several political and civil society organizations, such as Hiwa party, and to publish novels, poems, and magazines in Kurdish language. Hiwa was actively involved in the promotion of its nationalist ideology and activities

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[73] Bharier, J. (1971). Economic development in Iran 1900-1970. *Economic development in Iran 1900-1970*. *Pp. 25-28;* For more on urbanization in the Middle East see Cook, M. A. (1971). Ira M. Lapidus (ed.): Middle Eastern cities: a symposium on ancient, Islamic, and contemporary Middle Eastern Urbanism. xiii, 206 pp. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969.

outside the borders of Iraq, particularly in Iranian Kurdistan. Seyed Mohammad Amin

Sheikholeslami Mokri (1974), a famous Kurdish poet who wrote under pen name Hêmin and

was later was involved in the formation of the Republic of Kurdistan, wrote in his book, *Tarîk û*

Rûn, *(Twilight)* "the [Iranian] Kurdish leaders sent people to Iraq to bring Kurdish language

newspapers and magazines."[74] Three members of Hiwa were present in Mahabad to help Iranian

Kurds establish a Kurdish nationalist party. Later, and after the formation of Komala JK in Iran,

two Hiwa members were very influential in the dissemination of the party's ideology in Iranian

Kurdistan.[75] Along the same lines, the Republic enjoyed the military and political support of the

Iraqi Kurds of Barzani tribe who, according to Soviet and British reports, had been forced to flee

to Iranian Kurdistan in 1945 along with their leaders Sheikh Ahmed and Mulla Mustafa Barzani.

According to Massoud Barzani, "Barzani was very influential in convincing [the Kurdish tribes]

to come together under the rule of the republic."[76]

In 1942, the first Kurdish political party was established in Iran. It was a clandestine

organization named Komala J. K. (the Komalai Jiani Kurdistan, or the Committee of the

Resurrection of Kurdistan, henceforth JK) founded by eighteen people.[77] Among the founders of

the JK were civil servants, merchants, and teachers and, with the exception of two Iraqi Kurds,

all came from the city of Mahabad. Almost all of the founders and members of the party were

from middle-class and notable families.[78] This is particularly worth noting especially once one

compares JK to the Kurdish nationalist political parties in Iraq and Turkey (e.g. Hiwa, Azadi,

and Khoyboun), which had primarily risen from more traditional and tribal Kurdish

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[74] Hêmin, M. (2005). Sairan Hekmat and Sardar Shamza (ed.). *Divan-e Hêmin Mokriyani* [The Poems of Hêmin Mokriani], Kurdistan. P.69
[75] Mulla Izzat, M. (2003) *Dowlai Jomhuri Kurdistan, Nameh o Document* [Republic of Kurdistan: Letters and Documents], (Vol. 1), Sulaymania: Tishk Publisher. P. 67.
[76] Bārzānī, M. & Ferhadi, A. (2003). *Mustafa Barzani and the Kurdish liberation movement (1931-1961)*. Palgrave Macmillan. P. 101
[77] Eagleton, W. (1963). *The Kurdish republic of 1946*. London; Toronto: Oxford University Press. P. 33; Howrami, A. (2008), p. 112. However, in Roosevelt, A. (1947). The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad. *Middle East Journal*, *1*, 247, p. 19, the foundation date of Komala JK is 1943.
[78] Samadi, S. (1984). *Negah-i digar be Zh. Kaf* [J. K. From a New Lens], Mahabad.

communities.

The party's central committee was located in Mahabad but it had representatives in a few other Kurdish towns of Iran (mainly in Kermanshah, Ushnaviyeh, Boukan, and Sardasht) as well as in two major cities of Iraqi Kurdistan (Erbil and Sulaymaniyah). According to Mohammad Shahpasandi, who was a top-ranking member of the JK, from the outset, the JK had a nationalist agenda. It developed a logo with a sun and the letters J. K. at its center and a flag with three colors (red, white, and green).[79] The Party's nationalist agenda is clear in the public announcement it immediately after its formation, stating:

> "We, the Kurds, live in Iran but have no national rights. The government officials are not willing to accept the truth; they refuse to recognize the very rights granted to us by the Constitution […] We are human beings. We have our own history and language. Why do they violate our rights? Why are we captive in our own homeland? Why do they not let us educate our kids in Kurdish language? Why do they not grant autonomy to Kurdistan? […] We must revolt and fight for our rights and the establishment of our national self-determination."[80]

Further, as Shapasandi stated in his memoir, the Party's admission policies required that new members take an oath of loyalty on the Quran before the map and flag of Kurdistan. Membership to the Party was strictly restricted to people of Kurdish ethnic identity: members had to be born of a Kurdish father and mother. Moreover, members could not be a member of any other party or organization and should not have been involved in activities against the interests of the Kurds, nor a member of any other party or organization.[81] The rank-and-file members of the Party, like its founders, were mostly middle-class urban intellectuals, teachers and other government employees who had read about and had personal knowledge of the Kurdish movement in Iraq, and in general about the nationalist movements of other ethnic

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[79] Saleh, S. (ed.) (2007) *Khaterat Mohammad Shahpasandi* [memoir of Mohammad Shahpasandi]. Sulaymania: Shivan Publisher.
[80] Khoshhali, B. (2000) *Ghazi Mohammad va jomhuri dar ayeneh asnad* [Ghazi Mohammad and the Republic in Documents], Iran: Ferdosi Publisher. P. 44
[81] Saleh, S. (ed.) (2007); also see Ghassemlou, A. R. (1985).

groups in the region. Although the Party was primarily an urban organization, its members were aware of the importance of tribal influence and power. Therefore, the JK managed to expand its branches in other parts of Kurdistan by compelling influential tribal chieftains to cooperate. Its branches were primarily concentrated in the northern part of Kurdistan.[82]

The JK used two major consciousness-raising tools to promote its ethno-nationalist ideologies among Kurdish people:

First, it used print capital and produced some publications such as novels, poems, and magazines in which it discussed Kurdish history, culture, and politics. For example, JK's official journal (*Nishtiman*) which was published in 12 issues in Mahabad (1943-44) was widely distributed in Kurdistan. Just a look at the first issue of the journal which contained poetry, JK's constitution, and articles on Kurdish history is enough to confirm the ethno-nationalist ideology of the party. The journal's motto was "Long Live Greater Kurdistan," which refers to the Kurdish aspiration to bring all four major parts of Kurdistan (governed by Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria) under one unified political roof. Second, JK staged a dramatic opera with a strong nationalistic message called *Daiki Nishtiman* (Motherland). The opera was about a woman named Daiki Nishtiman, symbolizing the Kurdish nation, who was abused by three men, symbolizing Iraq, Iran, and Turkey. At the end of the story, the woman was rescued by her Kurdish sons.[83] The play went on for several months in Mahabad and some other Kurdish towns and was meant to raise the Kurds' ethno-nationalist awareness and grievances as well as a sense of unity and solidarity with other Kurds. After the success of the show, the party became increasingly interested in the theatre as an important instrument for the propagation of its

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[82] Saleh, S. (ed.) (2007).
[83] Bolourian, G. (2000). P. 51.

nationalist ideology.[84]

From the early publications of the JK, one can discern the main features of the politicized

Kurdish identity at its formation: First, as mentioned above, the JK's ideology supported the

establishment of one political entity bringing all Kurds under the same roof: The Greater

Kurdistan. This is demonstrated in an article published in the first issue of *Nishtiman*. The article,

entitled *Amanzhii Emeh* (Our Goal), points to the importance of the cooperation amongst all

Kurds from all four countries towards the independence of the Greater Kurdistan. The article

then goes on to say:

> "The hostility among Kurds, lack of unity, as well as the pursuit of narrow self-interests are the greatest impediments to the progression of our goals. Hence, we advocate for unity among all Kurds and strive for the emancipation of all Kurds and the formation of the Greater Kurdistan."[85]

The call for the establishment of Greater Kurdistan is also noticeable in the several

communications between the heads of JK and the Iraqi Kurds (the Barzanis). In a letter to Mulla

Mustafa Barzani, the JK leadership stated:

> "What goals does your revolt pursue? Are you advocating the liberation of Iraqi Kurdistan or are you planning to unite the entire Kurdistan region? […] We demand that you support the unification and the liberation of all of Kurdistan. If you do so, all Kurds will cooperate with you under your leadership. We propose that a group of delegates from both sides [Iranian and Iraqi Kurdistan] meet together to discuss Kurdish-populated lands in Iran and Iraq. Further, any liberation movement requires support from outside powers. In our opinion, the Soviet is a suitable option. What's your opinion on this? […] What positions do the British have with regard to your uprising?"[86]

Moreover, in addition to unity among all Kurds, the JK called for equality among all

Kurdish tribes. As stated in *Nishtiman*: "The JK does not discriminate among tribes, however big

or small, and seeks to promote brotherhood amongst all Kurds."[87]

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[84] Howrami, A. (2008a). P. 159.
[85] *Nishtiman* (1943, July 1). No. 1, pp. 1-2
[86] *Nishtiman*, (1943, August 2) No. 2, p. 7.
[87] *ibid.* (1944, February 1). No. 6, p. 16.

Second, another key feature illustrated in the first article published in *Nishtiman* is the rejection of armed conflict and an emphasis upon peaceful solutions for the Kurdish question:

> "Although some might suggest that the emancipation of the Kurds can only be achieved through armed conflict, it is the JK's position that these people are mistaken. We must understand that armed conflict is not a safe path to our liberation. We, therefore, promote peace and civilization as the only pathway, which we believe, through which we will gain our freedom."[88]

Third, the party had strong religious tendencies from the outset. Abdulrahman Zabihi, the JK secretary who had an important role within the party and especially in the publication of the *Nishtiman*, wrote in an article in the first issue of Nishtiman: "The JK's main pillar is erected on the foundation of Islam."[89] The JK regarded the Islamic laws (Shari'a) as the reference point and the basis according to which common law was to be adjusted, and even made a declaration in *Nishtiman*: " Our party is founded upon four main principles: Islam, Kurdish identity, civilization, and peace. The holy Islamic Shari'a must dictate and direct all our laws."[90]

This is in sharp contrast to the more secular and leftist stances that the Iranian Kurdish ethno-nationalist parties adopted later in the 1970s and afterwards. However, the fact that the majority of the Kurdish community, and therefore the JK's members, at the time were Muslim explains the JK's special attention to Islam and Shari'a in its official journal: "The JK takes Islam as the official religion of Kurdistan and seeks to promote it."[91]

Overall, the majority of articles published in *Nishtiman* focused on two main issues: Islam as the religion of Kurdistan, and Kurds as an oppressed group of people who must seek emancipation and independence. While the party sought independence for the Kurds, it also advocated for the democratization of Iran in general and of Kurdistan in particular, stating "the

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[88] *ibid.* (1943, July 1). No. 1, p. 2.
[89] *ibid.* pp. 1-2
[90] *ibid.* (1944, January 2) No. 5, p. 10.
[91] *ibid.*

JK adheres to the principles of democratic rule and the standards of humanity."[92] In fact,

regarding the party's stance on independence, according to Noor Mohammad *Quliev* who was

the Soviet vice-council in Tabriz Consulate, the JK had two main objectives: first, *autonomy* for

all parts of Kurdistan while the Second World War was going on, and second, *independence* for

Kurdistan once the war was over.[93] In 1944, the JK submitted a petition to the Iranian

government, requesting the following: first, Kurdish, and not Persian, must be the official

language of Kurdistan, second, Kurdish language must be used for kid's education in schools and

for all administrative matters in Kurdistan, third, the national radio broadcast in Tehran must

allocate at least two hours daily to programmes in Kurdish language.[94] The petition was

emphatically rejected by Iranian authorities.

b. Development and growth

The Russo-Kurdish relations eventually took a political turn. The political turn had some

popular support. As Hazhar, a leading member of JK, stated in his memoire:

> "People loved them [the Russians]. The Kurds regarded them as the guardian angles
> of Kurdistan and prayed to God to be protected by them. We imagined that all of their
> towns were well-developed, that those living in the same neighbourhood cooked their
> food together in one pot and distributed it equally amongst themselves; that they had
> no injustices; and that they were ruled by a guy called Stalin. That was it; that's all our
> people knew about the Soviets. We thought they would eventually liberate us and
> would establish a new state for us."[95]

By September 1945, the JK's position vis-à-vis armed conflict had changed. A Kurdish

delegate visited Baku to discuss issues such as military requirements of the JK and Soviet

representatives agreed to "[send] tanks, cannons and machine guns to Mahabad and promised to

financially support and make place for some Kurdish students on the Baku Military College."

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[92] *ibid*. (1944, February 1). No. 6, p.16.
[93] Howrami, A (2008b). *Peiwendyekani Kurdistan u Azerbaijan u hereshenani herdula le sali 1946 da: Le belgeh u sarchawekan da* [Kurdistan and Azerbaijan Relations and their Falls in 1946: Documents and Archives], Sulaymania: Sardam Publisher. P. 267.
[94] Howrami, A. (2008a), pp. 117-8; Majaleh Ruzhi No (New Day) magazine cited in Khoshhali, B (2000), p. 36.
[95] Khoshhali, B (2000). P. 35.

It is in this regard that the Soviet Union became a crucial ally to the JK, but the Soviet Union preferred that a new party be formed to replace the JK. The memoirs of some important figures in Kurdistan such as Hêmin, point to the Soviet pressure and the formation a new party in 1945. As Hêmin states, in a central committee meeting post-WWII, the JK intellectuals decided that their party's programs restricted its adaptation to the post-War conditions of Kurdistan and the world. More specifically, and as stated above, one of the main important pillars of the JK's ideology was the formation and independence of the Greater Kurdistan.[96] This was not an issue that the Soviets would get on board with. Further,

> "Due to the strong British presence in Iran, the Soviets always assumed that JK was protected and supported by the British; they could not stand British influence so close to their national borders. Some reports written by the Soviet consul in Tabriz confirm that such an assumption and preoccupation indeed existed. So things had to change."[97]

The new party was the Kurdistan Democratic Party [of Iran] with the leadership of Ghazi Mohammad. Despite that fact that Ghazi Mohammed was not a member of the JK Central Committee or the newly established Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran, with Russian advice from behind the scenes, he became very influential in the Kurdish movement.[98]

If there existed a favorable confluence of external political conditions and internal organizational characteristics in this period, it nonetheless was "the sense of optimism prevalent among the Kurdish elites regarding the prospects for insurgency that furnished the motive force for heightened movement activity."[99] Evidence of this optimistic state of mind is limited due to absence of any polling data or interviews, but there is little doubt that it was shared by large numbers of Kurds in this period.

The newly-established KDP[I] issued a formal declaration, signed by Ghazi Mohammad

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[96] Hêmin (2005), p.75; Khoshhali, B (2000); Ghassemlou, A R. (1988).
[97] Interview ID I012, Tehran (Iran), November 2016
[98] Eagleton, W. (1963). P. 56.
[99] Interview ID 025, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017.

which stressed two major point: First, demand for the autonomy (but not independence) of the Kurds in Iran as well as increased political participation of the Kurds in Iran's political decision making; second, demand for the establishment of democracy in Iran and the recognition of ethnic groups' social, cultural, and political rights. The declaration cites the Articles of the Treaty of Atlantic Charter, especially Article three: "they respect the rights of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live." (The original declaration was published in Kurdish and Persian)[100]

Although the KDP[I]'s declaration only went so far as to demand autonomy within Iran, the Soviet-backed declaration of the newly formed Republic of Azerbaijan (located in North West of Iran and immediately to the north of Mahabad)[101] resulted in growing optimism among Kurdish leaders vis-à-vis the prospect of independence. This encouraged the Kurds to take a step further and declare independence. After the independence of Azerbaijan, the Kurds also seized the opportunity to raise the Kurdish flag in many Kurdish towns as the most important indicator of Kurdish nationalism.[102]

As stated in *Kurdistan* newspaper, on January 19, 1946, and before a large crowd of about twenty thousand people, Kurdish tribal chiefs, and the KDP[I] leaders, Ghazi Mohammad declared the independence of Kurdistan, stating that it was "the national right of the Kurds to have ownership over their land."[103] According to *Kurdistan*, Ghazi Mohammed declared the establishment of the "Republic of Kurdistan" on January 22, 1946 [104](Now the Republic is commonly referred to as the Republic of Mahabad).

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[100] Rafiq, S & Seddiq S. (eds.) (2007) *Rooznameh Kurdistan: Mahabad 1324-1325* [*Kurdistan* Journal, Mahabad, 1945-46], (Sulaymania: Benkai Jeen Publisher. Pp. 351-5; Foreign Office 371/45436. (1945, November 8) Declaration of the Democratic Party of Kurdistan.

[101] In November, 1945, the Western Azerbaijan provinces of Iran (i.e. Urmiya and Tabriz) rebelled against the Shah and, with the support of the Soviet Union, declared independence, forming the Autonomous Government of Azerbaijan.

[102] Journal *Kurdistan*. (1946, March 4). No. 3.

[103] *Kurdistan*. (1946, February 4). No. 10, p. 1; Ghazi's speech was publish in two issues of Kurdistan (No. 10 and 11).

[104] *ibid*. (1946, January 3). No. 8, p. 3.

However, centered in Mahabad, geographically, the Republic was limited to a small

section of Iranian Kurdistan and did not have full control in all Kurdish regions of Iran. This was

mainly due to border conflicts especially in the north and northeast with the Autonomous

Government of Azerbaijan. In fact,

> "One of the major concerns that the leaders of the Republic had to deal with was the
> question concerning the exact borders of the Republic. Northern Iranian Kurdistan
> which was mostly populated by Sunni Kurds fell under the control of the Republic.
> But the southern region of Kurdistan, which contained a mixed Sunni and Shi'ite
> population, did not fall under the Republic's jurisdiction. The Iranian military had a
> strong presence in those areas."[105]

Nonetheless, the Republic was the first modern example of a Kurdish state, demonstrating

such possibilities to the Kurdish population of neighboring countries as well. However, the de-

facto government of Kurdistan was not formally recognized by either the Iranian government or

the international community.

Therefore, in the period immediately after the World War II, a combination of factors,

namely the presence of grievances, the availability of organizational resources, open

opportunities (in the form of weak state, and strong international allies), and Kurdish elites'

optimistic assessments of these opportunities, resulted in the Kurdish mobilization for

independence.

The Republic used two tools to disseminate its nationalist ideologies amongst the Kurds:

First, the formation of the Republic allowed Kurdish nationalist elites to formalize and increase

published material in Kurdish. According to Benedict Anderson, print capital can spread national

consciousness by creating an opportunity for networking and communication, and by

establishing a solid linguistic form which can play a central role in the way a nation perceives

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[105] Interview ID 036, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2017.

itself.[106] Moreover, Ghazi Mohammed believed that the "printing press would spread our ideas,

perspective and demands to the entire world."[107] Many magazines, journals, newspapers and

pamphlets, were published in Kurdish (in two main dialects: Kurmanji and Sorani) and

distributed. Several printing houses in Mahabad and Bukan published several magazines and one

newspaper. The journal *Kurdistan* was first published in December 1945 and lasted for 13 issues.

Other journals and newspapers were: newspaper *Kurdistan* (the official newspaper of the

Republic, was printed almost daily and produced 113 issues), *Hawari Nishtiman* (published by

the Kurdistan Democratic Youth Union), *Alale* (published by the KDP[I]'s branch in Bukan),

and a kids' journal named *Garogali Mindalani Kurd* (Kurdish children's voice).[108]

Second, the Republic established a modern education system.[109] All Persian primary school

textbooks were translated into Kurdish. In addition, the official language of the government was

Kurdish (as suggested by article nine of the KDP[I] program). Mahabad had its own radio station

which broadcast nationalist songs and programmes about Kurdish history, literature, and

language.[110] All of these allowed the Republic to diffuse its Kurdish nationalist framings which

later became a reference point to all Kurdish movements in the Middle East.

Another major goal of the Republic was the mobilization of women and increased

women's participation in political affairs. On February 6, 1946, Ghazi Mohammed's wife, Mina

Khanum (Ms. Mina) along with the wives of some other KDP[I] members, organized the first

Kurdish women's conference at the Kurdish-Soviet Cultural Society in Mahabad. At this

conference, Mina Khanum gave a speech that was later published in *Kurdistan*. She emphasized

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[106] Anderson, B. (1991). pp. 44-5.
[107] *Kurdistan*, (1946, February 6). No. 11, p. 1.
[108] The content of these journals are available in Hemdad, H. (2008). *Rojnamevani Kurdi: Sardemi Komari Dimokrati Kurdistan 1943-1947* [Kurdish Journalism: The Republic of Kurdistan 1943-47], Erbil: Aras Publisher; Some copies of *Hawari Nishtiman* are available in Rafiq, S. (2007).
[109] *Kurdistan*, (1946, January 11). No. 1, p. 4.
[110] Ghassemlou, A. R. (1985),

that women in Kurdistan must follow Soviet women as their role models and stressed the importance of education for women.[111] With the support of the KDP[I], she helped establish a women's organization in 1946.[112]

However, despite its unifying and mobilizing efforts, the Republic did not manage to gain the support of all tribal Kurds in its territory. Over the course of the Republic, the Kurdish tribes' approach was mainly to protect their own individual interests. While some of the tribes (such as Shikkak and Hakki tribes) supported it and offered their military forces, the main reason behind their support was the fact that the Republic was the only powerful alternative to the central government and rival tribes. However, there were many other tribes who were not happy with the Republic's leadership and the growing power it gained, and remained hostile to it.[113] The key reason for the hostility of these tribal leaders was their perception that the Republic and the KDP[I] posed more serious threat to their power than the central government. As stated by one of the interviewees, the conflicts and rivalries between different tribes' leaders were the main impediments to the national unity of Kurds:

> "The links between tribes and tribal chiefs to outside power have been prevalent in our [Kurdish] history. This has been used by central governments to divide and rule us. Basically, they often bribe tribal chiefs in exchange for their loyalty by offering them the state's support against their enemies [usually, other Kurdish tribes]. So whether or not a tribe supported or fought against the Kurdistan Republic really depended almost entirely on this dynamic and not on some kind of transcendent nationalist loyalty to the Kurds."[114]

The Republic did not live long enough to organize and mobilize resources and a larger army: In May 1946, Tehran convinced the Soviets to withdraw from Iran in exchange for an oil concession. Britain, the US, and the United Nations, dissatisfied with the establishment of

[111] *Kurdistan*, No. 1, January 11 1946, P. 4.
[112] *ibid.* (1946, March 13) No. 24, p.7; *ibid.* (1946, March 17). No. 25, p. 3.
[113] Iraj Afshari provides a great introduction to these tribes in Afshari Sistani, I. (1987) *Moghaddamei dar shenakht ilha, chadornshinan va tavayef ashayere Iran* [an introduction to Iranian Nomads, Tribes, and Clans.] Tehran: Homa Publisher.
[114] Interview ID I015, Tehran (Iran), November 2016.

Soviet-controlled Azeri and Kurdish puppet states in Iran, pressured the Soviets to withdraw. Without foreign support, the situation of the Republic quickly turned sour. Most of the supporting tribes, fearing an Iranian army invasion, withdrew their support. Others forced Ghazi to negotiate with Tehran. Although the Republic enjoyed the support of a loyal urban base, as the late General Secretary of Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) stated in his book, they did not comprise an organized force strong enough to defend it. The Republic's National Army structure, which consisted of several Kurdish tribes, lacked a strong nationalist identity trumping the army's tribal bondages.[115]

The Republic's largest source of revenue came from sugar and tobacco exports. These products were manufactured and exported by the *Taraqi* company to Azerbaijan, Iran, and the Soviet Union.[116] According to an interviewee: "The Republic was largely unsuccessful in collecting taxes from the public. Government officials formed a tax committee and published several articles *Kurdistan,* to basically beg people to pay taxes, but to no avail!" Therefore, with the withdrawal of the Soviets from Iranian territories and once Tehran boycotted Kurdish products, the Republic suffered severe financial losses.

Therefore, without the support of Kurdish tribes and the Soviet forces, the Republic lost its elite allies and international support. Nor did it possess the necessary financial resources that could be used to attract other allies and more dependable support. Nonetheless, the Republic was successful in the politicization of Kurdish identity. As one of the interviewees (a top-ranking member of the KDPI central committee) stated:

> "The Republic of Kurdistan didn't have full control over all Kurdish regions of Iran and lasted for only a year. But it had a long-lasting impact on Kurdish political identity, and I don't just mean on Iranian Kurds… the Republic was a dream-come-true for

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[115] Ghassemlou, A. R. (1985).
[116] *Kurdistan*, (1946, February 16). No. 15, p. 4.

every Kurd and has become a reference point for Kurdish movements ever since… Many of our dreams came true under the Republic: Kurdish became the official language, there were lots of Kurdish language publications, Kurdish *Peshmerga* [Kurdish armed forced] replaced Iranian police and military, the government bureaucrats were Kurdish. . . Ever since the fall of Mahabad, no other Kurdish movement has been able to copy these achievements… even right now, the Kurdistan Regional Government is using the Republic's flag, Ey Reqîb [the national anthem of Kurdistan], naming its armed forces *Peshmerga* and so forth. All of this goes back to our Republic. So no doubt, it was a major turning point in our history."[117]

Eventually, the Iranian army occupied and took control of Kurdistan. Ghazi Mohammad and leading members of his government were executed following the fall of the republic. The Republic had lasted for only about a year after its formation.

Stage Three: Electoral Politics

The collapse of the Kurdish Republic was followed by a period of imprisonment and exile of Kurdish leaders, displacement of some non-conforming Kurdish tribes, and further suppression of the Kurds' voices. A period of silence, therefore, followed. The closure of the political opportunities moved the Kurdish ethno-nationalist insurgency underground. Still, a bigger blow to the movement came when the Shah of Iran and Mulla Mustafa Barzani of Iraqi Kurdistan reached an agreement which lasted until the Algiers agreement signed between Iran and Iraq in 1975. Below is one of the interviewees' accounts of the Shah-Barzani relations:

"The deal between the Shah and Barzani was that Tehran would provide financial and military aid to Barzanis and, in return, they agreed to help the Iranian government in their conflict with the Iraqi government and with the Kurds in Iran. This way, the Shah would kill several birds with one stone: it would create internal instability for the Iraqi government, make the Kurdish movement in Iraq dependent on the Shah's support, undermine the relationship between the Iranian and Iraqi Kurds, and ultimately even get rid of the Kurdish movement in Iran."[118]

Therefore, in the immediate years after the Republic, due to the presence of a high level of

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[117] Interview ID 038, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2017
[118] Interview ID I015, Tehran (Iran), November 2016.

repression and imprisonment or execution of the KDPI's influential leaders as well as a sharp decline in its financial and organizational resources, the political and military activities of the KDPI against the central government declined significantly. It is during this time that the remaining members of the organization relocated to Iraq, went underground, and lost much of their contact with their base in Iran.

However, the opportunity structure did not remain closed. In the early 1950s, Kurds in Iran saw an opening in the political system, with the rise of Dr. Mohammad Mossadeq who led the National Front party in the Parliament and supported liberal democratic ideals. Following the Parliament's overwhelming vote of confidence for the National Front in April 1951, the Shah had no option but to appoint Mosaddegh as his prime minster. Although Mosaddegh's platform called for a strong democratic central government and did not directly endorse Kurdish ethno-nationalist causes, it did capture the Kurdish intellectuals' attention, for it promised to guarantee basic rights to all Iranians of all ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.[119] In fact, a number of leadership positions in the National Front were occupied by non-Persian politicians and intellectuals who had a known record of support for ethnic minorities in Iran. For example, Dr. Karim Sanjabi, a Kurdish politician, became a prominent figure within the party and later served as the Minster of Culture in Mosaddegh's cabinet.[120]

Backed up by popular support, Mosaddegh called for political and economic independence of Iran, the strengthening of civil society, the freedom of press, and an independent government free from foreign power meddling and interference. He also firmly advocated women's rights, workers' unionization, and freedom of political and religious associations. Political parties,

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[119] Bakhtar-e Emrooz (1950, July 7) cited in Entessar, N. (1992) *Kurdish Ethno-Nationlaism,* Lynn Rienner Publishers. P. 45.
[120] For more on Mosaddeq era see Katouzian, H. (1999). *Musaddiq and the Struggle for Power in Iran*. IB Tauris; and Katouzian, H. (1988). Musaddiq's Memoirs. *London: National Front Publisher*.

associations, and various interest groups flourished in this period (1951-1953). Moreover, Mosaddegh's administration facilitated the formation of Provincial and Federal Associations. This attempt for the decentralization of the political power of the state had already been present in the Constitution of the country in the form of a clause which had never been put in practice prior to that point. Mosaddegh believed that the Provincial and Federal Associations would encourage the participation of all Iranians in the construction and political life of their country, and would as a result, encourage national unity.[121] Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that Mosaddegh's liberal period was perceived as an open political space by Kurdish nationalist intellectuals, for the political opening offered a new legal alternative to the Kurds in Iran to mobilize. The Kurds, who had endured a period of silence and terror after the fall of the Republic, perceived the new opening in the political system as an opportunity to resume the political activities of the KDP[I] in Iran. It is during this period that Karim Sanjabi joined the National Front and became the head of the Ministry of Culture in Mosaddegh's cabinet. Moreover, in 1952, for the first time the KDPI nominated a candidate in the Parliament election. Sadeq Vaziri ran as the KDPI's unofficial candidate from Mahabad and won 87% of the votes. A former member of the KDPI Central Committee stated:

> "Mosaddegh allowed for the representation of the previously unheard voices in his cabinet. His popularity brought about a period of hope for reform, not just for Kurds but also for all Iranians. The KDPI became active again, although still clandestinely. The KDPI-affiliated candidates even ran for the provincial elections in 1952 and won very easily."[122]

However,

> "[*As Dr. Mossadeq mentioned in his trial,*] neither the Shah nor his Royal Army had any interest in accepting the election results and letting Vaziri represent Mahabad in the Parliament. Instead, they announced Hassan Emami, whom no one knew and who

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[121] Sanjabi, K. (1989) *Omidha and naomidiha: Khaterat siasi Dr. Karim Sanjani* [Hopes and Despairs: The political memoire of Dr. Karim Sanjabi] London: National Front Publisher.
[122] Interview ID 027, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017.

was not even from Mahabad, was announced the winner of the election."[123]

Moreover, the elite division and cracks within the structure of the central government (especially between the supporters of Shah and Mosaddegh),[124] the emergence of Tudeh Party (a Soviet-backed Iranian leftist organization) to the fore of the Iranian political stage encouraged the leftward shift of Kurdish nationalist politics.[125] The emergence of Tudeh provided further opportunities for Kurds to strengthen their organizational bases in Kurdish towns as pointed by a current leading member of the KDPI:

> "In the early 1950s, the KDPI decided to strengthen its bases among Kurdish people in Kurdistan of Iran. So their focus was on establishing organizational bases and offices in Kurdish towns. This was primarily pursued within the framework of the Tudeh Party. Their strategies in this period also included distancing the party from the Iraqi Kurds. They gradually started to think of themselves as an independent movement inside Iran. This, perhaps, was due to the overall political situation in Iran … and the belief amongst many Kurdish leaders that they could also gain something from the new open political space."[126]

The leftward shift of Kurdish nationalism is also evident in declassified documents of the CIA and Iran's intelligence agency (SAVAK). For example, a CIA intelligence assessment states:

> "The Tudeh has been particularly active among the Kurds. A pro-Tudeh faction of the largest Kurdish group, the Kurdish Democratic Party, emerged last spring."[127]

In 1953, Mosaddegh called for a referendum (the first referendum in Iran's history) to dissolve the Parliament and to call for a new election. The referendum received an approval of over 99% of the voters. On August 13, 1953, the day of the referendum, the Kurds overwhelmingly voted "yes" to Mosaddegh's call. Dr. Ghassemlou (who later ascended to the

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[123] Interview, *ibid*.
[124] Katouzian, H. (1999).
[125] The Archives Center of the Intelligence Ministry of Iran (ed.) (1999). *Chap dar Iran be revayat asnad SAVAK: Hezb democrat Kordestan.* [Leftist Movements in Iran in SAVAK Documents: The Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran.]
[126] Interview ID 023, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017.
[127] CIA Document (1981) Iran: The Tudeh since Revolution: An Intelligence Assessment- File No: RDP81B00401R000500110tf01-7. Retrieved from https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP81B00401R000500110001-7.pdf

leadership position of the KDPI), in the city of Mahabad, out of 5000 people who participated in the referendum, only two voted "no."[128]

Regardless of the election results, the fact the Kurds and KDPI chose a within-system legal and electoral option suggests that, as in the case of Turkey in the 1960s, Kurdish elites were happy to pursue their nationalist aspirations through conventional and institutional means when such means were available to them.

Stage Four: From Radicalization to Inactivity

Mossadeq was removed by a CIA-backed coup in 1953, and the Shah resumed his absolute authoritarian rule in Iran. In 1956, near the city of Kermanshah, a number of sporadic peasant-led uprisings took place which were swiftly suppressed. In the 1960s until the Islamic Revolution, the Shah's policy towards the Kurds was three-fold. First, he co-opted the tribal leaders by offering them political ranks and financial promises:

> "The Shah's White Revolution [a very important element of which was redistribution of land from landowning elites to peasants] exempted some Kurdish tribal leaders, for instance the leaders of Jaf tribe. Later on, Salar and Sardar Jaf were given important political positions; one even became an MP [member of Parliament]. Another example is the Ardalan family, a prominent Kurdish tribe: three brothers from this family (Ali Gholi, Naser Gholi, and Az-ol Mamalek) attained became very influential MPs and Ministers."[129]

Second, in an attempt to suppress the overt expression of politicized Kurdish identity, the Shah made Persian the exclusive language in governmental communications and in all print media and books. Moreover, all primary and secondary schoolings continued to be in Persian. However, he allowed for limited radio broadcast in Kurdish language. For example, the first radio station in Kurdish language, *Radio Kurdi Kermanshan,* was launched in Kermanshah in 1960 and continued to broadcast programmes in Kurdish language for 36 years, even surviving

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[128] Entessar, N. (1992). P. 45.
[129] Interview ID I016, Tehran (Iran), November 2016.

the Islamic Revolution and had audiences from all four countries of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria.

Third, in post-coup Iran and up to the Islamic Revolution, the Shah's secret police (SAVAK) effectively targeted and eliminated leading voices of dissent. As Abdullah Hassanzadeh, a leading member of KDPI from the 1960s to1980s, states in his published memoirs:

> "In 1959, SAVAK initiated a fear campaign attacking the Party's offices. Over 250 members of the Party were arrested, most of them among the top-ranking executive members. Most of them were convicted and got long prison terms or were executed. […] Following these arrests, SAVAK was able to identify most of the rank-and-file members. This was a serious blow to the Party's activities and the remaining members' morale."[130]

After the coup, the increasingly closed political space stifled labour organizations, intellectual circles, cultural associations, and civil society organizations in the absence of which non-tribal Kurdish or leftist movements could not effectively mobilize. In this period, Tudeh Party was largely crushed, and its leading members were exiled immediately after the coup in 1953. While ethnic grievances were present among the Kurds, the closed opportunity structure at the time, characterized by mass arrest, imprisonment, torture, and execution of political dissident voices, was certainly not conducive to large-scale nationalist mobilizations. It is under these circumstances that in 1964, at its second congress, the KDPI announced that its main goals were "Democracy for Iran, Autonomy for Kurdistan," and the establishment of a federal government in Iran, and called for an armed struggle and guerilla actions against the Shah.[131] Following the congress, the KDPI organized some revolts in northern Kurdistan which lasted three years and during which significant number of its members of were killed.[132]

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[130] Hassanzadeh, A. (1995) *Nim Gharn Kooshesh va fa'aliat: tarikhche hezb democrat.* [A Half a Century of Struggle and Activities: The History of KDPI]. Unknown Publisher. P. 13.
[131] KDPI (1984) The Central Committee Report to the Sixth Congress. A publication of the KDPI.
[132] Hassanzadeh, A. (1995). P. 35; For a similar account see the published memoir of Emaeil Bakhtiari: Bakhtiari, E. (2014), Negareshi tarikhi bar jonbesh mosallahaneh 1346-1347 dar Korderstan. [A historical account of the armed movements of Kurdistan 1966-1967].

As a result of internal disagreements over the Party's military strategy in 1967-68, a split

occurred in the KDPI which, at that time, was based in Iraq:

> "There were internal disagreements about whether the KDPI and its leadership should continue their guerrilla activities against the government of the Shah. Most of the members did not like the idea and thought it would eventually destroy the entire party. We had lost our Kurdish allies in Iraq—the Barzanis were now on Shah's side and we had to fight against two very well-organized enemies. Our chances of success were slim and most members correctly noted that."[133]

Therefore, and as a consequence of the internal strategic disagreement, a number of KDPI

members such Mollah Ahmad Shamlashi (Avareh), Abdollah Moeini , and Ismail Sharifzadeh

(all of whom were former representative of Tudeh Party) left the KDPI to return to Iran.[134] They

organized a new organization, "*Revolutionary KDPI*" (RKDPI) which was primarily involved in

guerilla warfare:

> "The organization had about 200 members, very limited financial and other organizational resources, and failed to mobilize support of Kurdish communities inside Iran. Eventually, and in less than a year since its formation, the RKDPI was completely destroyed by the Iranian army, and all three of its leaders were killed."[135]

Around the same time, the Iraqi Kurds (the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) led by Mulla

Mustafa Barzanis) who collaborated with the Shah's regime were involved in arresting and

killing the KDPI members and leaders in Iraq and even once handed forty members of the KDPI

to authorities in Iran. They also ordered the execution of one of the KDPI leaders, Soleyman

Moeini (Abdollah Moeini's brother).[136]

Therefore, once again, due to a high degree of threat embodied in the political

environment, Kurdish movement had to pursue its goal through extra-institutional channels.

However, the limited organizational resources available to the movement after the coup of 1953

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[133] Interview ID 032, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2017.
[134] Hassanzadeh, A. (1995), p. 106.
[135] *Ibid*, p.107.
[136] *Ibid*, p.107.

had left it with no choice but limited guerilla warfare. Once the guerrilla movement was eventually destroyed by the Iranian army, the Kurdish ethno-nationalist movement entered into another phase of dormancy for some years.

Stage five: From Electoral Politics to Armed Conflict

In 1969, Kurdish insurgency in Iran was experiencing a gradual disintegration of the centralized structure that had dominated the Kurdish movements in the early years. At the root of this disintegration was a growing disagreement within insurgent ranks over the proper goals of the movement and the most effective means to attain them. Therefore, the KDPI's hegemony over the movement was broken with the introduction and rapid spread of a second organization. A group of mostly young urban Kurdish intellectuals founded a new clandestine organization called the "*Society of Revolutionary Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan*," commonly known as Komala.

While both Komala and KDPI endorsed a within-system solution at the point (namely, autonomy for Kurdistan within a democratic Iran), Komala[137] considered the feudal and tribal structure of Kurdistan to be the major impediment to the Kurds' strive for autonomy.[138] Komala focused its communist mobilization strategies on appealing to peasants and working classes in urban areas of southern Kurdistan of Iran which was less tribal than northern Kurdistan. Unlike Komala, the KDPI's mobilization strategies primarily focused on tribal elites and their resource in northern Kurdistan.[139] This point was also highlighted in Komala's fourth Congress publication:

> "Prior to the emergence of Komala, the Kurdish uprising was led by feudal and tribal chiefs and the bourgeoisie. Komala's aim is to achieve autonomy for Kurds by eliminating those who subjugate and oppress the Kurdish people and by creating an autonomous Kurdish society ruled by the oppressed workers and peasants of

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[137] For more information on the formation of Komala see Morad Beigi, H. (2004) *Tarikh Zendeh: Kordestan, Chap va Nassionalism* [Live History: Kurdistan, the Left, and Nationalism Nasyonalizm] Iran: Nassim Publisher.

[138] Shooresh: The Newsletter of Komala (1980). No 1.

[139] Komala Publication (1983), *Barnameh Komala baraye Khodmokhtari Kordestan*, [Komala's Plan for the Autonomy of Kurdistan], the fourth congress of Kurdish Organization of the Communist Party of Iran.

Kurdistan."[140]

Moreover, Iraj Farzad, one of the core founders of Komala, states in his book:

> "Komala openly advocated leftist ideologies. Unlike the KDPI, Komala saw the realization of the Kurdish demands not in democracy and autonomy per se but rather in the realization of socialism and a revolutionary democracy. The core founders of the organization were a group of leftist Kurdish university students who had started their clandestine activities a decade before the formal establishment of Komala. But the formal establishment of the party was mostly due to the ever-growing participation of young workers and peasants. It was not just a bunch of revolutionary intellectuals with some ideas."[141]

A leading member of Komala stated:

> "Komala's main base was seasonal labourers who, due to extreme cold and unfavourable weather, are seasonally in and out of employment. These people, often agricultural workers, occasionally go to big industrial cities such as Tehran to seek employment. There, they were exposed to the oppressions they had to endure both as Kurds and as poor working class people …It is no accident that, in the course of the 1979 Revolution, these workers were the first group to join Komala."[142]

The following excerpt from my interview with a Komala leader points to the KDPI's

traditional class base:

> "Since its formation, the KDPI had many conflicts with tribal elites but it has also always depended upon and sought their support. This helped the party gain some financial and political leverage amongst the Kurds. The KDPI has historically relied upon the tribal elite's support and influence."[143]

In the late 1970s, both parties joined the popular uprisings against the Shah and were able

to find common cause with other non-Kurdish insurgents, such as the Islamists and leftist groups.

Despite the KDPI's tribal linkages, one of the most important features of the Kurdish insurgency

in the 1970s was the development of its *Peshmerga* forces into an independence military force

which was not attached to the traditional tribal forces and whose "allegiance was to Kurdish

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[140] *ibid*.

[141] Farzad, I. (2014). *Zamineh-haye ejtema-I va tarkhi-e Komaleh.* [The Social and Historical Bases of Komala.] Rerrieved from: http://www.iranomid.de/زمینه-های-اجتماعی-و-تاریخی-شکل-گیری-کوم/

[142] Interview ID 059, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018.

[143] Interview ID 036, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2017.

nationalist causes and not to tribal elites."[144] This development is due to the changes in the social

and economic fabrics of Kurdistan since the Shah's Land Reforms of the 1960s which created a

large body of unemployed agricultural workers and an ideal base for the recruitment of

Peshmerga forces. According to Ghassemlou, the number of trained and armed Peshmerga active

forces involved in fighting against the government on the eve of the 1979 Revolution is

estimated to be about 100,000 men.[145]

> "The Peshmerga consisted of a larger body of rural members and a smaller core body
> of urban members, so that whenever the parties were in an organizationally
> disadvantaged position (in terms of access to resources), the rural forces would be
> placed on standby."[146]

During the first several months after the 1979 Revolution, the Kurds once again took

advantage of the open opportunity structure of Iran. The KDPI managed to legally set up offices

and present their plans for Kurdish self-determination in Iran. In the course of the Revolution,

Kurdish political forces who had become far more politically organized and articulate than they

were in 1946, seized the opportunity to fill the vacuum created by the absence of police or army

forces in the Kurdish regions (due to army defection) and took control of several towns and

villages region.[147] All types of civil society groups and associations such as town councils,

workers' rights organizations, women's organizations, teachers unions, and peasants unions were

formed and replaced government bodies.

Amir Hassanpour, a Kurdish activist and linguist writes:

> "As far as I remember, the first association was formed in Mahabad and later they
> spread to other cities in Kurdistan… a number of political parties such as Komala and
> Communists Union were behind the formation of these associations. They thought this
> would encourage democratic participation in local affairs and self-government
> particularly amongst those who were not members of any political parties. They also
> saw this as great networking opportunities for their parties to reach out to these

[144] Interview ID 065, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018.
[145] The New York Times. (1979, August 26).
[146] Interview ID 060, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018.
[147] Hassanzadeh, A. (1995).

people."[148]

In the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, no one political faction had full control of the provisional government. Instead, the government was comprised of leftists, Islamist moderates and fundamentalist Islamist groups and was headed by the left-leaning Mehdi Bazargan (a former member of the National Member, and the founder of Liberation Movement of Iran). Three Kurds also attained top-ranking positions in Bazargan's cabinet: Karim Sanjabi (minister of foreign affairs), Ali Ardalan (minister of economic and financial affairs) and Daryush Forouhar (minister of labour and social affairs).[149] Moreover, the provisional constitution recognized the equality of all ethnic groups. According to its Article 19 of Charter II (The Rights of People):

> "All people of Iran, whatever the ethnic group or tribe to which they belong, enjoy equal rights; and colour, race, language, and the like, do not bestow any privilege."[150]

Even Ayatollah Khomeini, who was the spiritual leader of the interim government, and whose power was not institutionalized in the provisional constitution created opportunities for ethno-nationalist groups' activities at this time. Looking for ethnic minorities' support in the March 1979 referendum (Yes or No to Islamic Republic of Iran), he reconstructed the official state nationalist discourse on the basis of Islam, a major shift from the pan-Persian approaches of the old regime. Instead of focusing on the importance of the Persian language and culture and the "Aryanness" of Iranian identity, Khomeini, albeit very strategically, sought to adopt a more inclusive pan-Islamic rhetoric to unify Sunni and Shi'a communities as well as all ethnic minority groups within Iran. The new nationalist discourse blurred the boundaries of inclusion

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[148] Hassanpour, A. (2011) Rahpeimaei Sanandaj dar goftogoo ba Amir Hassanpour. [Sanandaj Protest in a Chat with Amir Hassanpour], Retrieved from: http://www.nnsroj.com/fa/detiles.aspx?id=90, accessed in March 2018.
[149] Keyhan, (1979, February). No. 10666.
[150] Ghanun asasi jomhuri eslami Iran [The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran]. Retrieved from https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran_1989.pdf?lang=en accessed in May 2017

and exclusion that existed under the Pahlavi Shahs and the notion of "otherness" for Kurdish

communities, majority of whom were Sunni Muslims.

> "[This opening] was encouraging to all Kurdish organizations and they sought to take advantage of this opportunity. When the first post-revolution election was held in Iran, despite the fact that the elections took place in limited areas, the representatives of the KDPI, including its leader Dr. Abdol Rahman Ghassemlou, won an overwhelming majority in Kurdistan."[151]

A member of the Central Committee of the KDPI stated:

> "From the beginning, and right before Khomeini announced his Holy War against [the Kurds and the Party,] the KDPI's main goal was autonomy within a democratic Iran. Ghassemlou himself participated in the elections for the Assembly of Experts (Majlis Khobregan) and won 80 percent of the votes in Urmya. But he never got the chance to enter the Parliament as the war against [the Kurds] started soon after the election."[152]

> A former member of the KDPI who had direct experience working with Dr. Ghassemlou in

the 1980s asserted:

> "Before the war, Ghassemlou was very optimistic about the formation of an election-based Parliamentarian democracy in Iran which would also acknowledge the Kurds' rights for autonomy."[153]

Moreover, as Hassanzadeh sates in his memoir:

> "Before the first presidential election in 1980, the KDPI made a public announcement stating that it encourages Kurdish people to vote in the election and that its preferred choice would be Masoud Rajavi, who at the time was the leader of the then-legal Islamist-leftist political party Mojahedin-e Khalgh and who had expressed his support for the Kurdish causes."[154]

> Once again, the KDPI's endorsement of and participation in the election demonstrates that,

similar to Iraq and Turkey, when the political space offered the possibility of openness towards

the Kurds' demands, Kurdish political elites were willing to pursue their goals through

conventional electoral means. However, Abol Hassan Banisadr who won the presidential race

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[151] Interview ID 065, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018.
[152] Interview ID 042, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2018.
[153] Interview ID 062, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018.
[154] Hassanzadeh, A. (1995), p. 86.

became the first president of Iran after the Revolution.

> "Eventually, the KDPI refused to endorse the elections due to the forceful removal of Rajavi from the candidates list. Nonetheless, the KDPI sent a congratulatory note to Banisadr expressing its leaders' hope that he'll govern the country fairly and wisely."[155]

The KDPI further demanded a meeting between five of its delegates and a group of government representatives (Daryoush Forouhar, Ezzatollah Sahabi, and Hashem Sabbaghian). Further, the KDPI, backed by other Kurdish political organizations, presented its plan for Kurdish self-determination. Later the government stated while it did accept the plan, the Revolutionary Council (backed byKhomeini) outright rejected it. The plan primarily focused on determining the precise geographic boundaries of Iranian Kurdistan; education in Kurdish languages while Persian would also continue to be an official language; formation of a local Kurdish government managing local affairs while leaving matters of defense, foreign relations, long-term economic plans, and the national currency to the central government; the establishment of Kurdish People's Army, a local security force replacing the police, and the appointment of local Kurdish administrators.[156] The negotiations between the two groups did not produce the expected results for the Kurds: Khomeini rejected all of the promises made to the Kurds by the government representatives. Khomeini rejected the plan saying its demands were unacceptable, plot for secession, and attack against Muslim unity. Kurdish leader, Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, repeatedly denied such accusations, asserting:

> "Charges of secessionism are leveled against us by reactionary forces … Let the central government have control over the army, defense matter, foreign policy and finance, [but] let us have control over local administration and domestic policies."[157]

Ghassemlou went on to suggest that due to Iran's multi-ethnic population, a federated

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[155] *ibid*. P. 88.
[156] KDPI (1981), *Talash dar rahe Tafahom* [Road to Agreement] KDPI Publication, Vol. 2, pp.38-40.
[157] Cited in Esman, M. J., & Rabinovich, I. (Eds.). (1988). *Ethnicity, pluralism, and the State in the Middle East*. Cornell University Press. P. 242.

political model such as the one in Yugoslavia would best suit the country.[158] However,

Khomeini's visions for the establishment of an Islamic political entity which would bring all

Muslims under its theocratic rule had no place for ethno-nationalist self-determination

aspirations of ethnic groups and a decentralized and democratic Iran. He claimed ethnic groups'

demands for autonomy were in line with centuries-long imperialist strategies of divide-and-rule

in the country:

> "Sometimes the word 'minorities' is used to refer to people such as Kurds, Lurs, Turks, Persians, Baluchis, and such. These people should not be called minorities, because this term assumes there is a difference between these brothers. In Islam, such a difference has no place at all. There is no difference between Muslims who speak different languages, for instance, the Arabs or the Persians. It is very probably that such problems have been created by those who do not wish the Muslim countries to be united [. . .] They create the issues of nationalism, of pan-Iranism, pan-Turkism, and such-isms which are contrary to Islamic doctrines. Their plan is to destroy Islam and Islamic philosophy."[159]

As soon as the radicals' position within the political structure and their coercive capacity

(control over the army and police force) was consolidated, they made it clear to the Kurdish

representatives that no Kurds and no other ethnic groups would be granted autonomy. In an

interview with BBC Ghassemlou stated:

> "In 1979 and before the referendum, a group of us went to meet with Khomeini in person. We asked that Kurds' demands for autonomy and self-determination be recognized by the government …we told him only under that condition would we take part in the referendum. But he rejected our demands and, therefore, right from the outset we did not vote for the Islamic Republic and its constitution. Nor did we participate in any referenda."[160]

However, although a solution to the Kurdish question in Iran was not reached in this

period, the negotiations provided the Kurdish political actors space and time in which to

mobilize support and consolidate their position across Iranian Kurdistan. While irregular

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[158] Ghader, A. (1980). Kordha che migooyand. [*What do the Kurds say?]* No Publisher.
[159] Ayatollah Khomeini, Radio Tehran, December 17, 1979 cited in McDowall, D. (2004). A modern history of the Kurds. *London, IB Tauris*.
[160] Full interview retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SGsfvkcMn8U Accessed in April 2016.

negotiations were ongoing, the Kurdish political parties were strengthening their political and social bases. In March 1979, a referendum (Yes or No to the Islamic Republic) was held in Iran. The KDPI made a public announcement stating it did not recognize the legitimacy of the referendum of and asked the Kurds to boycott the referendum. As a result, the referendum had a low turnout amongst the Kurds, with more than 85 percent of the population in Kurdish regions not participating.[161]

The KDPI's boycott call suggests its gradual move towards extra-institutionalized means once the political system proved to be unaccommodating to the Kurds' demands. Moreover, the Kurds' positive response to the KDPI's boycott call demonstrate the increase in the party's popularity in the eyes of the Kurdish people:

> "The Party was at the time enjoying a great degree of legitimacy and recognition amongst the Kurds. Something that it had never experienced before that day. Its legitimacy was more widespread amongst the people of all ages and classes."[162]

The armed confrontations and clashes between Kurdish *Peshmerga* forces and the Revolutionary Guard began in the spring of 1979. This was the start of a conflict-negotiation cycle between the Kurds and the central government. In March 1979, the *Peshmerga* forces seized Paveh, a border town near Iraq, only to be recaptured by the Revolutionary Guard after a series of clashes. According to an estimation made by the KDPI, more than 10,000 people, 80 percent of whom were children and the elderly, had been killed in the war.[163] Following the incidents in Paveh, Ayatollah Khomeini declared a "holy war" in a religious edict (Fatwa) against Iranian Kurds, banned their political activities and organizations, rejected Ghassemlou's

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[161] Hassanzadeh, A. (1995), p. 104.
[162] Interview ID 041, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2018.
[163] Ayoubzade, A. (2002) *Chap le rojhelati Kurdistan: Komala u dozi nasionalism Kurd* [Left in Eastern Kurdistan: Komala and Kurdish Nationalism], Vol. 1. Nima Verlag; also in Gadani, J. (2011) Panjah Sal Khabat: Kurd Mejuyak Hezibi Demokrat-i Kurdistan-i Eran [Fifty Years of Struggle: A Short History of KDPI], Kurdistan.

credentials for membership in the Assembly of Experts (Majlis Khobregan)[164] denouncing him

as "the enemy of the people" and the KDPI as the "Party of Satan."[165]

In his public speech, Khomeini invited people and police forces to mobilize against the

Kurdish people and to treat them with utmost strictness. In reaction, led by the KDPI and other

Kurdish groups, thousands of Kurds protested, in Sanandaj and took over control of police

headquarters, army bases, and army barracks in Sanandaj.[166]

In response, on August 20th, Khomeini ordered a mass mobilization of Iran's security

forces to crush Kurdish insurgency and "called upon the armed forces … to set up an 'air bridge'

to transport troops, police and Revolutionary Guards to Sanandaj," stating:

> "I give absolute orders to all law and order forces to proceed to their military bases
> and then move towards Sanandaj with sufficient strength to pound the rebels
> severely."[167]

A month later, in September, the Revolutionary Guards attacked Mahabad where the KDPI

offices were located with F4 jets. Khomeini also ordered the arrest and murder of the Kurdish

commanders and leaders causing them to go into hiding and to withdraw to the mountains. After

a series of bloody clashes (and about 600 casualties), the Army and the Revolutionary Guards

took control of all Kurdish cities, but the *Peshmerga* managed to keep control of the rural and

mountainous areas.[168]

In November 1979, the government in Tehran called for a ceasefire and invited Kurdish

leaders to negotiate. Although the Kurdish leaders welcomed the negotiation calls,

> "[A] group of government representatives was sent to talk to the leaders of KDPI and
> Komala. But the delegates had no executive power and had nothing serious to offer.
> The Kurdish leaders thought this was the regime's strategy to kill the time until they
> took full control of Kurdistan. At the time, Kurdish fighters still had control over much

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[164] Election results retrieved from: https://web.archive.org/web/20150924115857/http://www.princeton.edu/irandataportal/elections/experts/1979/
[165] Keyhan (1970, May 13) No. 3359; also see Khomeini's speech at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWnczX4g3yM accessed in July 2016.
[166] The New York Times (1979, August 20).
[167] The Washington Post (1979, August 20).
[168] BBC News, (1979, August 23).

of the roads, rural areas and also some parts of the city of Mahabad. The KDPI alone had more than 7,000 fighters at the time. The delegates said we had to fully disarm our troops. We thought this was a trap … how could we defend ourselves without any arms? So the Kurdish leaders refused to negotiate on those terms."[169]

When the negotiations failed, both sides resumed armed conflict. For two years, the negotiation-conflict cycle continued until most of the Kurdish fighters either were wiped out or went into hiding in the mountains.

The Kurdish organizations' fighting capacity came from the weapons they had confiscated from army bases in the course of the revolution which equipped them with Soviet-made Kalashnikov assault rifles, American M-16s, and Czechoslovak-made automatic weapons.[170] Moreover, the KDPI, was a powerful and popular political party and in command of an army of well-trained fighters. The Sixth Congress of the party in January 1984 reported that "*Peshmerga* Commission*" had managed to reorganize political and military training schools for its forces.[171] Therefore, the shift in the structure of opportunities towards a more repressive environment on the one hand, and the availability of a solid organizational base (trained members, leadership, and financial resources) on the other, allowed for a sustained armed conflict for two years. However, the Revolutionary Guard's attacks resulted in major losses for the Kurdish groups throughout Kurdistan, particularly in their strongholds (Mahabad, Sanandaj, Naqadeh, Paveh, Marivan and Saqqiz). In the captured city, the regimes' security forces executed hundreds of Kurds (civilians and fighters) without due process.[172] The Kurds resorted to guerrilla warfare against Iran from 1981 onwards.

The Iran–Iraq war, which began in September 1980, provided further opportunities to the governments of Iran and Iraq to suppress their own Kurdish problems. Both countries had

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[169] Interview ID 054, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018.
[170] The New York Times, (1979, August 25).
[171] KDPI (1984) The Central Committee's Report to the Sixth Congress of KDPI, a publication of the KDPI.
[172] The New York Times (1979, August 21).

geopolitical incentives to fuel the Kurdish problems on the other side and to keep it alive in their enemy's territory. So, both Iran and Iraq, while fighting and suppressing their own Kurdish population, provided military and financial aids to Kurdish dissident groups from the other side. Both the KDPI and Komala received supplies and weapons from Baghdad, which they used to push Iranian troops out of Iranian Kurdistan.[173]

On the Iranian side, the border towns and villages of Kurdistan came under fire by the Iraqi troops fighting on the Iran-Iraq war front, and by the Iranian troops fighting on the Kurdistan front. Iran also recruited Iranian Kurdish forces to fight for the Islamic Republic on the Kurdish front. As one of my interviewees pointed out:

> "Our people [the Kurds] have always been divided. We've been divided on Sunni-Shi'a, tribal-urban lines, and rich-poor lines and so on. The regime exploited the tensions that have existed in our communities since time immemorial. They recruited soldiers from regions with tribal allegiances and regions where Shi'a Kurds supported the regime (for example from Kermanshah) and organized "Islamic Peshmerga" to fight against us."[174]

By 1982, after three years of fighting, the much larger and more organized Iranian Revolutionary Guard recaptured Iranian Kurdistan. With the assistance of some Shi'a Kurds who identified with the regime and with the help of the Barzanis from Iraq, Iran managed to bring Kurdistan under its control. It is worth noting that the collaboration of the Iraqi Kurds with the Iranian regime added to the already-existing animosity and mistrust between the two groups.

Another major blow to the Kurdish insurgency was yet to come: internal conflict amongst the Kurds, namely between the KDPI and Komala, turned deadly. Despite the two organizations' collaborations after the Revolution and their united struggles against the Revolutionary Guards, in 1984 they engaged in a series of armed conflicts against each other. As a result of the

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[173] Golparian, Abdol (2014) *Tarikh-e Yek Doreh (The History of an Era: KDPI 1968-1988)*
[174] Interview ID 044, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2018.

escalated confrontations between the two groups, hundreds have died. A formed member of the

KDPI explained in an interview:

> "The fighting between the KDPI and Komala was a confrontation over territory and political power in the region and was devastating. Ideologically, Komala was way more left leaning. They considered the KDPI their 'class enemy.' But the fight was less about ideology and more about who controlled what, it was about control over territory. In this fight KDPI had the upper hand and Komala was the greater loser."[175]

While fighting the government and dealing with the confrontations with Komala, the KDPI

had to face internal conflicts. In 1988 and after the KDPI's Eighth Congress, some leading

members of the party criticized its leader, Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, "for distancing the party

from leftist ideologies and for showing interest to reenter into negotiations with the Islamic

Republic."[176] The group left the party and founded a new organization called "KDPI, the

Revolutionary Leadership."

Komala also had to undergo an internal split around the same time. In 1983, Komala joined

communist organizations to establish the Communist Party of Iran.[177] In 1991, a group of

Komala's members who endorsed class-based visions over Komala's nationalist agenda split off

from the party to establish a party of their own: the Worker-Communist Party of Iran (WPI).[178]

Fragmentation in Kurdish nationalist insurgency was the immediate consequence of the

internal splits in the KDPI and Komala in the late 1980s and early 1990s. From then until the end

of the Iran-Iraq war, the Kurdish organizations, having lost much of their organizational

capacities partly due to the internal splits and Komala-KDPI armed conflict and partly due to

losses they had suffered against the Revolutionary Guards, had no choice but to restrict their

actions to limited guerrilla warfare. In an interview in 1988 with *Rah-e Erani* newsletter (the

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[175] *ibid.*
[176] Interview ID 025, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017
[177] Golparian, A. (2014) *Tarikh-e yek doreh: Mokhtasari as fa'aliat sisasi dar Kordestan 1348-1368.* [The History of an Era: A Brief Account of Political Activism in Kurdistan 1968-1988], Unknown Publisher.
[178] *ibid*.

official newsletter of the KDPI), Ghassemlou pointed:

> "We have changed our fighting strategy for some time now. Due to the loss of many of our *Peshmerga* in endless war, we find guerilla fighting a more suitable option. Guerilla fighting methods allows for our *Peshmerga* to be everywhere and nowhere at the same time. So, our *Peshmerga* are not under great danger. However, we are really afraid that the regime will direct its animosity towards innocent people of Kurdistan in order to avenge us. They did so in the early 80s; they raided Kurdish villages and towns [...] The regime might achieve some military gains against us, but it will be temporary. The *Peshmerga* will continue their fight. What happened in 1946 with the Republic of Mahabad will not be repeated again."[179]

Nonetheless, ultimately Dr. Ghassemlou came into the conclusion that the KDPI had to negotiate with the government rather than continue an indefinite guerrilla war. He and two other members of KDPI were assassinated during negotiations in Vienna in 1989. Three years later, Ghassemlou's successor, Dr. Sadeq Sharafkandi, was invited to negotiations with government representatives in a restaurant in Berlin, which also resulted in the new leader's assassination by the Iranian regime.

Therefore, the conflict between KDPI and Komala, the internal fragmentation within these organizations, and the assassination of the KDPI's most influential leaders struck a powerful blow to the movement's organizational resources. After the Iran-Iraq war, the closed opportunity structure and the drastically impaired organizational capacity of the Kurdish movement forced it into yet another phase of inactivity for more than a decade.

Stage Six: From Decline to Revitalization

After the Gulf War in 1990, the conditions of the Iranian Kurdish groups in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) changed. The cooperative relationship between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Iran meant that any armed struggle against Iran by the Iranian Kurdish organizations, which had been based in KRI for many years, had to stop. Therefore, both the

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[179] KDPI (1983) *Rah-e erani* [Iranian Path], KDPI Publication. No. 6, p.16. Retrieved from https://www.iran-archive.com/start/128. accessed in January 2016.

KDPI and Komala were initially prevented from military acts against Iran. Moreover, the Iranian regime assassinated several Iranian Kurdish activists in KRI.[180] The most recent assassinations occurred in Summer 2018.

However, the mid-1990s is also simultaneous with social and political changes in Iran, and most notably the election of the reformist Mohammad Khatami as President of Iran in 1996. Khatami remained in office for two consecutive terms (eight years in total) and his reformist government's policies opened up cultural and political space to a degree unprecedented in the Islamic Republic. For example, Khatami appointed Abdullah Ramazanzadeh to be the first Kurdish Governor of Iranian Kurdistan. Ramazanzadeh, who is of Shi'a Kurdish origin, appointed several Sunni Kurds to important positions in his administration.

Khatami was the first presidential nominee in post-Revolution Iran who based his campaign promises on issues such as the rule of law, the expansion of civil society activities, an inclusive and democratic decision-making process, and an administrative decentralization (the actual implementation of the Article 100 of the Iranian constitution) and the establishment of city and village councils for local affairs. He was also the first politician to publicly appeal to non-Persian speaking as well as religious minorities. His campaign pamphlets were also made available in Azeri and Kurdish languages and one of his major campaign promises was the recognition of linguistic rights of ethnic minorities in Iran.

In fact, Iranian women, youth, and ethnic minorities were the main contributor to Khatami's election in 1997. Even the KDPI, which had previously boycotted the elections, encouraged the Kurds to vote in the election. The voter turnouts in the Kurdish provinces were

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[180] Homa, A. (2016, December 22). Targeted Iranian Kurdish party says won't respond with 'terror'. *Kurdistan 24.* Retrieved from: https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/bb2750c5-3e6c-4c03-91b0-22fc74d23749/Targeted-Iranian-Kurdish-party-says-won-t-respond-with--terror- , accessed in December 2016.

Kurdistan, Ilam, Kermanshah, and West Azerbaijan were 79.04% (compared to 54.96% in 1993), 87.16% (compared to 66.26% in 1993), 75.15% (compared to 52.57% in 1993), and 73.71% (compared to 48.8% in 1993).[181]

The Iranian Kurds used this open opportunity and began to engage in unprecedented cultural activities. Several Kurdish journals such as *Rojhelat*, *Asou*, *Ashti*, and *Payam-e Kordestan* were published in almost all Kurdish cities. But the new publication suggested a major shift in the character of the Iranian Kurdish movement:

> "During the Reform, the published journals and books in Iranian Kurdistan shifted away from the discourse of the main Kurdish parties (the KDPI and Komala). The old established parties were beginning to lose their popularity among the new generation of politically-minded Kurds in Iran who were reformist, less ideological and more pragmatic… These parties had been isolated from the Kurdish communities in Iran for so many years. They are not in any significant way influencing the shape and character of the Kurdish movements inside Iran or any influence over their intellectual development or activities."[182]

Khatami, who despite enjoying unprecedented public support had a restricted executive power in the power structure of Iran dominated by conservatives and hardliners, failed to deliver on his promises and implement his reformist plans. The election of the hardliner Mahmood Ahmadinejad as the Iranian President in 2005 resulted in yet another rough period for the Kurds. The policy of banning Kurdish newspapers and imprisoning Kurdish activists was most fiercely pursued during Ahmadinejad's presidency resulting in much less space for Kurdish political and cultural expression. Kurdish language newspapers (*Ashti*, *Asou, Sirwan,* and *Hawar*) were closed down and several Kurdish activists received long prison terms or life sentence.

During the period 2005-2013, the Iranian Kurdish political parties in Iraqi Kurdistan experienced further split in their organization. In 2006, as a result of "major internal conflicts

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[181] Data retrieved from: http://www.princeton.edu/irandataportal/elections/
[182] Interview ID I022, Sanandaj (Iran), December 2016.

and in protest of undemocratic actions of the KDPI leaders, and their continuous refusal to adhere to the democratic principles of the KDPI,"[183] numerous members of the KDPI members split from the party to form a new party, the KDP (without Iran in the title). Furthermore, Komala, much for same same reasons as KDPI, also faced internal splits when in 2007 a number of its top-ranking members formed a new organization, *Komalay Zahmat-keshani* (The Organization of the Toilers of Kurdistan). Hence, the historically dominant Kurdish political parties in Iran remain divided and disunited and as their previous experience demonstrates, they are susceptible to fragmentation.

Nonetheless, the KDPI and Komala have in recent years cooperated on many occasions by issuing joint statements on many issues of mutual concern. These steps resulted in the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement for Cooperation and Coordination on August 21, 2012.[184] As one of my interviewees (a high-ranking official of the KDPI) stated:

> "In recent years, we have been working to put our differences aside and reach a compromise that would benefit us all. For example, in [summer 2017], we are organizing a big gathering of all major Iranian Kurdish organizations in KRI. This will also send a message to the Islamic Republic, that we're once again united and ready to fight as one united front…although, we are in no illusion about the organizational and sometimes ideological differences and set us apart, we do believe that this is feasible and workable goal. Or, at least this is what the KDPI is striving for."[185]

However,

> "Right now, due to all of these internal conflicts and fights, and disagreements, which have at times also turned violent, it is difficult to see [these organizations'] armed campaign to evolve into a full insurgency. Given the current conditions, it's very unlikely. There are some efforts to bring all these factions together but it's just too soon to be optimistic."[186]

The decline of Kurdish movement in Iran has opened a space for the Kurdistan workers'

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[183] Interview ID 045, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2018.
[184] Retrieved from: http://pdki.org/english/pdki-komalamemorandum-of-agreement-for-cooperation-and-coordination/
[185] Interview ID 037, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018.
[186] Interview ID 065, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018.

Party (PKK) to mobilize Iranian Kurds. The PKK has found some popularity amongst Iranian Kurds in the late 1990s. The party managed to strengthen and broaden its link amongst some Iranian Kurdish communities when, in the early 2000s, it moved its bases to Mount Qandil in KRI. In the early 2000s, in order to escape its terrorist designation, the PKK made a strategic decision to create smaller ideologically-affiliated sub-branches for its members in different parts of the Greater Kurdistan. As a result, the Iranian sub-branch of the PKK, PJAK (Free Life Party of Kurdistan), was founded in 2004.

> "PJAK supports the PKK's position on democratic autonomy, a form of democratic confederalism and administrative decentralization. This also includes a firm position on gender equality, as exemplified by the PKK, linguistic and cultural rights for the Kurds, freedom of speech, the recognition of the Kurds as a nation, etc. And to that end, [the organization] has cultural activities and consciousness-raising groups inside Iran, but also we organize [and support] guerilla attacks against the regime's military forces on Iran-Iraq border and inside Iran."[187]

Post-US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Iranian Kurdish organizations in Iraq became revitalized:

> "This was a period of hope for all of the Iranian Kurdish organizations in KRI. We all assumed that, much like Saddam's regime, the Islamic Republic would be toppled. We were ready to participate in this process. But we came to realize that the US had no such plans. "[188]

Moreover, in an interview with the *New York Sun*, the leader of Komala, Abdullah Mohtadi, expressed his concerns about the lack of a clear US policy toward Iranian Kurds and stated that "[t]here is no formal strategy. We still don't know what the U.S. wants to do with this regime."[189]

However, according to Jonathan Spyer, a Middle East analyst, the new US policy under President Donald Trump might result in more support for Iranian Kurds:

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[187] Interview ID 063, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018.
[188] Interview ID 066, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018.
[189] Lake, E. (2007, May 18). Kurdish Iranian Opposition Leader Seeks Clear Strategy From U.S. The Sun. Retrieved from:
  https://www.nysun.com/foreign/kurdish-iranian-opposition-leader-seeks-clear/54773/

"There is already evidence on the ground for this. Abdullah Mohtadi, leader of Komala, and KDPI leader Mustafa Hijri, for example, just completed a successful visit to DC [in 2018]…I think there is a real possibility of increased US attention to and support for Iranian Kurds if the unrest in Iran continues and spreads."[190]

In their exchanges with the Trump administration, both leaders expressed their readiness to become American partners in an effort to replace the current regime in Iran, and both expressed the goal for a coalition with the rest of the Iranian government opposition to bring about the necessary change.[191] These exchanges, as well as other regional and internal factors, have contributed to an optimistic assessment of the prospect of insurgency amongst the Kurdish organizational leadership in recent years.

To sum up, as of the 1990s, despite the resurgence of Kurdish activities, the closing opportunity structure in recent years has meant that the Iranian Kurdish organizations have remained fairly weak and ineffective in mobilizing mass support in Iran. Moreover, despite the revitalization of Kurdish activities in the KRG-controlled region of Iraq, due to the further splits within the main Kurdish parties, the proliferation of new organizations, and their status as ethno-nationalist organizations in exile (and therefore their weak appeal to younger Iranian Kurdish population), these groups have resorted to sporadic guerilla warfare against Iran.

6.4   Conclusion

The framework used here (opportunity structures, resource mobilization, and subjective assessments of change) is primarily intended to serve as a theoretical framework of explanation. The Iranian Kurdish case has been examined here as a heuristic application of these theories and their synthesis.

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[190] Van Wilgenberg, W. (2018, July 10). Iranian Kurds welcome US statement on assassination of Kurdish leader. *Kurdistan 24.* Retrieved from: https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/e79474bc-aae1-42c6-a7e0-893c7d6137c8
[191] Nawzad, K. (2018, June 18). Regime change in Iran task for its people: Iranian Opposition Leader. *Kurdistan 24.* Retrieved from: https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/interview/fa14c01d-cc94-4f9b-9eda-c2c133044384

In all of the phases of Kurdish ethno-nationalist movement examined here, opportunity structures played a crucial role in determining the form Iranian Kurdish ethno-nationalist claim-makings would take and the timing of these challenges. The major Iranian Kurdish ethno-nationalist uprisings occurred when the Iranian state was too weak to repress its Kurdish challengers: the 1920s (in the form of armed revolts), 1945–1946 (in the form of nationalist separatism and self-determination), and the early 1980s (in the form of full-scale armed conflicts). A closer look at all of these periods point to the availability of reliable external allies and mobilizational resources, the lack of inclusive institutional channels to allow for Kurdish ethno-nationalist claim-making through electoral politics, and the existence of significant optimism amongst organizational leadership and elites about the prospect of their insurgency.

In contrast, under Mosaddegh administration (1951-1953) and post-1979 Revolution, when the Kurdish elites perceived an opening in the political structure of Iran, they opted for electoral politics and institutional channels than armed insurgency. When the institutional channels broke down, the Kurdish groups' mobilizational capacity and subjective assessment of chances of success determined their next strategic move: in post-Mosaddegh era, the Kurdish groups' significantly impaired mobilizational resources and low morale (due to internal splits, loss of important allies and important organizational figures) resulted in a long phase of dormancy and inactivity. Conversely, post-Revolution, Kurdish groups enjoyed modernized Peshmerga forces and military equipment's, unprecedented mass support, and felt confidently strong enough to take up arms against the state. Moreover, in post-1990s period, fragmentations in the Kurdish organizations' structures, the proliferation of new organizations, the lack of credible internal and external allies, and the closing political opportunities have resulted in a long period of dormancy and inactivity.

More recently, especially after US invasion of Iraq (2003), and the perceived availability of strong international allies, has resulted in more positive assessments of the prospect of change amongst the leadership of the KDPI and Komala and a shift towards the revitalization of Kurdish uprising in the form of sporadic guerilla warfare and mobilization within Iran:

> "Rassan is about 'rising again.' We are organizing politically within Iranian Kurdistan. Our strategy is to organize people inside Iranian Kurdistan. This time things are very different [than our previous failed attempts]. The regime is being hit by international sanctions and has exhausted its military forces in its regional armed entanglements. So, it's very weak right now, both economically and politically speaking. The US presence in Iraq is also working to our advantage. The regime is also losing popular support among its own people. So, the pressure is from everywhere. All of this adds to our optimism about positive changes in the near future… but we must act… that's why we act… that's why we started Rassan."[192]

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[192] Interview ID 026, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017.

7 WHY DO THEY JOIN? THE STORIES OF REBELS IN KURDISTAN

7.1 Introduction

Recent contributions in the literature on civil conflicts have explored the micro-foundations of collective political violence, and the specific constraints and challenges that non-state organizations face: gathering funds, recruiting combatants, enforcing commitment of rank and file. The strategies implemented to solve these challenges have been shown to influence crucial outcomes such as the intensity of conflict or the sustainability of the organizations over time.

Organizations involved in armed civil conflict must face the challenge of mobilizing forces and manpower. There are, however, two dimensions to understanding mobilization in rebellion and armed conflict. The first dimension is related to individuals' decision to participate in conflict: what motivates individuals' decisions to leave their homes and families behind and join armed conflict, risking their lives and safety? The second dimension deals with organizational aspects of mobilization and how organizations implement recruitment strategies to, on the one hand, affect individuals' decision to fight for them, and on the other hand, filter out the low-commitment individuals who seek short-term gains from participation. How does a rebel organization's recruitment strategies and approach to mobilization affect individuals' decision? Since rebel organizations' capacity to wage a war and survive a conflict is contingent upon its ability to mobilize fighters, explaining these two dimensions of mobilization is central to understanding the dynamics of armed conflict.

This part of the thesis focuses on the dual dimension of mobilization in armed conflict. Although the civil war literature is replete with discussions on participation in civil conflict, participation as a key causal mechanism is typically not grounded in systematic and empirical studies. Regarding recruitment, much of the existing literature on civil conflict takes rebel

organization as a given, focusing instead on the structural conditions that give rise to conflict. However, by looking at a more mico- and meso-level perspectives on how combatants are recruited into a rebel organization one can make sense of the strategies these groups pursue.

I suggest that a comprehensive theory of armed conflict depends on a clear explanation of micro- and meso-politics which can be achieved by focusing on the push and pull factors that affect individuals' decisions to join rebel groups and by understanding how rebel groups recruit combatants. The latter depends upon the choices organization leaders make about how to recruit people, and the strategies they set in place to ensure that combatants are committed to the groups' objectives. Since rebel groups' strategies and the choices their leaders make are constrained and conditioned by macro-level factors (state structure, political opportunities, etc.), a focus on participation and recruitment can link our understanding of micro- and meso- politics to macro-politics of conflict.

Therefore, this work distinguishes between micro-level (participation) and meso-level (recruitment) factors. The case of Iranian Kurds who cross the Iran-Iraq border to join the three camps of the Iranian Kurdish Democratic Party located in Iraqi Kurdistan illustrates the utility of this approach. Every year hundreds of Iranian Kurds (men and women) cross the border to join the organization. By analyzing the multiple paths that Kurdish dissidents followed to the KDPI camps, I refine existing explanations of participation and recruitment and suggest how these new insights may have important implications for our understanding of ethnic mobilization. My conclusions are based on the analysis of rich data from in-depth interviews with female and male rank-and-file combatants (*Peshmerga*), and high-ranking members of the KDPI camps. These data have a unique advantage: they include the first-hand accounts of the experiences of the organization rank-and-file and leadership. This rare sample of Iranian Kurdish fighters is very

well suited to the identification of multiple paths to ethno-nationalist mobilization and will therefore deepen the existing sociological understanding of ethno-nationalist insurgency. I begin this analysis with a brief introduction of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran and explain why it is a useful case in which to conduct this analysis. I then provide a review of the existing literature followed by a discussion of the main approach in this paper. The section that follows describes the data and research design. I then provide a demographic information on a sample of 740 organization members who joined the organization between 1980 and 2016. This section is followed by a rich and detailed section analyzing the qualitative interview data. Lastly, I conclude with a discussion of the results and their relevance for theoretical debates about participation and recruitment in civil war.

7.2 The KDPI: A Brief Introduction

The Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) was established on August 16, 1945, by Ghazi Mohammad in Mahabad in eastern Kurdistan, Iran. Just a few months after its creation, on January 22, 1946, the KDPI established the "Republic of Kurdistan," (also referred to by historians as the "Republic of Mahabad," since the city of Mahabad was chosen as its capital) which stretched over one-third of Iranian Kurdistan. The Republic, however, was short-lived and collapsed in less than a year, many of its leaders were imprisoned, some were executed, including Qazi Mohammad himself.

Following the collapse, the KDPI moved its bases to Iraq. In the 1970s, under the direction of its new leader, Dr. Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, the organization joined the uprisings against the Shah. However, soon after Ayatollah Khomeini had seized power in 1979, he declared a "holy war" on the Kurds of Iran resulting in full-scale warfare between Kurdish organizations (including the KDPI) and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. In the 1980s, several

towns and villages of Iran Kurdistan came under fire by the Iraqi troops fighting on the Iran-Iraq war front, and by the Iranian troops fighting on the Kurdistan front. After the Iran-Iraq war and in the years following Ayatollah Khomeini's death in 1989, the Iranian regime expressed its readiness for negotiations with Ghassemlou in Austria. In 1989, in Vienna, Ghassemlou and his aides were assassinated at the negotiating table. In 1992, the Iranian government targeted the KDPI's new leader Dr. Sadegh Sharafkandi in Berlin during yet another round of negotiations with the organization. By the early 1990s, the Kurdish organizations, which had lost much of their organizational capacities, had no choice but to restrict their actions to guerrilla warfare. The armed conflicts resulted in displacement, imprisonment, and death of thousands of Kurdish fighters and civilians.

The organization endorses democratic struggle in Iran, autonomy, and the right to self-determination for the Kurds. In the past, especially during the Iran-Iraq War, the organization received foreign aid in the form of financial and military support from the Iraqi government to fight back against Iranian security forces. For a few years after the revolution, the organization held a strong position on the ground in several urban and rural areas of the Kurdish region in Iran. The KDPI renounced its armed struggle in the 1990s only to resume it again in the 2010 when the organization announced the launch of a new movement – "Rassan" (a Kurdish word for "standing up with a vengeance to an enemy.")

7.3   Previous Research on Civil War Mobilization

The existing literature on participation and recruitment comes from several streams of thought. A small fraction of the literature deals explicitly with the question of why individuals participate in insurgency, but the majority often conflates the two following questions: why do men and women participate in rebellion and why does insurgency occur? In what follows, I

revisit the four main schools of thought in participation literature: inequality, collective action, security dilemma, and political structure.

In the inequality stream, participation is the key causal mechanism connecting economic inequality and the resulting political conflict. The argument primarily relies on the concept of relative deprivation,[193] which states that political violence is more likely to occur when people's expectations about what they should be achieving exceed their actual levels of achievement.[194] Therefore, the foundations of the argument lie in the grievances (ethnic, religious, ideological, economic, etc.) that motivate individuals to participate in rebellion. The greater the intensity of deprivation, the stronger the motivational base for political violence, and the greater the magnitude for violence.[195]

A second stream, collective action school, questions the assumption that all individuals with common interests will join a rebel organization to attain these interests. This line of argument suggests that a rebel organization fights for public goods and that collective benefits are a consistent feature of rebellion but individual rebels who fight for the organization must pay the heavy costs of participation (time commitment, imprisonment, death, etc.). Therefore, rational and calculating individuals have strong incentives to not participate and to free-ride. Thus, from this perspective grievances are not sufficient to provide an explanation as to why rebels choose participation in collective action. This criticism is the essence of Mancur Olson's[196] challenge to collective action arguments. He argued that if collective actions are costly to individuals, they can only be sustained if individuals are coerced to participate or are

[193] Davies, J. C. (1962). Toward a theory of revolution. *American sociological review*, 5-19.
[194] Gurr. Ted. (1970). Why men rebel. *Princeton, PUP*; Popkin, S. L., & Popkin, S. L. (1979). *The rational peasant: The political economy of rural society in Vietnam*. Univ of California Press; Tullock, G. (1971). The paradox of revolution. *Public Choice*, *11*(1), 89-99; Olson, M. (1965). The theory of collective action: public goods and the theory of groups. *Harvard University Press, Cambridge*.
[195] *Ibid*.
[196] Olson, M. (1965). The theory of collective action: public goods and the theory of groups. *Harvard University Press, Cambridge*.

motivated by the availability of selective incentives (private gains) which are only distributed to those who participate.[197] This view shifted the approach from macro-level to micro-level aspects of collective action, and more specifically, to individuals' calculations about whether to support or participate in collective action. The existing literature points to three types of selective incentives: material, social, and purposive, with material incentives receiving the most attention.[198]

Social incentives can provide a powerful foundation for mobilizing participation in rebellion. Close-knit communities share identities and pre-existing social networks that facilitate contacts based on shared norms. The resulting cultural homogeneity and tight networks within the group allows for members to more easily mobilize participants, and to impose costs for non-participation.[199] (Taylor 1988). Non-material rewards like a sense of belonging to the group and increased status can also function as selective incentives.

Related to the same line of argument, some scholars[200] argue that factors related to individuals' communities provide strong incentives or disincentives for individual's decision to participate. From this perspective, close-knit communities where individuals share identities and pre-existing social ties can overcome the free-rider problem by increasing social sanctions for non-participating or defecting individuals.[201] On the other hand, in close-knit societies, non-material rewards such as increased status in the group or a sense of belonging amongst group members can serve as selective incentives.

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[197] Lichbach, M. I. (1987). Deterrence or escalation? The puzzle of aggregate studies of repression and dissent. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *31*(2), 266-297;

[198] Goodwin, J., & Skocpol, T. (1989). Explaining revolutions in the contemporary Third World. *Politics & Society*, *17*(4), 489-509. A prominent example of the material incentive literature is the "greed" argument in Collier, P., & Hoeffler, A. (2004). Greed and grievance in civil war. *Oxford economic papers*, *56*(4), 563-595.

[199] Taylor, M., & Ryan, H. (1988). Fanaticism, political suicide and terrorism. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, *11*(2), 91-111.

[200] *Ibid*; Weinstein, J. M. (2006). *Inside rebellion: The politics of insurgent violence*. Cambridge University Press.

[201] Taylor, M., & Ryan, H. (1988).

A more recent approach in this stream literature focuses on the process orientation rather than the outcome of participation as a factor influencing individuals' decision to participate. From this perspective, instead of promising material selective incentives to potential members, leaders of rebel groups may activate a process orientation by presenting the act of participation as a reward in itself. Participation contributes to a sense of self-esteem and personal efficacy, and is enjoyable to participants. The process, in and off itself, might be as valuable to the members of the community as the end result. Elisabeth Wood's research on rebel participation in El Salvador's civil war draws on this line of argument.[202] She argues that what motivated the revolutionaries to participate in the war was their belief in the value of participation per se, and the rebels' "pleasure in agency" due to their active role in the rebellion.

A third approach focuses on potential members' security dilemma. Kalyvas and Kocher[203] criticize the collective action literature arguing that is that it assumes that non-participants do not bear any costs. They go on to argue that civilians might choose to join a war because of the protection offered by fighting factions. Therefore, joining rebellion is a way to minimize potential costs of war. The idea that the possibility of improving one's security provides an important motivation for joining a warring faction has recently received the attention of civil war scholars.[204] For example, some scholars focus their attention on how state repression can create incentives or disincentives for participation. On the one hand, some scholars argue that higher levels of state repression are positively associated with an individual's decision to join rebellion,[205] others posit that state violence activates individuals' emotional response

[202] Allison, M. E. (2004). Elisabeth Jean Wood, Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador. New York: Cambridge University Press, *Latin American politics and society*, *46*(3), 144-149.

[203] Kalyvas, S. N., & Kocher, M. A. (2007). How "Free" is Free Riding in civil wars?: Violence, insurgency, and the collective action problem. *World politics*, *59*(2), 177-216.

[204] Humphreys, M., & Weinstein, J. M. (2008). Who fights? The determinants of participation in civil war. *American Journal of Political Science*, *52*(2), 436-455; Goodwin, J. (2001). *No other way out: states and revolutionary movements, 1945-1991*. Cambridge University Press.

[205] Sambanis, N., & Zinn, A. (2005). From protest to violence: An analysis of conflict escalation with an application to self-determination movements. *Manuscript, Yale University*; Mason, T. D., & Krane, D. A. (1989). The political economy of death squads: Toward a theory of

(Petersen 2002).[206] Along the same lines are scholars who focus on ethnic security dilemma[207] arguing that in ethnic communities individuals might join a rebel organization out of fear for their safety. On the other hand, another body of literature within this stream suggests that when costs of participation are too high (due to increased repression) individuals will not participate in collective action. Repression thus decreases the likelihood of participation. From this perspective, what matters instead is an individual's calculations regarding their personal security.

A fourth stream shifts the attention to the role opportunity structures (state structure, shifting political environment, etc.) play in mobilization for collective actions (including armed conflict). This literature does not explicitly look into the mechanisms of participation, and instead assumes that open and favourable opportunity structures are associated with individuals' participation whereas closed structures of opportunities create disincentives for participation. Scholars in this stream of thought have looked at variables such as regime type,[208] and state strength.[209] Weak states that cannot exercise full command over their territories by effective local policing or counterinsurgency practices create incentives for participation by lowering the opportunity costs for participation and augmenting the chances of victory.

While this perspective improves our understanding of the environment within which rebellion occurs, it offers little that helps to make sense of what strategies insurgent organizations adopt to attract new members and what tactics are available to rebel leaders to

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the impact of state-sanctioned terror. *International Studies Quarterly*, *33*(2), 175-198; Lichbach, M. I. (1987). Deterrence or escalation? The puzzle of aggregate studies of repression and dissent. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *31*(2), 266-297.

[206] Petersen, R. D. (2002). *Understanding ethnic violence: Fear, hatred, and resentment in twentieth-century Eastern Europe*. Cambridge University Press.

[207] Kaufmann, C. (1996). Intervention in ethnic and ideological civil wars: Why one can be done and the other can't. *Security Studies*, *6*(1), 62-101; Posen, B. R. (1993). The security dilemma and ethnic conflict. *Survival*, *35*(1), 27-47.

[208] Buhaug, H., & Rød, J. K. (2006). Local determinants of African civil wars, 1970–2001. *Political geography*, *25*(3), 315-335; Gurr, Ted. (1993). Why minorities rebel: A global analysis of communal mobilization and conflict since 1945. *International Political Science Review*, *14*(2), 161-201; Hegre, H. (2001). Toward a democratic civil peace? Democracy, political change, and civil war, 1816–1992. *American political science review*, *95*(1), 33-48; Reynal-Querol, M. (2002). Ethnicity, political systems, and civil wars. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *46*(1), 29-54.

[209] Fearon, J. D., & Laitin, D. D. (2003). Ethnicity, insurgency, and civil war. *American political science review*, *97*(1), 75-90.

recruit fighters and to ensure the new recruits' commitment to the group's objectives. Therefore, moving beyond the structural factors, the question should be whether an insurgent group exercise any agency in the recruitment process, and what strategies it can employ to increase its effectiveness in recruitment. Moreover, in the existing literature, individuals' participation in conflict pops up implicitly, but the logic behind the arguments is rarely developed. In order to understand the "why" and "how" behind the statistical correlations in this literature, it is necessary to turn focus to the mechanisms explaining multiple paths that insurgents follow to ethno-nationalist organizations. By looking at the mechanisms of participation and recruitment, I attempt to refine the existing explanations and suggest how these new insights may have important implications for our micro- and meso-level understanding of ethno-nationalist mobilization.

7.4   Participation and Recruitment

In this paper, I argue that, in fact, there is no single reason underlying individuals' decisions to join an ethno-nationalist organization. In the case of the KDPI, various micro-level factors such as the socioeconomic situation of the individual, his/her family conditions, and persecution of Kurdish activists in conjunction with discriminatory policies implemented by the state may *push* or encourage individuals to join the organization. The organization also utilizes the family, community, and other problems for recruitment purposes. The KDPI's offering of alternatives to an excluded lifestyle (such as enhancing the sense of belonging, valuing the individual, and providing solutions to practical problems for prospective members) serves as *pull* factors for individuals to join.

Moreover, the fact that the organization relies on kinship factors for the recruitment of new members, creates a web of ties and networks among prospective members and existing

members of the organization, and further accelerates the process of joining the organization. The connection of an individual to someone else in the organization, and the wider network of social relations, is crucial to that individual's decision to join the organization. In fact, as I will show below, most of the interviewees joined the organization because of their close networks or intimate relations. Therefore, from this perspective, individual processes constitute motivational triggers and the social processes provide a basis for communication and interaction between the organization and the individual.

Lastly, the organization pursues various strategies to sell its ethno-nationalist ideologies via its TV broadcasts, social media pages, group meetings held in the Kurdish towns and villages of Iran coordinated by the KDPI members and the organization's clandestine cells in Iran. The individuals who receive and consume these media messages and/or attend the group meetings prior to joining the organization, internalize the organization's ideology. In this way, a militant identity is constructed in the individual through psychological methods: an individual's worldview is shaped in line with the value judgments and ideological definitions of the organization. My observations also suggest that the organization holds various group activities (such as political education courses for the new and old recruits), and in this way, it ensures to maintain and enhance the ideological commitment of the members once the join the organization on the Iraqi side.

In this analysis, as shall be seen, I divide the reasons for joining the organization into two broad categories of micro- and meso-level factors. This is important in the sense that it allows one to make sense of the interplay between the individual and organizational factors and to understand the transposition of organizational factors (objective world) into the individual's subjective world of thought and action.

7.5   Methodology

This paper summarizes the findings of the field research that I conducted in summer 2017 and summer 2018 in three camps of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) located in Kurdistan of Iraq. I gathered the data from three different sources:

1. Semi-structured interviews that I conducted with the members of the organization (a total of 38 interviews with 19 male and 19 female members.)

2. Semi-structured interviews that I conducted with the leaders of the organization (a total of 11 interviews). All of the interviewees self-identified as Kurds and were born in Kurdish towns of Iran. Their ages varied between 18 and 71.

3. Official records and documents provided by the archives center of the KDPI: I analyzed the archived records of a total of 740 members and examined their biographical data. In the randomly selected sample of the data set, "the year of birth" varies between 1963 and 1997; while "the year joining the organization" varies between 1980 and 2016. Therefore, while the analysis of these data reflects both the historic and contemporary situation within the organization, it primarily focuses on those members who joined the organization after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran 1979.

7.5.1   Issues of access and trust

As an outsider, I was able to establish a degree of trust with the respondents due to my key informants' position within the organization. During the early stages of the research when I attempted to contact potential participants on my own, I encountered considerable suspicion (due to being ethnically "Persian"), however, my gatekeeper, a high ranking member of the KDPI, explained to the respondents the general aims and rationales of the research and was vital in gaining their confidence. Consequently, the participants welcomed me into their homes inside

the KDPI camps in the Iraqi Kurdistan, and many stated that it was important for them to tell "their stories." These data uniquely include the experiences of the Kurdish fighters, whereas most mobilization studies focus solely on organizational elites and leadership. This rare study is very well suited to the identification of the multiple paths to activism that deepen sociological understandings of ethnic mobilization.

7.6   Members' Demographic Information

Information in this section is based on the personal information of the members of the KDPI who reside in the organization camps near Erbil in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. I gathered and analyzed records of a total of 740 members of the organization based on different available demographic information, and the results are presented in *Table 1*. I accessed the data through an informant within the organization. However, since I was not granted permission to make copies or take pictures of the available hard copy of the data, I drew a systematic random sample of 740 members' profiles out of the 2,225 recorded profiles that were presented to me. These demographic profiles have been recorded between 1997 and 2016.

[Insert *Table 1* here]

1. Respondent's age at the time of enlisting: The age of initial involvement in the organizations' activities on the Iranian side and prior to joining the organization reaches as low as 15 (this, however, is in sharp contrast to what the KDPI leaders claim to be their organization's minimum age requirement). In general, the age at which individuals join the organization would seem to range between the ages of 15 and 42. Therefore, as is also the case in other Kurdish organizations such as Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK), the majority of the KDPI's fighters are young individuals.

2. Gender: Considering the gender distribution of the organization, female participants comprise one out of every three members. The high proportion of female members in the organization suggests that, on the one hand, a high proportion of women are situated in problem areas (e.g. unfavourable family conditions, unemployment, financial hardship) all of which may trigger their decision to join their organization. On the other hand, this high number also points to the organization's effective outreach programs and its ability to appeal to women in the Kurdish communities of Iran.

3. Marital status: The data suggest that 39.1 percent of members of the organization are married individuals. This goes against the existing social movement literature (that participants in a social movement tend to be biographically available with minimal family responsibilities and commitments to worry about.)

4. Level of education: considering the members' educational background, the majority of the members (53.8 percent) had high school degrees at the time of joining the organization. 35.7 percent of the members were either primary school graduates or high school dropouts. About 10.2 percent of the sample either held a university degree (undergraduate or higher) or were university dropouts.

5. Employment status prior to joining the organization: Regarding the employment status of the members before joining the organization, 12 percent were employees in public sector, 30.4 percent were employed in the private sector, and the majority of the members, 57.6 percent, were unemployed prior to joining the organization.

6. Whether a family member had died fighting for the organization: as the interview excepts included in the following section will show, some of the organization's members had a family member (or an extended family member) who had died fighting for the organization.

Based on the available data, 21.4 percent of individuals had lost a family member in the organization.

7. Whether family members were already active members of the organization: Here, "family member" includes spouses, siblings, parents, children, and extended relatives. The proportion of the members who have at least one family member in the organization is at a high level (42.2 percent). This rather high proportion suggest the role that social ties and networks (pull factors) play in individuals' decisions to join an ethno-nationalist organization.

8. Member's place of origin: As shown in *Figure 2*, certain towns in the northern region of the Iranian Kurdistan are among towns which display the highest number of individuals joining the organization. These towns are also historically known as the organization's strongholds in Iranian Kurdistan where the majority of the organization's underground activities are concentrated.

[Insert *Figure 2* here]

7.7   Why Do They Join?

I separate factors affecting members' decisions to join the organization into two main sets: micro-level factors (individuals' participation) and meso-level factors (organization's recruitment strategies). The socioeconomic situation of the individual, his/her family conditions, general conditions in the community, together with discriminatory policies and strategies implemented by the state may encourage individuals to join the organizations. In addition to these factors, the organization actively pursues recruitment strategies to attract new recruits.

Although individuals' paths to the organization might vary and micro-level factors that affect a person's decision to join the organization might ultimately be different from one person to another, it is possible to discern some general pattern and common issues from individuals'

accounts. These general patterns can be summarized into the following seven categories: (1) Family conditions; (2) Community and kinship ties; (3) Friendship networks and emotional relationships; (4) Prison experience; (5) Grievances (ethnic and ideological); (6) Unemployment/financial incentives; and (7) Gaining position and status.

7.7.1 Individual Factors

1. Family Conditions: Dysfunctional family

Individuals' family condition was one of the most important factors mentioned by the interviewees that triggered their decision to join the organization. However, it must be emphasized that although family condition does play a crucial role in an individual's decision, it often works in conjunction with other factors such as friendship networks, emotional ties, or seeking position and status. Family conditions can be further divided into two major categories that came up in the interviews: family pressure (exerted by an authoritative figure in the family), abuse (the presence of physical and/or psychological violence at home):

a. Family pressure

Family pressure due to the presence of an authoritative figure in family was the most important factor that members mentioned affected their decisions to join the organization. As mentioned above, the majority of the organization's recruits are young individuals.

The presence of an authoritative person in the family (usually father or older brother) and the demands and expectations they place on young individuals' behaviour and choices might motivate the individuals to rebel against authority. The majority of the members who mentioned family pressure were female members of the organization. For example, some young girls are pushed by the authoritative members of their family to accept a marriage proposal. While some might accept such commands as legitimate, many others will rebel. The authoritative figures

often resort to a rage of pressure tactics, from emotional blackmail (by verbally abusing and blaming the child for not respecting and honouring the family's word and by subjecting them to mockery and insult) to death threats to achieve their goal. Some families closely control the nonconforming member's coming and going and keep them under close watch (and in some cases forbid them to go to school). The same pressure also exists when individuals live with their extended family members and do not contribute to supporting the household. The family considers them a burden and, if they are female, often forces them to marry very young.

Here is a female member's account. She was 23 years old at the time the interview and joined the organization at the age of 20. She explained:

> "I took the university entrance exam and got admitted to a good university. It was about 2.5 hours away from our town, so I had to stay at the university residence on weekdays and go back home on weekends. My older brother objected the idea. He said it would bring disgrace to our family. He was the only voice in the family; so his words were my dad's words. So I stayed home for two years and took the exam again hoping I would qualify for a college in our town. But I failed both times. My brother started to put pressure on me to marry one of my suitors… At this time, I was involved in the party's activities. I decided to join since I already had a few friends in the party."[210]

Another female member who is 35 years old, and joined when she was 18, recounted her story as follows:

> "[*In a very emotional conversation, the interviewee mentioned her dad had disappeared from the village in the course of the heightened conflict in Kurdistan during the Iran-Iraq war, and following this event, her mother had ran away from their community*] I lived with my uncle who had three daughters of his own. I was 17 when his wife told me "you have no money and no job, do you expect us to pay for you forever? Why don't you marry this guy? He seems nice, he's a bit old but who cares? At least he has a job." I would have been the guy's second wife and had to live with her under the same roof and probably cook for her for the rest of my life [she laughs]. So of course, I said no and the bullies began … there was no end to them, day and night, and even in presence of other people. Then my uncle joined her and accused me of dishonouring his family, and making him the joke of the community … one day I just decided I'm out of here. I joined the organization a year later through a cell [*Hasteh* in Persian] in our town."[211]

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[210] Interview ID 011, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017
[211] Interview ID 012, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017

A male member who is now 24 years old and joined at the age of 19 and who experienced family pressure explained the situation:

> "My dad was a real control freak. He had to know where I was and whom I was hanging out with all the time. So I started to stay home and spend most of my day surfing the net, you know chatting with online friends, reading stuff, doing video games, etc. I joined a Facebook group affiliated with the organization and read their news quite often. I had no plan to join the organization. But one day I had a really bad fight with my dad. The day after he disconnected the Internet modem and took my computer away. A week after, I ran away … I spent six months in [*town name*], and from there, through a connection, I crossed the border and joined the organization."[212]

Yet another male member (27 years old) who joined the organization at the age of 17, stated:

> "I had really bad communication with my step-dad since a really young age. Because of him I was constantly stressed, not just at home, but also at school, too. Sometimes he yelled at me, sometimes he suddenly stopped speaking to me. He constantly reminded me that I owed him money. The money with which he pays the bills! He said the minute I turned 18 he wanted me out of the house and start working to pay him back. He also cuts my Internet connection, so I could "stop wasting time". My mom never interfered. I think she was scared of him too. I ran away when I was 16. I found a part-time job in [*name of a border town*]. That's where I met [*Sherko*]. He gave me some Party flyers and taught me how to read Kurdish. He later encouraged me to join the Party. He said everything would be fine and I didn't have to worry about a job, or where to sleep anymore. I joined the party a year later."[213]

b. The presence of physical and/or psychological abuse at home:

Another factor that is directly related to the previous problem is the experience of physical or psychological abuse at home. Although this category is closely connected to the previous one, it is worth distinguishing the two categories. While some male members did certainly point to the presence of domestic physical/psychological abuse as the triggering factor, the overwhelming majority of the members who mentioned this factor were women:

A female university drop-out who was at the time of this interview 26 and joined the

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[212] Interview ID 013, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017
[213] Interview ID 005, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), June 2017

organization when she was 22 expressed her reason for joining the organization:

> "I joined the organization with the idea that it could be a solution for the problems and despair I experienced in my family. However, when I came here I understood that the conditions of the organization did not meet my expectations. Also, living conditions are very difficult here in the camp. So I started to miss my family after a while. But it's too risky to go back; joining the organization is a serious crime… it's just too risky."[214]

A female member, 34 years old, who had recently joined the organization stated her

reasons for joining the organization:

> "I had been married to my husband for 4 years before I decided to join the organization last year … Things went well for a year or so, but then everything turned sour… We had financial difficulties…I could not get along with my in-laws. My husband and I fought every day, he beat me every day, I felt desperate and wanted to return to my family. However, my family did not support me. Upon this, I told some people around me—people who links to the organization—that I wanted to join the organization."[215]
> A 20-year-old male member who joined the organization at the age of 17 explained his

experience:

> "I lived with my mom and my stepdad. My stepped hated me … he was very physically abusive to me. He always mocked me and said I wasn't smart enough to go to college. So I left the house and went to [*name of a border town*]. One of my friends who was already a member of the organization, suggested I join their activities in the town. Some time later, I came here to the camp but I already knew a few people here."[216]

2. Community and kinship ties:

Another significant factor affecting the decision to join the organization is the social

networks and structures that are deeply rooted in the Kurdish communities in Iran. Strong

kinship relations, specifically in rural and tribal areas of Kurdistan, plays an important role in

individuals' decisions to join the KDPI.

In his *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse*, Paul

Staniland[217] explains the origins and trajectories of insurgent organizations by looking at social

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[214] Interview ID 034, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2017
[215] Interview ID 006, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), June 2017
[216] Interview ID 033, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2017
[217] Staniland, P. (2014). *Networks of rebellion: Explaining insurgent cohesion and collapse*. Cornell University Press.

networks and how they link rebel leaders to each other and to the rebel fighter. Staniland presents a typology of insurgent organizations based on their network structure. His typology take into account two lines of relations: central (which includes horizontal ties between organization elites and contributes to a unified leadership), and local (which included vertical ties between elites and local communities and "are created by relations of information, trust, and belief that link organizers to local communities."[218] Drawing on these two axes, Staniland presents four ideal-typical structures of relations within a rebel organization: 1. Integrated organizations enjoy strong ties between elites and strong relationships between elites and the masses); 2. Vanguard organizations have strong horizontal ties among the elites but weaker vertical ties to people; conversely, 3. Parochial organizations lack horizontal ties among leaders, but enjoy strong local ties between the leaders and the people; and finally, 4. Fragmented organizations lack both horizontal and vertical linkages.[219]

This typology, however, does not fully capture the KDPI's structure of social networks. While the party's central organizational structure does certainly show strong connection among its elites (all of whom are former mountain fighters and have experienced years of comradeship alongside each other within the organization) and its very special status as an ethno-nationalist rebel organization in exile operating on the Iraqi side but recruiting from the Iranian Kurdish communities do not allow for strong bondages between the elites and the masses. To overcome this shortcoming, the organization has two options as its disposal. First, the connection between to-be rebels and the organization becomes possible through a Kurdish communities' social capital endowment that helps channeling waves of recruits to the rank-and-file members of the organization. Individuals, whose relatives had already joined the organization, may themselves

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[218] *Ibid*, p. 22.
[219] *Ibid*, pp. 5-11, pp. 25-34.

join with the help of such relatives. Moreover, kinship connections accelerate the process of joining the organization by bypassing the trust and loyalty tests. A substantial proportion of my interviewees stated that they decided to join the organization with the help and/or under the influence of their relatives or someone in their tight-knit communities. A rebel organization that is embedded in a tight-knit community or in pre-existing societal networks can recruit more easily and invest less time and effort on recruitment as the solidary rewards of joining the organization will be more obvious to potential members who are already connected to the organization through close social relations. Second, in urban areas where kinship ties are not as strong as they are in tribal and rural regions, the organization employs a proactive method of recruitment through its Urban Cells. This organizational recruitment strategy is explained in full length in the second part of this paper.

Considering the first mechanism, that is kinship ties, a 27-year-old male member who joined the organization at the age of 19 explains his experience:

> "My family lives in a village… After high school, I left the village to find a job in [name of town] where my uncle and his family lived. Two of my uncle's sons had already crossed the border to join the organization. He always spoke so proudly of them. His youngest son, about my age, always used to tell me "Let's go to the mountain, there is no need for jobs there, we will have guns, we can live freely…" So I decided to join the organization with my cousin."[220]

Along the same lines, family legacy was also a pull factor for some members. Another male member of the organization (32 years old at the time of the interview) explained his experience of joining:

> "My relatives encouraged me to join the organization. Two of my uncles were already members. One of my cousins was martyred at border a few years ago. I decided to join the mountain *Peshmerga* of the organization. I decided to join to make my family proud."[221]

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[220] Interview ID 015, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017
[221] Interview ID 040, Sulaymaniyah (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2018

Family involvement (especially father's or brother's involvement) in the conflict was also a key factor for another member who is a male member, 21 years old, joined in 2016:

> "I joined the party because my dad was already a party member. He joined the organization before I was born. I never saw my dad until recently when I also joined the party. My mom and sisters are still back home."[222]

Another female member reported that the most influential person in her joining the organization was her brother, and she joined the organization to find her brother.[223]

A few other accounts of the organization's members pointed to cases where their family members were associated with the organization prior to the member's recruitment. Having relatives within the party meant individuals were put under police surveillance and ultimately forced to leave. In the Kurdish areas of Iran, individuals who have close friends or relatives in the KDPI (and also in other Iranian Kurdish organizations such as Komala and PJAK) are suspected of connections to the organization and may be called in by the security agencies. This method is often used by authorities to set pressure on the individuals by showing them that they are under surveillance and to set pressure on their relatives/friends to abandon the organization and return to Iran. Particularly, one of the organization leaders explained this issue:

> "When a person is associated with our Party, the regime will detain their family members to interrogate them. We've even had people whose family members were associated with us, were imprisoned but had escaped prison and who were detained and tortured to make confessions about the escapee's whereabouts. If they have a job in public sector, they'll be removed from their position. The escapees' close family members will be banned from entering higher education, their computers will be monitored, etc."[224]

A member of the Central Committee of the organization points out:

> "Sometime the regime pressures the family members to come to our camps to take

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[222] Interview ID 014, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017
[223] Interview ID 003, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), June 2017

[224] Interview ID 056, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018

their siblings, kids, spouses etc. back to Iran with them…basically to convince them to go back. If they refuse and say they can't afford this, the regime will provide financial support. So, there are all kinds of ways through which the regime puts people under pressure in Iran, making it impossible for them to stay."[225]

Yet another high-ranking member of the Central Committee explained:

"If a person is a member or in any way linked to our organization, authorities would naturally expect to find other activists or sympathizers within his/her family or close circles. Also, if an activist in on the run and has fugitive status, authorities will seek out his/her family members… I think they just go after families to create examples and, of course, to establish fear."[226]

The following quotes are from my interviews with the organization rank-and-file members

and further demonstrate this point. A female member of the organization, 43 years old, who

joined in 2012, states:

"My husband crossed the border some years ago and has been was a full-time member of the Party ever since. He used to fight in the mountains first, now he is a cadre. I had worked in a public school for many years before my husband left. But I lost my job a little while after it was made news that he had joined the party. The police interrogated me several times. They wanted to know if I was in touch with my husband, where he was, what he was doing and so on. I felt I was constantly under surveillance. So I decided to cross the border with my son who had not seen his dad since he was one. I am an active member of the organization now."[227]

Another female member, 34 years old, who joined in 2007 explains:

"My husband had been involved in the party since 2001. But I was not a party supporter at that time, nor was I a member of it. I spent seven days in prison. They asked me about my husband's whereabouts and confiscated my passport. The police used to search our house from time to time. It was frustrating. When the circumstances turned unfavourable, I left my children and family and joined the Party."[228]

Moreover, family legacy might result in an individual's desire for revenge. Revenge can be

a driving force behind the individual's final decision to join the organization. In the interviews,

revenge has been a strong motivation for those individuals whose close relatives or family

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[225] Interview ID 037, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018
[226] Interview ID 004, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), June 2017
[227] Interview ID 053, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018
[228] Interview ID 055, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018

members had been killed during an armed conflict with the Iranian security forces (*Sepah*) or had been executed in prison.

A female member of the organization, age [*unknown*], who joined in 2012 stated her motivation for revenge:

> "My brother and my cousin were both arrested in a protest in 2010. They spent 200 days in solitary confinement and were tortured. The regime claimed they had been arrested after an armed attack. But it was just a peaceful protest and they had no guns in their possession. They were sentenced to death after a one-hour trial. Both were executed a few months later. One day they called us and said 'come to this address to collect their belongings.' This made me feel helpless at first. We had nowhere to go to complain about this injustice. Even if we did, would it bring them back to us? My brother was only 18, my cousin was 21…Then I felt angry, I had to do something about it. I had to take revenge. That's how I decided to join… I joined after a few months of underground activities in Iran."[229]

Along the same lines, a male member, age 37, who joined in 2007 expressed his desire to take revenge:

> "Many of my relatives were killed in the mountains or in prison. One of my brothers committed suicide in prison, or that's the story they told us. We never really figured out if he died under torture or if he took his own life in solitary confinement. Many of my close relatives were punished for supporting the organization. I just could not stand still anymore; I had to do something. I had to avenge them, and that's why I joined the organization."[230]

3. Friendship networks and emotional relationships:

Closely related to the previous category, a number of members stated friendship networks and/or emotional relationships as important factors influencing their decision to join the organization. The following statements were brought up in the interviews with some members of the organization. A female member, 21 years old, who joined the organization in 2015 stated:

> "[Dena] and I met a little while before we joined the Party. He was involved in the organization's underground activities in [Iran]. He was planning to cross the border and join the party here in Kurdistan. My family did not want us to marry, he had no job, [nothing] to start a family with… He asked me to go with him and to fight for the

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[229] Interview ID 017, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017
[230] Interview ID 028, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017

rights of Kurdish people, there was no return from that. He promised that we would be very happy there once we joined. So I joined the organization."[231]

A female member of the organization, who was 24 years old at the time of the interview and joined the organization in 2013 stated that her decision to join the organization was made under her close friends' influence:

> "My best friends, [*Zakki*] and [*Alia*], and I were classmates in high school. [*Zakki*]'s fiancé had already joined the organization in the mountains. All three of us used to distribute the party's leaflets in schools…we were very close. [*Zakki*] was planning to join her fiancé after graduation. She asked me and [Alia] to go with her. We were very close and were already fighting for the same cause. So we decided to join together. [*Zakki*] joined first, and then the two us followed through her contacts."[232]

4. Prison experience/being chased by authorities
    Another important factor affecting the decision to join the organization is fugitive status.

Young individuals, who come into contact with the underground branches of the organization on the Iranian side and commit themselves to the activities of the organization, are channeled and encouraged into street protests and other activities (such as activities on the organization's social media outlets, distributing pamphlets and newspapers, joining and organizing the KDPI events in safe houses, etc.) Involvement in Party-affiliated activities is associated with high risks of imprisonment and even execution (as one of my interviewees mentioned: "Being a Kurdish activist is doubly criminal: not only are you an activist but also you are a Kurd. So your punishments are harsher than a normal political activist's.").[233] In this respect, joining the organization manifests itself as an opportunity to escape from the risks of imprisonment and harsh punishments. There is another factor that often mediates this process, which I will discuss below.

A female member, 39 years old, described the influence of being sought by the security

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[231] Interview ID 043, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2018
[232] Interview ID 057, Sulaymaniyah (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018
[233] Interview ID 007, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), June 2017

forces in joining the organization as follows:

> "My dad [*killed in 1985*] and both of my brothers [*killed in 1987 and 1991*] were *Peshmerga* and fought for the party in the mountains. I also had some members of my extended family here in the organization. I was in the Urban Cell of the party in [our town]. In 1997, I was arrested and released six months later. Then arrested twice during protests between 1998 and 2004. They had very minor charges against me. I was released in 2006. Then I received another letter from the court to attend a trial for attending the Party's meetings and organizing Kurdish writing classes. I went into hiding and was told the police were looking for me. So I decided to cross the border and join the Party here."[234]

Moreover, individuals' "criminal" status as a result of their involvement in the

organization's activities in Iran may result in limited access to employment and education

opportunities, and this will in turn serve as an incentive to join the organization on the other side

of the border. For example, a 24-year-old male member of the organization who joined at the age

of 20 explained:

> "I was in police custody for about five months in 2012. I wasn't told why I was arrested, but I can make a guess… I had been very active on the Party's social media pages before the arrest… used to post pictures, comments, tagged people, you know that kind of stuff. I was finally released on bail because they had no proof, maybe only my IP address. Anyway, once I was released, my life was literally over. I took the university entry exam that same year and the year after but wasn't eligible to go due to my prison records. So I thought of joining the Party… I already had a friend there. What other options did I have?"[235]

5. Ethno-nationalist/Anti-regime grievances:

Another set of factors that affect individuals' decision to get involved in the organization-

affiliated activities and later to join the organization is ethno-nationalist sentiments and/or more

generally speaking, anti-regime grievances. In fact, a number of the interviewees expressed their

ethno-nationalist awareness and their desire to "fight for [their] cause"[236] as the main reason

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[234] Interview ID 039, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018
[235] Interview ID 048, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2018
[236] Interview ID 037, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018

influencing their decision to get engaged with the organization. However, as stated earlier, a combination of factors can and often do interact and go hand in hand to link and draw an individual to the organization. However, although it is not very common that one single factor explains an individual's engagement with the organization, often one factor plays a more decisive role in an individual's decision-making process. Many of the members who stated ethno-nationalism as their primary reason, had been experienced members of the underground Urban Cells of the organization prior to joining the organization's camps in Iraq (with at least two years of experience prior to joining) and, therefore, had pre-established ties with the organization. Moreover, these members have a higher education level (college or university) than the median education level of the sample (high school). Furthermore, they invariably expressed feelings of relative deprivation due their inability to find a job after graduation from college. Therefore, the members seem to invoke the "fight for [their] cause"[237] and ethno-nationalist grievances to express their dissatisfaction with their social problems or life conditions in their communities.

Over the course of the interviews, many members expressed their thoughts of the systematic exclusion of the Kurdish people in Iran and the oppressions their people have had to endure for many years. They have also expressed their firm belief in the organization as the defender of the rights of their people. Many explained that engagement with the organization and involvement in its activities is the only way to fight for their cause. Below, I provide a few examples:

A 43-year-old male member of the organization who has joined the organization in the 1990s stated:

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[237] Interview ID 002, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), June 2017

KDPI member: "I joined because I believed in the cause. We, the Kurds, have been oppressed for many years. It's time for us to fight back. We need more men and women to join the party. Two years before I joined the Party, I had plans to join PJAK [another active Kurdish organization in Kurdistan]. They're linked to the PKK and fight in Qandil Mountains… But after reading Dr. Ghassemlou's [former leader of the KDPI] books and after the Party's Rassan movement [the revitalization of the Party's armed and unarmed activities against the Iranian regime.], I decided to join the Party. I joined deliberately, because of my own sympathies."

Interviewer: "How did you get access to Dr. Ghassemlou's books in Iran?"

KDPI member: "I had contacts with some of the members of the organization in Iran. Underground publishing houses are all over the place in Iran and in Kurdistan. They publish and distribute these kinds of book. But I got them from a few friends who'd already been active. Not so difficult to find these books on the Internet these days."[238]

A 22-year old female member who joined the organization in 2015 explained:

"I decided to join because I wanted to serve my people. I joined to make sure that my people haven't died and suffered in vain. I already knew about the Party's history and activities. Our brothers and sisters are being sentenced to death every day in Iran. It's time for us to stand up and fight. There is an on-going war in the mountains of the Kurdistan region right now. Every day people are dying. Two years ago there was an explosion near one of our camps… I joined the organization deliberately. My aim is to ensure the establishment of a democratic and autonomous Kurdish region within Iran. I am here to pursue this goal."[239]

A forty-year-old female member stated:

"In my first year of college in Iran, I studied the ideology of the Party. It shook me- particularly the personality of Dr. Ghassemlou. It made me think. I realized that for a change to materialize, political activism was necessary. Therefore, I decided to join the Party. Gradually, my contacts with the Party members increased. I had one more year to finish college, but I decided to drop out and join the Party instead."[240]

A 28-year-old male member said:

"Before joining the Party, I was associated with a party-affiliated underground organization inside Iran. There was a public awareness campaign in our village. At that time, everybody was more or less supportive of the Party in the village and I thought why not me? I also started to attend their other activities and became an active member in 2012. The following year, I decided to cross the border with a friend of mine [who was killed in the mountains last year]."[241]

[238] Interview ID 021, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017
[239] Interview ID 050, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018
[240] Interview ID 051, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018
[241] Interview ID 002, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), June 2017

6. Unemployment and financial incentives

Unemployment and financial incentives were another set of factors expressed by some members. For some members, joining the party has been a "safe way out of [their] financial difficulties."[242] Over the past several decades, the Iranian government has failed to show a sustained commitment to economic development of Kurdistan and to meaningful social, political, and economic reforms in the region. Unemployment and absence of jobs have been amongst the most important factors influencing individuals' decision to join the organization. A 23-year-old male member of the organization stated:

> "I lived with my family in the village. We lost our land due to my father's debt to the bank. Shortly after, my dad died of a heart attack. I went to [*Kurdish town name*] to live with my uncle and send money back home. I worked in my uncle's shop. I became distressed due to the financial difficulties I was having. One of my friends suggested joining the organization. He said I'd earn a decent salary and would be able to get a refugee status in Germany or the U.S. I started my activities in our town a couple of years before joining the Party."[243]

Another male member, 26 years old, who joined the organization at the age of 23 explained:

> "My dad had a small grocery store in [*name of a Kurdish town*] and I used to work for him. Things weren't perfect, but still ... But suddenly he had to close it down because of some problems. We were totally broke. One of my friends whom I met in that period told me that if I joined the organization I would no longer have to worry about money, and that the organization would provide a stable source of income and that I would be free from financial concerns. At the time, it sounded very promising."[244]

7. Gaining position and status

Feelings of under-appreciation in family, school at work, or in society in general play an important role in engagement with the organization. In other words, for some the organization provides psychological gratification: companionship, excitement, and respect. Apart from the

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[242] Interview ID 010, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017
[243] Interview ID 029, Sulymaniyah (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017
[244] Interview ID 031, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2017

necessity to escape from desperate conditions at home, some young members decided to join the organization because of the prestige of wearing a uniform and for the feeling of doing something important. In this process, written and visual propaganda activities carried out by the organization constitute the main means for recruitment. The following quotes are taken from interviews with the members who mentioned this point. A 22-year-old male member of the organization who had joined at the age of 20 stated:

> "Three people in my town had joined PJAC and Komala. People used to talk about them all the time. I did not personally know them, but my friend knew one of them. They lived in the same neighbourhood. People in our community were talking about these guys as if they were heroes. I envied them. So, I also later decided to join. I had a friend who was connected to the KDPI, so I joined the Party. Since childhood, I always wanted to become someone important. Some friends told me that if I join the organization, I would be able to become a commander. I joined for that."[245]

Another male member, 19 years old, who had recently joined the organization explained:

> "When I was 15, I dropped out of high school and found a job in construction […] A friend, who also worked in construction in [*name of a Kurdish town*], showed me the Party's social media posts and the pictures of the *Peshmerga*. I was really impressed by the pictures I saw […] One of them was exactly my age standing next to the Party leaders in a Party uniform, with a gun. I really envied that person. I wanted to be like him."[246]

7.7.2   Organizational Factors

These are the factors that affect engagement with the organization as stated by members and leaders of the organization. Rebel organizations often determine the processes through which individuals can learn about the organizations and engage in their activities. In fact rebel organizations play a proactive role in the recruitment of their potential members and employ a set of recruitment strategies. Based on its members' and leaders' accounts, it can be discerned that the KDPI has three main methods of recruitment at its disposal: (1) Engaging young

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[245] Interview ID 047, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2018
[246] Interview ID 009, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017

individuals in its activities in Iranian Kurdistan; (2) Media effect; (3) Indoctrination in prison.

1. Engaging young individuals in its activities in Iranian Kurdistan

Although according to the organization leaders the age of recruitment to the party is 18 years old, the organization has a youth branch that is active in primary and high schools in Iranian Kurdistan. The organization's youth wing is called Democratic Youth Union of Iranian Kurdistan (Persian: *Ettehadie demokratike Javanane Kurdistane Iran*; Kurdish: *Yeketi lawani demokrati Kurdistani Iran*) and is commonly referred to as Lawan. As a leading member of the organization states:

> "Lawan is like a non-profit organization and the age of its members can be anywhere between 13 and 30. It is involved in a range of activities, especially in high schools in Iranian Kurdistan. Lawan is a secret organization, they don't have any actual offices in Iran but there are several methods through which it reaches out to the Kurdish youth: its magazine *Lawan*, its website, its Radio Station. It also has its own show called *Lawan* on the KDPI's satellite TV. The leaders of Lawan coordinate their activities with the KDPI and join us in the organization's activities. Because it's specifically dedicated to the youth, Lawan also runs some campaigns for social causes such as teaching people to stay away from drugs, and so on. So, they are committed to community service on top of all sorts of political activism."[247]

The youth branch of the organization initially attracts individuals, especially teenagers and young adults and involves them in its social events in Iran. These activities include:

> "…distributing flyers in Kurdish towns and villages to call for civil disobedience (for example not opening shops or not going to school on stated days) and street protests. For instance, in order to organize a strike a strike, a two-months preparation is required most of which has to do with public opinion and encouraging people to participate."[248]

The member continued:

> "Also, we distribute flyers when an activist or an ordinary Kurd is imprisoned or is going to be executed. Through flyers we invite people to participate in mass protests. Also, the party's opinion on different issues such as the central government's foreign policy can be distributed in this way. Lawan members' participation in this process is invaluable to us due to their expanded outreach in schools, colleges, etc."[249]

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[247] Interview ID 052, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018
[248] Interview ID 049, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018
[249] *ibid*

Involvement in the above-stated activities in Iran is extremely risky and can lead to arrest and imprisonment, immediate suspension from school, ban to enter college or have public sector jobs. In a sense, the individual will have no other option but to cross the border to be recruited by the organization. A high-ranking male member of the organization stated:

> "The individuals who are involved in our social events in Iran and are later imprisoned become the main recruitment base for us. We expose them to our history, the injustices our people have endured for years and years… from there, it's their choice and decision to join."[250]

A 29-year-old female member who joined the organization at the age of 18 explained:

> "I crossed the border with a friend of mine. We were both involved in Lawan, the organization's youth wing, in Iran when were in high school. Then the school found out and we were expelled … a year later, I got arrested for some other activities but was released after a few months. It was then that I decided to join the organization in Koya. I knew I had no future in Iran… so I decided to join … it was my only option … now I don't want to look back, I still think I made a good decision."[251]

2. Media effect:

The KDPI also uses various media outlets such as TV and Radio stations as well as its websites and social media accounts to disseminate its news, ideology, views on current events, and to invite people to take part in its activities. However, in recent years, a powerful signal interruption tool has been used by the Iranian government to make the organization's TV and radio signals unclear to the Kurdish audience. Therefore, the Internet and social media have increasingly become important tools of communication for the organization. Young individuals constitute the majority of the organization's followers on its social media accounts. As the following quote from the interviews suggest, these media do play an important role on individuals' decisions to join the organization.

A 25-year old female member who joined at the age of 22 explains:

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[250] Interview ID 023, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017
[251] Interview ID 046, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2018

"The organizations' posts on Facebook are full of pictures of the *Peshmerga* holding guns: if you hold a gun in your hands, you become a hero… it also constantly posts pictures and news of commemorative ceremonies, meetings … I particularly liked going through albums on the organization's pages and reading their stories… not only do these posts teach you about the organization's activities and Kurdish people's history, but also it makes you want to be a part of all this."[252]

Another member, male and 24 years old, states:

"When I was in high school, I began to sympathize with the organization with a number of my friends in school. I followed news about the organization on the Internet and watched its TV programmes. The pictures of the *Peshmerga* fighters really affected me. Watching news about them being martyred brought tears to my eyes. I participated in the anniversary events the party holds in our town, like the 17 August (Khomeini's declaration of holy war against Kurds). I learned about it all through the TV and social media. Later I became a party sympathizer and got more actively involved. That's how it began."[253]

Another female member, 22 years old, spoke about how such broadcasts had influenced her engagement with the organization as follows:

"In my second year in high-school, I began to visit the organization's websites with two of my friends. We were very impressed with the pictures of female guerrillas fighting for their people. I used to discuss these matters with my uncle's daughter, and eventually we decided to join the organization together. At first, we joined the youth wing, and a while later were recruited to the organization."[254]

3. Indoctrination in prison:

As stated earlier, the state punishes many Kurds for being KDPI accomplices without much proof. The incarcerations, therefore, are not exclusive to high profile Kurdish activists. Even high school students can be arrested for joining the organization's call for protests. Protestors and party sympathizers receive harsh punishments and are further marginalized and alienated from the state. Moreover, they incarcerated individuals face the challenge of finding a job or re-entering school when the get out of prison with a criminal record. Furthermore, the

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[252] Interview ID 016, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017
[253] Interview ID 024, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017
[254] Interview ID 022, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017

KDPI has an active (yet secret) presence in several prisons in Kurdistan, it also provides political and ideological training to prisoners, and encourages engagement in certain activities inside prison such as readings about Kurdish history and KDPI's role in the fight for Kurdish autonomy in Iran. A lot of the prisoners, in fact, leave prison more educated and enlightened about their identity because of the indoctrination process present inside prison. The indoctrination often occurs under the influence of more senior (in terms of time in prison).

A 26-year-old male member who spent 3.5 years in prison prior to joining the organization stated:

> "Prison was a great learning opportunity. It was like going to school. We would learn Kurdish writing and history in the morning, in the afternoon everybody would do their own reading on the movement, our rights as a nation, and the Party ideology. The books would circulate—mostly Dr. Ghassemlou's books... In order to learn about what it means to be a Kurd, and to learn about our history you should go to prison… I'd never learned that much outside prison…prison opened my eyes. I owe it all to that."[255]

A 32-year-old male member who had spent 5 years in prison before joining the organization at the age of 28 stated:

> "Through my uncle, I got in touch with the members of the organization. At that time the party used to assign us to meetings and demonstrations. I also attended the protest organized after a few members of KDPI and Komala were arrested and sentenced to death. After this protest, I was arrested… I was in prison for five years, and during this time I was encouraged to join the cadre of the organization. So, I joined the organization as soon as I got out of prison."[256]

Yet another male member, 31 years old, who joined the organization at the age of 27, pointed:

> "I had been caught because I distributed some pictures at a protest in [*name of a Kurdish town*] I was in prison for 1 year and 6 months. In the prison the party provided intensive political education. I immediately crossed the border to join the organization when I was released."[257]

7.7.2.1 Organizational Recruitment Process

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[255] Interview ID 058, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018
[256] Interview ID 020, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017
[257] Interview ID 035, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2017

As can be read through these lines, one of the most important means used by the organization for recruitment consists of the activities carried out by the organization itself, or organization-affiliated groups inside Iran. However, once potential members join the KDPI, they are not immediately recruited as member. The path to membership is in fact a time taking journey requiring and testing members' commitment and loyalty to the organization.

The organization leaders have developed three sets of authentication strategy in an attempt to avoid the infiltration of the Iranian regime and to identify and exclude individuals who are not sufficiently committed to the group's ideology and goals. First, the organization collects information about the individual's past behaviour. Collecting information requires groups to be embedded in particular communities from which the group can gather reliable information about the potential members. More specifically, in tight-knit Kurdish communities, the organization can rely upon preexisting links among the community members in order to receive information about the trustworthiness and reliability of a potential member and to authenticate the individual's loyalty claims. A member of the Central Committee of the KDPI explained:

> "Potentially everyone can become a member in our organization so long as they believe in and call for the rights of the Kurds and believe that the Kurds in Iran are suppressed. They must be on board with the party's position on autonomy for Kurdistan. However, once a potential member joins our organization, we will start an inquiry about that person. Our members in Iran will carry out a secret investigation on the individual. We check up their family backgrounds, etc. to avoid infiltration. In rural areas this can be done very easily as everyone knows everyone. In urban centers, our secret cells will do the job through their local connections."[258]

Second, another strategy utilized by the organization to verify the individual's reputation includes relying upon the accounts and credibility of the organization's current members. As explained before, individuals who join the organization are often involved in the secret cells of the organization in Iran and/or are connected to the organization bases in Iraqi Kurdistan through

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[258] Interview ID 026, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017

community ties. These linkages allow the organization to confirm the honesty and commitment

of new recruits. Another member of the organization's Central Committee stated:

> "We require that two members of the organization (either here or in Iran) must be well-acquainted with and recommend the person. We must make sure the person is truly committed to our cause and is no here for some short-term benefits. Also, we make sure that they are not addicted to drugs. That's why at least two members must vouch for them. We trust these members and we know they won't risk their reputation and position in the party. So, we trust their recommendations. Membership is not easy; there are filters which a person has to go through, and this process is long. We will keep the person under scrutiny for between six to twelve months."[259]

Lastly, the organization evaluates the potential member's level of commitment by

requiring the individual to go through a long period of training and indoctrination. This includes

both military theories as well as ideological and political training. Throughout this process, the

individual's performance will be closely monitored and screened by a recruitment committee.

Since this process is long and introduces a time delay (spent the in study and vetting process) in

access to gun and other benefits of being a member, it helps the organization to select highly

committed individuals.

A member of the organization's Political Bureau explained:

> "Once the members are sufficiently vetted, they don't immediately become *Peshmerga*. They are required to participate in a preparatory training on party discipline called "*Paziresh*" (which means "reception" in Kurdish language). The training will last for as long as necessary, depending on the participant's knowledge, experience and proven loyalty to the party."[260]

 A top-ranking member of the organization stated:

> "When a potential member joins us from Iran, he or she must attend the *Paziresh* training. The training is financially covered by our organization. After *Paziresh*, they can proceed to *Peshmerga* training. *Peshmerga* training teaches them some basic theoretical military knowledge. Moreover, the members are trained to live under harsh conditions. A big part of this process is also practical military training which will teach our forces to defend themselves against terrorist groups and the Iranian military. This takes about three to four months during which they are not allowed to leave the camp.

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[259] Interview ID 060, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018
[260] Interview ID 019, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017

After the *Peshmerga* training, the members take on different types of tasks within the organization according to their qualifications, i.e. administration, intelligence work and social work."[261]

Although the KDPI uses its training courses to prepare its forces for confrontations with the Iranian security forces, trainings are also used to shape individual behaviors and beliefs around a shared set of expectations and organizational norms. Moreover, political and social education (indoctrination) can be used to create a sense of mission amongst the members. Obviously, the organization's education material is deeply rooted in its social practices, beliefs, and ideological standpoints. In my field visits, I have observed and been invited to attend a number of these political training courses in which new and old members of the organization take part.

A leading member of the organization's Democratic Women's Union of Iranian Kurdistan explained:

"The *Peshmerga* training includes courses on the policies and ideologies of the party; democracy and federalism, women's rights, and human rights; staying away from drugs and terrorist groups; problem solving skills; Kurdish culture and language; international relations and laws; etc. The members must learn our codes of conduct and truly believe in what our party stands for and be ready to fight for it. Trainings also include social gatherings; members are expected to attend the party's social event during this period. There are also some sportive events and competitions during this period."[262]

Therefore, ethno-nationalist mobilization is a critical tool that enables the organization to recruit committed members. Through the use of this method of mobilization, the organization effectively screens out and filters non-committed or opportunistic joiners.

The training processes are costly and time taking for the organization and require the investment of material and non-material resources. This investment makes members' defection

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[261] Interview ID 041, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2018
[262] Interview ID 018, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017

costly for the organization. Therefore, the members' continued participation in these sessions are meant to keep them motivated by reinforcing a sense of purpose and duty in them. In addition, in order to "avoid defection and keep the morales high,"[263] the organization enters the members into a system of hierarchies and provides promotions to higher ranks to members who have demonstrated a progress in their skills and tasks. This hierarchical system creates a desire for higher status and prestige that can be used to shape the members' behaviour and performance and to avoid defection. Another member of the organization's Central Committee stated:

> "After the initial trainings and tests, members start as fourth rank cadres, and will usually be promoted to third rank cadres after three years of training and good performance in different activities. A third rank cadre will be given more serious responsibilities and task in different commissions. After another three years and several courses, the member may receive another promotion to second rank cadre, again depending on performance. Then after spending several more years here and contingent on the member's great contributions to the party, he or she can be promoted to a first rank member. First rank members can be elected as a member of the central committee. They can get re-elected every four years."[264]

7.8   Conclusion and Discussion

Considering individuals' participation in armed conflict, this study suggests that a combination of multiple factors often affected potential recruits' decision to join the KDPI. Along these lines, the following quote from an interview with a female member of the organization, who was 30 years old at the time of the interview, points to her multifaceted decision-making process:

> "I became involved in the cultural activities of a Kurdish association on university campus. It was a legal group on campus. I made close friends in the group. Everything seemed to be about Kurdish cultural activities but then after a while I was give the Party's flyer. I began to read and distribute the party's flyer. Later I became a Party sympathizer… I was arrested and released a few months after. I knew my academic life was over. I was a good student, but I knew I was a "starred student". ["Starred students" are students with a strong history of anti-government activism and are either

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[263] Interview ID 026, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017
[264] Interview ID 054, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018

expelled from university or not allowed to pursue higher education upon graduation.] That's what pushed me to join the Party."[265]

As these lines suggest, a number of issues contributed to her final decision to join the organization: her involvement with the organization-affiliated groups in Iran, her friendship ties, her experience as an organization sympathizer in Iran, and her time in prison which effectively ruined her chances of getting a job or higher education.

However, there are a few issues, with regard to the individuals' motivations that are worth noting: One recurrent view of the interviewees was that the organization ideology was a key driver for joining the organization. There existed a strong link between self-reported ethno-nationalist consciousness of the interviewees and their motivation to join the Party. However, it is unclear how much of this consciousness was gained prior to joining the KDPI and how much was the result of the organization's indoctrination after the individuals became members.

One study indicates the probability of occurrences of participation in conflict is higher amongst individuals with higher levels of educational attainment.[266] The low literacy rates of the KDPI members contradict this view.

Some of the interviewees suggested that having a family member or close relative who had been killed, tortured, or prosecuted influenced their decision to join the organization. Based on the existing literature, retaliation encourages individuals' decision to participate in violence. This also supports the findings in the existing literature that suggests grievances and government brutality trigger participation in rebellion.[267]

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[265] Interview ID 008, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017
[266] Gautam, S., Banskota, A., & Manchanda, R. (2001). Women, War, and Peace in South Asia: Beyond Victimhood to Agency.
[267] Leve, L. (2007). Failed development and rural revolution in Nepal: Rethinking subaltern consciousness and women's empowerment. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 127-172; Hossain, M., Siitonen, L., & Sharma, S. (2006). Development Co-operation for Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution. *Helsinki: University of Helsinki*; Pettigrew, J., Shneiderman, S., & Harper, I. (2004). Relationships, complicity and representation conducting research in Nepal during the Maoist insurgency; Parvati, C. (2003). Women's Participation in the People's War. Karki A. & Seddon D. *(eds)*; Gersony, R. (2003). *Sowing the wind: History and dynamics of the Maoist revolt in Nepal's Rapti Hills.* Mercy Corps International/USAID report.

Moreover, my study suggests that a number of members' pathways to the organization often started from their families and communities. Their ethno-nationalist consciousness was the result of interaction with members of the organizations' cells in Iran and/or their family members and friends who were sympathetic to the party and who may have had connections with the organization and activists. As my research participants reported, in many Iranian Kurdish villages and towns near the border, which are also the KDPI's strongholds, the entire community supported the organization and that that influenced their decision to join. Further, many Kurdish towns and villages have experienced years of armed conflict and brutal state repression during the Iran-Iraq War, which lead to strong public sentiments against the regime forces and paved the way for the organization's popularity and public support.

Furthermore, many of the members had a history of activism prior to joining the Party. They had joined clandestine support organizations (urban cells) of the KDPI such as its organizations for youth (Lawan), teachers, women, and labourers groups inside Iran. At some point, they came into contact with the KDPI members and took part in their activities and meetings. When the state became aware of this involvement or sympathies through its informers, it increased its repressive measures, despite the fact that most of them were organization "friends" or "sympathizers" and played no active role in the cells. The sympathizers were frequently arrested and harassed by the security forces. Due to constant police harassments, ongoing trials, and long prison terms, some saw no option other than crossing the border and joining the organization. However, since my study focuses on those who decided to join, it does not provide a comparison with individuals who found themselves in the same situations, and yet did not cross the border to join the organization.

The individual factors, however, are only one side of the story. The KDPI itself employs several recruitment strategies and methods. The results of my interviews and observations seem to suggest that the organization's consciousness-raising activities (such as underground Kurdish history and witting courses organized by the organization's cells) capitalize on political and social problems experienced by the Kurdish communities in Iran. The persistence of these problems and the lack of adequate policies to eradicate them, legitimizes and reinforces the organization's oppositional ideologies amongst the aggrieved people. In addition, the organization constantly holds commemorative ceremonies honoring its martyrs, as well as several anniversaries (examples) in Kurdish regions of Iran. These experiences play a crucial role in the process of the construction of a politicized Kurdish ethno-nationalist identity. Furthermore, the rituals of organizing elaborate funerals for *Peshmerga* fighters (martyrs) reinforce group cohesion, strengthens the community ties within the organization, and further deepens the members' loyalty and commitment to the organization's causes.

In addition, the role of the organization's media activities (social media, radio and TV broadcasting) cannot be overstated. These outlets constitute the most important social media outlets and TV/Radio channels are the most important elements of indoctrination in the region due to the nature of the news that they disseminate and the debates that arise from their contents. Associations established in city centers and towns as extensions of the organization are being used as recruitment centers. These associations, which are visited by young individuals, constitute a long-term source of recruitment for the organization. Therefore, both individual and organizational factors matter and interact.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of KDPI Members

Based on a random sample of 740 members

	Percentage (%)
Age at the Time of Enlisting	
17 and below	28
18-24	34
25-30	22
31-35	10
36 and above	6
Age at the Time of First Contact with the Organization	
17 and below	19.7
18-24	40.5
25-30	18.5
31-35	13.2
36 and above	8.1
Gender	
Male	62.3
Female	37.7
Marital Status	
Single (including divorced and widowed)	60.9
Married	39.1
Level of Education	
Completed Primary School	35.7
Completed High School	53.8
University Degree	10.5
Employment Status prior to Enlisting	
Unemployed	57.6
Employed in Private Sector	30.4
Employed in Public Sector	12
At least one family member in the organization	
Yes	42.2
No	57.8
A family member died in the organization	
Yes	21.4
No	79.6
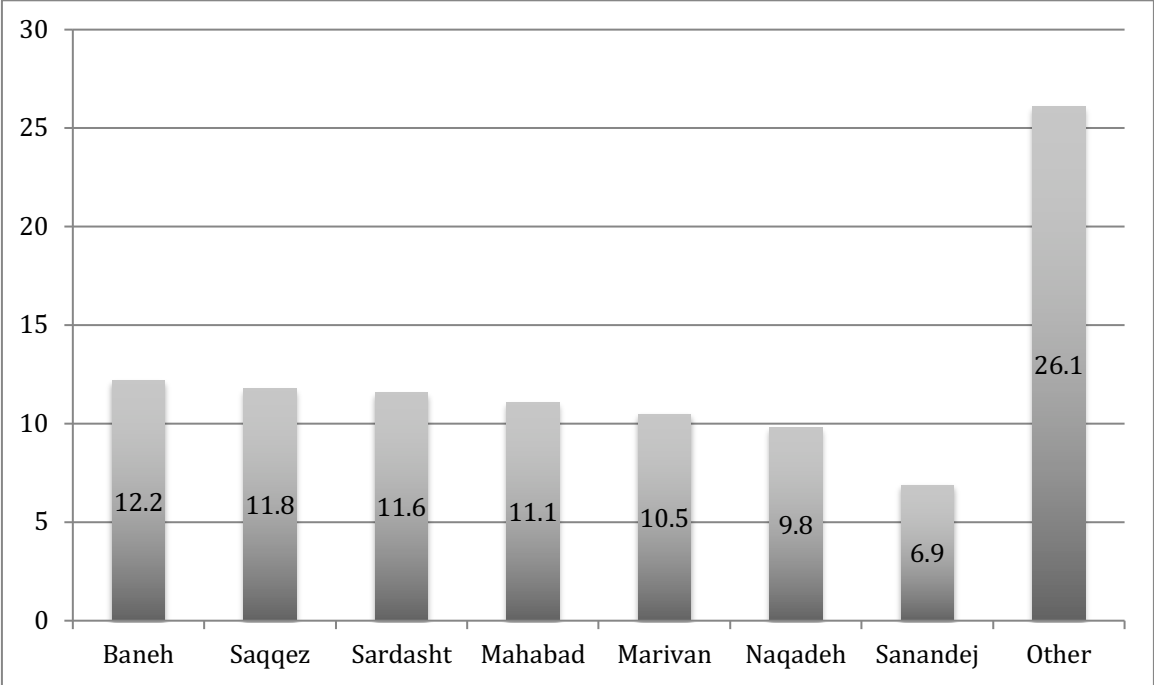
Figure 2: Geographic Origins of KDPI Members

Numbers are in percentage and based on a random sample of 740 profiles.

8   ETHNO-NATIONALISM AND REGIONAL GEOPOLITICS: THE CASE OF THE KURDS

8.1   Introduction

The Kurdish issues have for a long time been associated with the geopolitical stability and security of the Middle East and have gone beyond the geographic limits the countries dealing with their respective Kurdish populations. The Kurds who have been caught amongst geopolitically competing states of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria have often been used as pawns by these regional powers that transcribe the borders of Kurdistan. The importance of the Kurdish issue, that is intrastate (Kurdish problem), or inter-state (Kurdish question) challenges posed by Kurdish ethno-nationalist movements cannot be overstated. The Kurdish issues have indeed been one of the most important and persistent factors shaping the relationships and foreign policies of the four states transcribing the Kurdistan borders.

Theoretically speaking, the type of relationship that exists among the states of the region with Kurdish populations can be described as omni-balancing, a theory that allows for a focus on internal as well as external threats to a regime. In more general terms, a relationship characterized by omni-balancing is the one in which leaders of the states will cooperate with their rival states on certain issues in order to focus their resources on threats that they see as more challenging.[268] Therefore, these states will make individual alignment decisions based on whatever threat they view as most salient, be it internal or external. This allows for states such as Iran, Iraq, and Turkey, which have historically been hostile towards each other, to cooperate on certain issues, while still competing in others. Even since before the inception of modern nation-

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[268] David, S. R. (1991). Explaining third world alignment. *World Politics*, *43* (2), 233-256.

states, the Kurdish question played a crucial role in Turko-Iranian relations, often being seen as the "dominant factor during the imperial phase of Turkish-Iranian relations from 1501–1925."[269] At times, the Kurdish question has also been one of the security issues that have compelled historically competing and belligerent states (that is Iran, Iraq, Turkey) to cooperate and set aside their differences and mutual distrust to reach a common policy in order to contain Kurdish ethno-nationalist demands. Occasional cooperation, however, has not discouraged these countries from meddling into the Kurdish problems of their neighbours as a means to fuel internal conflict and instability of their rival states. These phases of cooperation and manipulation point to the fact that these regional powers continue to perceive the Kurdish nationalist movements as a direct challenge to their internal and regional stability.

Kurdish political organizations in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey have, at one time or another, relied upon the external support of a neighbouring state, and consequently, most have become highly dependent on it, to the extent that their major mobilizing decisions were highly influenced by their foreign sponsors. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that geopolitical factors have played a crucial role in shaping Kurdish ethno-nationalist movements. Relying on archival documents, in-depth interviews with experts, and Kurdish organizational elites, I argue that the prevalent state policy motivated by geostrategic calculations has encouraged regional powers to use the Kurds against each other. This has added to the divisiveness amongst the Kurds and has served as an impediment to the formation of a coherent and unitary Kurdish front. More specifically, the Iranian Kurds, have often found themselves isolated from and distrustful of Iraqi Kurds who collaborated with the Iranian government during the civil conflicts of the 1980s to bring the Iranian Kurdish territories under the control of the central state. Iranian Kurds "felt

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[269] Ciment, J. (1996). *The Kurds: State and Minority in Turkey, Iraq, and Iran*. Facts on file.

betrayed by those they had historically considered their brothers and allies."[270]

In the following sections, I look at the historical role the Kurdish question, viewed by national governments are a security challenge, has played in the relationships among three major actors: Iran, Turkey, and Iraq. I will then turn to the case of Iranian Kurds to demonstrate the effects of these countries' regional Kurdish policies on the Iranian Kurds' cross-border alliances with other Kurdish groups.

I draw upon three types of primary sources: news sources (Persian and English), interviews, memoires (and autobiographies in Persian), declassified archival documents (Iranian Foreign Ministry, SAVAK, etc. in Persian and English) as well as a host of secondary sources (history books, articles).

First, archival documents: I collected and analyzed CIA documents, Foreign Office (UK) documents, and Iranian intelligence documents (SAVAK[271] documents, archives published by Iran's ministries of Foreign Affairs and Intelligence) These print data provide rich information on the historical context and the geopolitical assessments discussed below.

Second, semi-structured in-depth interviews: I interviewed 8 top-ranking leaders of the three Iranian Kurdish organizations: KDPI (6 members), Komala (2 members), and a KRG government representatives. These interviews were carried out during my field trips to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in summer 2017 and summer 2018. The KDPI and Komala members have been involved with the activities and major decision making of their organizations since mid-1970s and provided invaluable accounts of their organizations' histories as well as the impacts of the geopolitical dynamics on their approaches towards other Kurdish organizations in the region. To complement these accounts, I also consulted regional experts, Kurdish historians

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[270] Interview ID 038, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2017.
[271] National Organization for Security and Intelligence or SAVAK was a secret police and intelligence agency during the Pahlavi Reign in Iran.

(3 interviews) and former government officials from Iran's Ministries of Internal Affairs and Foreign Affairs. All of these interviews were carried out during my field trip to Iran between November and December 2016.

Third, additionally, I draw upon newspaper articles and journalistic reports published in Iranian newspapers, as well as the New York Times, The Washington Post, etc. to obtain data on the historical events discussed below.

Lastly, I also use published biographies and memoires written by prominent figures of the Iranian Kurdish organizations (such as Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, Abdullah Hassanzadeh, and Abdullah Golparian). These sources are invaluable to this research as they provide first-hand information on the party leaders' account of the history of their organizations, regional dynamics,and the impact of such dynamics on their organizational policies over time.

8.2   Iran and Turkey

Although historically Turko-Iranian relationship has been of very complex and hostile nature, since the end of the First World War, the two states have engaged in phases of cooperation to contain Kurdish ethno-nationalist uprisings. This cooperation has been expressed through the formulation of treaties. In the 1920s, Iran's concern over the rise of Kurdish nationalist insurgencies in the region resulted in cross-border cooperation between Iran and Turkey against the Kurds. The treaties in this period did not last long and the diplomatic relations between the two countries soured over an incident in their borders. Nor did the treaties stop the Kurds from crossing the borders freely throughout the 1920s. The inability of the two countries to contain the Kurdish movements, which constantly fueled distrust and accusations between the two, led Turkey to expel the Iranian ambassador from Turkey in 1927 over allegations of Iranian

support of the Turkish Kurds.[272] The Turks accused Iran of using the Kurdish questions in

Turkey and playing the "Kurdish card" in order to destabilize Turkey. In this way, Turkey

believed, Iran would continue to weaken Turkey by keeping it engaged with its internal

instability and will maintain the upper hand in the territorial disputes the two states were having

at the time.

It was after the Ararat rebellion in Turkey that the two states signed the Turko-Iran

Frontier Treaty in 1932.[273] The main purpose of this treaty was to place the eastern slopes of

Mount Ararat (which was on the Iranian side) under Turkish control, as Kurdish rebels were

using this area as a safe haven to mobilize against the Turkish state.[274] In July 1937 another

major treaty was signed among Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan. The main focus of this non-

aggression treaty known as the "Treaty of Sa'adabad" was the issues of the Kurds, as four of the

ten Articles the states (excluding Afghanistan who did not have a Kurdish population) agreed

upon pointed to the need for cooperation among the countries to contain the Kurdish uprisings.[275]

Hence, from the early 1920s (the formation of the Turkish Republic in 1923) throughout

the decades leading up to the Iranian revolution the two states showed signs of cooperation

against the Kurds. The cooperation primarily occurred during the heightened phases of Kurdish

insurgency, and as a result of the two countries' fear of the implications an independent and

autonomous Kurdish state would have to their own territorial integrity and security. Below, I

specifically focus on the Turko-Iranian relations from the Iranian Revolution in 1979 onward to

illustrate the shifts in the nature of this relationship as both countries pursued an interest in the

Kurdish questions in their relations. Overall, the Iran-Turkey relations can be divided into three

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[272] Koohi-Kamali, F. (2003). The Political Development of the Kurds in Iran: Pastoral Nationalism. Springer. p. 73.
[273] Olson, R. W. (1998). The Kurdish question and Turkish-Iranian relations: Kurdish studies series.
[274] *Ibid.*
[275] *ibid.*

stages of contention, convergence, and competition:

Contention: Since the early 1980s to the early 2000s, the Kurdish issues informed the Turko-Iranian relations in three ways: First, in the early 1980s, the Iranian Kurdish organizations (KDPI and Komala) and some non-Kurdish Iranian opposition forces formed armed groups and settled in the Iran-Turkey border. Iran blamed Turkey for harbouring armed Kurdish groups, arguing this reinforced instability in the Kurdish regions of northwestern Iran as Iranian Kurdish opposition groups used their bases on the Turkish side to carry out attacks inside Iran. However, due to Iran's widespread offences against these forces resulting in their gradual diminution, these groups reportedly left Turkey in the mid-1990s for northern Iraq and settled in Iraqi Kurdistan.[276] Therefore, as of mid-1190s, the Iranian Kurdish issue did not play a significant role in the two countries' interactions.

Second, yet another Kurdish issue that influenced relations between the two states in the 1980s relates to the establishment and growth of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey and Turkey's desire to contain the group's activities in its soil. The PKK initiated a phase of overt guerrilla warfare against the Turkish state in 1984. The ongoing fight caused Turkey to take perceive the Kurdish issue as a matter of internal security. Turkey was also concerned with the threat of outside support for the PKK, and its foreign policy approach to Iran (and Syria) reflected this. However, Iran vehemently denied Turkey's allegations, claiming it had no interest in supporting the PKK, as stated by a former official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

> "There were no serious grounds for such allegations. Iran, right after the revolution, had no ideological affinity with the PKK which identified as a Marxist group. The ideological divide was so serious, that even Iran's political and ideological rivalry with Kemalist Turkey couldn't have motivated such an alliance. Iran was actually hoping to find support amongst the Alevi and Islamist populations in Turkey, and an alliance with a Marxist Kurdish organization would have created the opposite impact amongst

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[276] Ali Babaei, G. (1996). Tarikh Siasat Khareji Iran. [The History of Iranian Foreign Policy], pp. 383-390.

the Turks."[277]

From 1984, the PKK moved some of its military bases to the mountainous areas on Iranian side of the border. Turkey continued to pressure Iran to cease its support for the PKK (in the form of the provision of military aid and territory for PKK bases) and to help Turkey in its negotiations with PKK supporters, that is Syria and the Iraqi Kurdish organizations the PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan), the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party).[278] Relying on its cooperation protocol with the KDP, which had been signed in Damascus in 1983, the PKK established several camps in the north of Iraq. Because of the KDP-Iranian alliance at the time, Turkey viewed the KDP-PKK agreement as equal to tacit Iranian support for the PKK.[279] Moreover, the PKK increased its presence in the Western Azerbaijan province of Iran, using the mountainous geography of the Turkish-Iranian border to its benefit through the mid-1980s. In this period, the Turkish media highlighted the PKK's relations with Iran, and Turkish politicians openly condemned Iran for supporting PKK.)[280]

Therefore, the PKK emerged as an important factor informing Turko-Iranian relations. The two countries' contentious exchanges of this issue (characterized by Turkey's allegation and Iran's denial) culminated in a request from Turkey to follow PKK militants inside Iranian territories. Although Iran rejected the request, the two countries signed a security agreement in November 1984 based on which the two signatories would prevent the activities of any group that attempted to undermine the security of the other. However, the agreement did not put an end to the distrust and allegations between the two countries.[281] A new security agreement was signed in September 1992 which reinforced the previous one and required the signatories to

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[277] Interview ID I013, Tehran (Iran), November 2016.
[278] Office of Kurdistan Governor (1986). Mas'aleh Kord dar Aragh [Kurdish Issues in Iraq], Sanandaj, p. 46.
[279] Ali Babaei, G. (1996).
[280] *ibid,* p.388.
[281] Office of Kurdistan Governor (1986), p.46.

prevent illegal border crossings. Following this agreement, security committees were established

to allow for closer communications over security issues amongst top-ranking officials from both

sides. Another added point in this agreement was Iran's request that the KDP limits the PKK-

related activities in northern Kurdistan of Iraq.[282] However, as a former official (Iran's Ministry

of Foreign Affairs) stated in an interview:

> "[Iran] was not very keen on supporting the PKK or allowing much room for the
> organization's activities inside [its] border. But at the same time it was not able or
> willing to provide a strong guarantee to Turkey. Also, Tehran was not very happy
> about Turkey's operations against its ally [the KDP] in northern Iraq. I think, since
> because of the KDP-Iran and KDP-PKK alliances, Turkey considered Iran an ally to
> the PKK by extension. Besides, Iran needed to use the PKK card [against Turkey] to
> strengthen its influence in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq."[283]

Despite the two agreements, the accusations and denials continued throughout the 1990s.

Turkey continued to accuse Iran of closing its eyes to the PKK camps inside its territories and of

aiding the organization in its cross-border operations. Even high-level security officials publicly

claimed that Iran was "using terrorism for its political ends" against Turkey and was providing

logistical support to the PKK … in order to disrupt the order in Turkey."[284] Ankara alleged that

the PKK had established several military bases and camps on the Iranian side of the Shahidan

Mountains and had deployed about hundreds of fighters in the camps.[285] The Turkish army's

planned attacks on the PKK camps inside Iranian territory was prevented by Turkey's then-

President Süleyman Demirel in order to avoid further tensions with Iran.[286] The PKK leader

Abdullah Öcalan was arrested in February 1999. During his trial, Öcalan claimed that a number

of states in the region, including Iran, had been providing aid to his organization.[287] In response

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[282] *ibid.*
[283] Interview ID I017, Tehran (Iran), November 2016.
[284] Agence France Presse (1997, April 29) cited in Gunter, M. M. (1998). Turkey and Iran face off in Kurdistan. *Middle East Quarterly*.
[285] Ali Babaei, G. (1996), p. 388.
[286] Olson, R. W. (2000).
[287] *ibid.*

to such accusations,

> "Iran used its influence over the PUK to relocate and settle the PKK forces in the Qandil Mountains, north of the Sulaymaniah province which was under the PUK control. Iran also arrested fourteen PKK fighters in its territories and turned them over to Turkey."[288]

Along the same lines, the Turko-Iranian relations in this period were also informed by Turkey's strikes against the PKK that occasionally caused damages to civilians and military facilities inside Iranian territories. For instance, the bombing of the PKK's Zhaleh camp near the Iranian border resulted in twenty casualties on the Iranian side.[289] In another instance, in June 1996, as a result of Turkey's attack on PKK camps more than twenty Iranians in the border village of Silvaneh were killed or injured.[290] Yet in another case in June 1999, a Turkish aircraft violated Iranian airspace and bombed a military post close to Piranshahr resulting in seven casualties. The incident was followed by a declaration of retaliation issued by Iran's Chief of the Armed Forces, and the arrest of two Turkish soldiers.[291] The two countries reconciled later in August 1999.[292]

Third, Iran and Turkey's contentious relations were also reinforced over their competitions in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Both Iran and Turkey had similar concerns: while Iran was concerned about the settlement of the KDPI, Komala and other Iranian Kurdish organizations in the KRI, Turkey's concerns related to the settlement of the PKK bases in the region, which since 1980s has become a safe haven for the militant Kurdish organizations'

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[288] Interview ID I017, Tehran (Iran), November 2016.

[289] US Cluster Bombs for Turkey? (1994, December) Human Rights Watch. Vol. 6, No. 19. Retrieved from https://www.hrw.org/reports/1994/turkey2/

[290] Twing, S. L. (1996, August-September), Iran threatens Turkey after Military Incursion Kills Six, *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs.* Retrieved from: https://www.wrmea.org/1996-august-september/issues-in-the-news.html ; also see *Hamshahri* (1999, July 8), p.3

[291] Office of Kurdistan Governor (1986), pp. 36-37.

[292] Iran Foreign Ministry Office (2004). Barresi amalkard siasat khareji jomhouri eslami dar dolat Khatami [An Analysis of the Islamic Republic's Foreign Policies under Khatami Administration], pp. 36-37; Also see Sinkaya, B. (2005). Turkey-Iran Relations in the 1990s and the Role of Ideology. *Perception Journal of International Affairs*, *10*(1), 1-16; also in *Ettela'at*, (1997, December 16). p. 7.

armed activities against their respective states.[293] In May 1983, for instance, Turkish armed

forces initiated a prolonged attacked on the PKK bases in KRI with the support of the Iraqi

government.[294] Moreover, both Iran and Turkey approached the KDP and PUK (two major

Kurdish parties in Iraq that share control over KRI) and offered them financial, military, and

political support to mobilize their forces against the PKK and Iranian Kurdish organizations.[295]

These strategic alliances, as will be explained below, not only shaped each country's relations

with the Iraqi Kurdish parties, but also had important implications for the trajectory of Kurdish

ethno-nationalist movements of Iran.

As of 1983, Turkey also sent its armed forces to the KRI to push back PKK militants.

Much to Iran's dismay, these military activities were permitted by an agreement between Turkey

and Iraq, whereby Turkish forces could carry out military operations against PKK camps in Iraqi

Kurdistan.

Since most Turkish military operations inside Iraq took place within the territories

controlled by the KDP, a long-time ally of Iran, Iran perceived the move as a threat to its

geopolitical interests in the region. Iran's spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

condemned Turkey's military strikes, calling them violation of the territorial integrity of Iraq.

The Foreign Minister of Iran, Ali Akbar Velayati, later expressed Iran's concerns and discontent

over Turkish military activities in KRI to his counterpart in Istanbul.[296]

In addition to its military strikes against PKK, Turkey approached the Iraqi Kurds in an

attempt to contain PKK activities in northern Iraq. The KDP-PKK relations were ultimately

terminated by the KDP. In the 1990s, the KDP, having formed an alliance with Saddam, began to

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[293] Office of Kurdistan Governor (1986), p.46.

[294] Olson, R. (2000). Turkey-Iran relations, 1997 to 2000: The Kurdish and Islamist questions. *Third World Quarterly*, *21*(5), 871-890, p.53.
[295] Office of Kurdistan Governor (1986), p.25.
[296] Iran Foreign Ministry Office (2004), p. 85.

distance itself from Iran. These shifts in alliances eventually strengthened the KDP's positions vis-à-vis the PUK. With the consolidation of the KDP control over KRI, Iraqi oil was now more easily exported to Turkey through the Kikuk-Iskenderun oil pipelines. Moreover, in exchange for Turkey's support, the Barzanis (KDP) agreed to fight PKK forces in KRI.

The rapprochement between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds increased particularly after the first Gulf War (1991). Following the defeat of the Iraqi army by a US-led international coalition, the Iraqi Kurds mobilized against Saddam. However, the suppression of the insurgency followed by massacres of Kurdish populations led to the displacement of over one million Iraqi Kurds fleeing to Iran and Turkey. Under the political and economic pressure posed by the Kurdish refugees, Turkey supported the UN Security Council's Resolution 688, and cooperated in the Operation Provide Comfort, the US military effort to defend the Kurds. Moreover, Turkey established a close relationship with both KDP and PUK, allowing them to open offices in Ankara and providing the KDP and PUK leaders with diplomatic passports to facilitate their international travels.[297]

Despite Turkish opposition to the establishment of an autonomous Kurdistan in Iraq, the post-Gulf War events including Operation Provide Comfort, the compromise between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurdish leaders, rounds of negotiations between the Iraqi Kurdish leaders and Saddam followed by the withdrawal of the Iraqi forces from KRI in fact paved the way for the establishment of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). However, both Iran and Turkey felt uneasy about the emergence of an independent Kurdish state in the region and its implication for their own security and stability. After the parliamentary elections of May1992 and the formation of the KRG, the Foreign Ministry of Iran announced its "outright and clear opposition to the

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[297] Karami, J. (2009, October 4). Siasat Iran dar ghebal Kordestan Aragh [Iran's Policies towards Iradi Kurdistan]. Oloum and Ma'aref Research Center, p. 9.

disintegration of Iraq and the establishment of an independent state in the region."[298] Iran's

position was motivated by its concern over an independent Kurdish state turning into a new

Israeli and American sphere of influence close to its borders on the one hand,[299] and the concerns

for the spillover effect of Kurdish independence in Iraq on its own Kurdish question, on the

other:

> "Our position towards the future of Iraq cannot be separate from our concerns for [our] security. [Iran] does not intend to interfere in Iraq's internal affairs, [however], in the event of any incident in our neighbouring country, we must think of our own security."[300]

> Throughout the 1990s, Iran and Turkey competed for influence over KRG and continued

their de facto relationships with Iraqi Kurdish parties. Iran had two concerns. First,

> "Iran was mainly concerned about the upsurge in a Turkish nationalist discourse promoting the Turkish claims on the former Ottoman province of Mosul which included the oil-rich region of Kirkuk. Equally disturbing to Iran was the increasingly close relationships between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdish parties which would decrease the Iraqi Kurds' dependence on Iran."[301]

> For example, in May 1995, Turkey's President Süleyman Demirel proposed a change in

Turkey's border with Iraq in favor of Turkey, causing immediate and sharp criticisms from Iran

and neighbouring Arab countries.[302]

In response:

> "Tehran established Nasr organization, under close supervision of Iran's Supreme Leader himself, to coordinate its political, military, and security activities in KRG. This was the first time Tehran was establishing a formal relation, not a de facto one, with the KRI."[303]

> However, with the outbreak of the Kurdish civil war (between the KDP- and PUK-

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[298] *Salam* (1992, November 15), p. 15.
    1   [299] *Hersh, S. (2004, June 28) Plan B: As June 30th approaches, Israel looks to the Kurds.* The *New Yorker. Retrieved from:*
    2   https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2004/06/28/plan-b-2
[300] Sajjadpour, K. (2002), Didgah-ha va Tahlilha [Opinions and Analyses], No. 162. p. 11.
[301] Interview ID I023, Tehran (Iran), December 2016.
[302] Pipes, D. (1995, September) Hot Spot: Turkey, Iraq, and Mosul, *Middle East Quarterly*. pp. 65-68.
[303] Interview ID I020, Tehran (Iran), December 2016.

controlled areas) in 1994, the KDP-Iran alliance broke apart. The KDP condemned Tehran for

interfering in Iraq's affairs by actively supporting the PUK. In turn, Iran and the PUK criticized

the KDP for its cooperation with Turkey. During the civil war in KRI, the two Kurdish parties

turned into proxies of Turkey and Iran. KDP, once again, approached Saddam for his support in

the war and, with the help of the Iraqi army, took temporary control of the KRI.[304]

Turkey and the United States moved to hold several mediation meetings to reach a

ceasefire between the warring Kurdish parties in Iraq. Moreover, Turkey increased its presence

in the KRI further marginalizing Iran and increasing its suspicions about the Turkish intention to

control the region. In addition, the US-supported Turko-Israeli relations in 1990s added to Iran's

concerns and anxiety about the role of Turkey in KRI.[305] Therefore, in a balancing attempt

against the Turkish influence, Iran allied with and increased its military and political aid to the

PUK and deployed about 5,000 Iraqi fighters (members of Badr Forces) near Sulaymaniya in

November 1995. It is worth noting that the Badr Forces are the military arm of the Supreme

Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SAIRI).

A second consideration that motivated Iran's alliance with PUK was the former's concerns

over its own Kurdish question. In August 1996 and following an agreement between Iran and the

PUK, Tehran sent 2-3,000 troops to attack the KDPI (Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran)

headquarters located near the town of Koya Sanjaq, 100 kilometers inside the KRI border. Under

Iranian influence, the KDPI's radio station was closed down and its broadcasts were announced

illegal by the PUK.[306] These coordinated actions of Iran and the PUK finally forced the KDPI

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[304] Isa S, (1999) *Bohran afarini abar ghodratha dar Kordestan-e Aragh* [Superpowers Causing Crisis in KRI] Tehran: Tavakkoli, p.203.
[305] Sariolghalam, M. (2001, Winter). Israeli-Turkish Military Cooperation: Iranian Perceptions and Responses. J*ournal of Political and Military Sociology*, p.29; Aras, B. (2000) Turkish-Israeli-Iranian relations in the 90s: Impact on the Middle East, *Middle East Policy*, 7(3), pp. 151–64.
[306] Aykan, M. (1996). Turkish Perspectives on Turkish-US Relations concerning Persian Gulf Security in the Post-Cold War Era: 1989-1995. *Middle East Journal, 50*(3), 344-358.

and Komala to cease their armed operations inside Iran.[307] To balance against the KDP, Iran also supported the Kurdish Hezbollah, a Kurdish opposition group that was active in the KDP-controlled regions of KRI.[308] The Iran-PUK cooperation made KDP leaders anxious, blaming Iran for stepping up its interventions and calling on Turkey for help.[309]

In response, Turkish officials, who continued to see Iran complicit in the PKK presence on Iranian borders and were alarmed over Iran-PUK relations, regarded expanded Iranian influence a threat to its relations with Baghdad. In September 1996, Ankara announced its intention to increase it presence in KRI and to establish a security zone stretching several kilometers into Iraqi territory for the purpose of pursuing PKK militants.[310] Iran angrily condemned the move seeing it the result of an "expansionist power lust of some power factions in Turkey."[311]

Therefore, in the period between 1991 to the early 2000s, both Iraqi Kurdish parties became proxies of their Iranian and Turkish allies. The presence of outside interference had the immediate consequence of spiral of hostilities between the two Iraqi Kurdish parties and their loss of control over the outcome of the civil war.

Convergence: The American invasion of Iraq in 2003 once again changed the geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East, creating new security concerns for both Iran and Turkey. The converging interests of the two countries caused by their uncertainties over the United States' vision for the future of Iraq pushed Tehran and Ankara to find common grounds for cooperation. Both Iran and Turkey anxiously anticipated the possibility of the formation of an independent Kurdish state which they considered a threat to their geopolitical security and internal stability

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[307] *Negin Iran.* (1985, Spring), p.25.
[308] Iran Foreign Ministry Office (2004), p.83.
[309] KDP Press Release (1996, October 23), Iran Has Stepped Up Its Intervention in Iraqi Kurdistan To Kill US Peace Initiative, cited in Gunter M. M. (1998).
[310] Iran Foreign Ministry Office (2004), p.83.
[311] Editorial in *Jomhouri-e Eslami* (Tehran) (1997, January 5), cited in Gunter M. M. (1998).

(due to the effects of Kurdish irredentism on their own Kurdish populations). The Iraqi Kurdish leaders sent delegations to Turkey and Iran to reassure that: "We have resigned ourselves to the land geography has given us," said Bahram Saleh, the prime minister of PUK. But, he added, "military intervention would only complicate matters. If one neighbour gets into Iraq, the others will too, and it will be a mess."[312]

Despite the two countries' converging interests, Ankara and Tehran's first steps towards the Iraqi Kurds post-US invasion pointed to contrasting policies. On the one hand, despite its close relations with the KDP, Turkey declared a federal regime and the formalization of the KRG in Iraq would be its red line. Although the Iraqi constitution of 2005 recognized the KRG as a federal region, Turkey refused to recognize the legitimacy of the KRG. On the other hand, Tehran, while opposing the formation of an independent Kurdistan,

> "[supported] the idea of federalism in Iraq hoping to mediate an alliance between its fellow Iraqi Shi'as in southern Iraq and the Iraqi Kurds to Iran's geopolitical advantage. [Therefore,] Iran expanded its formal relations with the KRG and opened a consulate in Erbil, and one in Sulaymaniyah. [Iran-KRG] Relations progressed from de facto to more formalized exchanges."[313]

The KRG also opened an office in Tehran in 2007 in an attempt to formalize its relations with Iran.[314] However, a number of shared concerns pushed the two countries towards cooperation: First, post-Iraq invasion, the presence of American forces in Iraq forced Iran and Iraq to limit their intervention and intelligence activities in KRI. In July 2003, American troops arrested a unit of the Turkish Special Forces in Sulaymaniyah.[315] In 2007, Americans arrested

[312] Turkey, Iraqi Kurds and Iran: The battle for northern Iraq (2003, May 20). *The Economist*. Retrieved from https://www.economist.com/special-report/2003/03/20/the-battle-for-northern-iraq
[313] Interview ID I020, Tehran (Iran), December 2016; also see Also see: Iran Reopens 2 Consulates in Iraq. (2007, July 11) *Payvand*. Retrieved from: http://www.payvand.com/news/07/nov/1056.html
[314] Sinkaya, B. (2015, July 4) Iran-KRG Relations Within The Grip Of Distrust. *ORSAM*, 14 July 2015. Retrieved from: https://orsam.org.tr/en/iran-krg-relations-within-the-grip-of-distrust/
[315] Howard, M & Goldenberg, S. (2003, July 8). US arrest of soldiers infuriates Turkey. *The Guardian.* Retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jul/08/turkey.michaelhoward

five Iranian intelligence forces at the Iranian consulate in Erbil.[316] Therefore,

> "The US presence supported the KRG independence. For the first time, PUK and KDP were—to some extent—free from Iranian and Turkish interference, something they always considered detrimental to their autonomy but never had the guts to stand up against. With American presence, [the Kurdish leaders] found the confidence to stand up against Iran and Turkey's meddling."[317]

Second,

> "The KRG reached out to Kurdish opposition forces of Iran and Turkey and hosted several conferences on the Kurdish questions in the Middle East. It also became a center of Kurdish nationalist publications, and broadcasting addressing the future of the Kurds in the two countries. This was something neither country could stand."[318]

Third,

> "[Another] shared concern was that given the new limits on the Iranian and Turkish military actions in KRI, the region turned into a safe haven for militant Kurdish organizations (the PKK and PJAK) which had military bases in the Qandil Mountains."[319]

Finally, the United States' unwillingness to contain the PKK and PJAK activities in KRI, led to Turko-Iranian cooperation over the issue. In July 2004, Turkey and Iran signed a security agreement that declared the PKK a terrorist organization.[320] Iran has also accused the United States of actively supporting the PKK and PJAK, although American officials vehemently deny these claims.[321] Therefore, Iran and Turkey stepped up their security cooperation by sharing intelligence, and coordinated their strikes and military operations against the PKK and PJAK bases in the Qandil Mountains. [322]

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[316] Wright, R. (2007, June 21). U.S. Refuses to Free 5 Captured Iranians Until at Least October. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/20/AR2007062001456.html

[317] Interview ID 061, Erbil (Kurdistan egion of Iraq), August 2018.

[318] Interview ID 042, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2018.

[319] Interview ID I025, Tehran (Iran), December 2016.

[320] Larabee, F. S. (207, July-August) Turkey Rediscovers the Middle East. *Foreign Affairs*. Retrieved from: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2007-07-01/turkey-rediscovers-middle-east

[321] Moubayed, S. (2006, May 13). Iran and Turkey fire salvo over Iraq. *Asia Times*. Retrieved from: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/HE13Ak03.html; Hersh, S. (2006, April 17). Annals of National Security. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from: https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/annals-of-national-security

[322] Turkey and Iran Collaborating against Kurdish Rebels. (2011, October 21). *BBC News*. Retrieved from: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-15407142; Barzani Says Iraqi Kurds not Supporting PKK. (2007, August 8). *Today's Zaman with Wires*. Retrieved from: http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy_barzani-says-iraqi-kurds-not-supporting-pkk_118856.html

During this time, the relationship between the US and Turkey deteriorated. Washington policy analyst Soner Çağaptay stated at a testimony on Capitol Hill:

> "It is ironic that every time the U.S. State Department says the right things on how we are together with Turks in fighting the PKK and we will deliver security, promising the right things, that same day the Iranians bomb PKK camps. So this is how you read the news in the Turkish press: front page, big headlines, "Iranians Have Bombed PKK Camps" -12th page, one column, "The U.S. Has Said They'll Support against the PKK." In this regard Iranians walk the walk and they make it look as if the Americans are only talking the talk. And that's a huge problem."[323]

Nonetheless, it appears that the close yet uneasy alliance between Turkey and Iran cooled down after 2007 due to the U.S.-Turkish rapprochement and Turkey's increasing economic investment in Iraqi Kurdistan in the late 2000s.[324]

Competition: In the 2010s, Iran and Turkey employed diverging strategies to deal with their own Kurdish questions. While Iran continued to focus on military containment of its Kurdish opposition, the AK party (Justice and Development Party, Turkish: *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi)* in Turkey pursued the strategy of peaceful resolution of the conflict resulting in the disarmament of the PKK. Later, the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan declared a ceasefire in March 2013.[325] However, despite the ceasefire, the PKK organized an urban youth group YDG-H (The Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement, Kurdish: Tevgera *Ciwanen* Welatparêzên Şoreşger) and worked to enforce democratic autonomy in some Kurdish towns.[326] Ankara criticized regional actors, including Iran, for sabotaging the peace. Iran arguably considered the peace process a threat to its regional interests:

> "Iran's fear was two-fold: on the one hand, Iran was afraid that a democratic solution

[323] Çağaptay. S. (2007, July 26) Turkey After the July 2007 Elections: Domestic Politics and International Relations. Testimony before the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Washington D.C. Cited in https://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_turkey_tpq_vol7_no2_dmc.pdf

[324] President Bush Vows Help for Turkey against PKK Terrorists. (2007, November 6) Today's Zaman. Cited in https://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_turkey_tpq_vol7_no2_dmc.pdf

[325] Letsch, C. (2013, March 21) Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan declares ceasefire with Turkey. *The Guardian.* Retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/mar/21/pkk-leader-ocalan-declares-ceasefire

[326] Dalay, G. (2015, September 15). Is Turkey's Kurdish Process on the Brink. *Al Jazeera Center for Studies*. Retrieved from: http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2015/09/20159813236393942.html; also see Gunter, M. M. (2016, Winter).The Kurdish Issue In Turkey: Back To Square One?' *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 14(4), pp. 77–86.

to the Kurdish questions in both Turkey and Iraq (and let us remember that the Syrian Kurdish movement was also on the rise at this time) would entice its own Kurdish population to re-mobilize; but more importantly, Iran was anxious that, after the ceasefire between Turkey and the PKK, the PKK fighters (over 3000 of them) would join PJAK which was carrying out attacks against Iran's military posts in border areas."[327]

Therefore, the Kurdish question in Turkey and the PKK re-surfaced as a source of negotiation and disagreement between Iran and Turkey.

In the early 2010s, Turkey gradually moved to reevaluate its policies towards the KRG. Despite its initial refusal to officially recognize the federal system in Iraq and the KRG, Turkey revised its approach by initiating formal economic, political, and diplomatic relations with the region. [328] Factors such as Turkey's increasing need for new sources of energy and the increasing interference of Iran in Iraqi affairs might have played a role in such major turn in Turkish approach to the KRG. With about over 1000 Turkish companies active in the region, some went on to suggest "the region could become a virtual client statelet for Ankara while remaining within Iraqi frontiers."[329] Although Iraq is the second most important trade partner for Turkey, were KRG a country, it would be amongst Turkey's top five trade partners. The total Turkish export to Iraq in 2013 was $12 dollars, 60% of which went to KRG. However, as for Iran, exports to Iraq dropped by 10 % in 2014, and even more in 2015.[330] Therefore, despite the decades-long relations between Iran and the Iraqi Kurds, Turkey has surpassed Iran in terms of economic partnership with KRG.

Since the early 2010 and the KRG-Turkish rapprochement, the KDP has allied itself with Turkey, while the PUK and Gorran Party (which split from PUK in 2009) have formed alliances

[327] Interview ID I021, Tehran (Iran), December 2016.
[328] Charountaki, M. (2012). Turkish Foreign Policy and the Kurdistan Regional Government. *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs*, *17*(4).
[329] Dombey, D. (2013, May 13) Turkey Agrees Energy Deal with Kurdish North Iraq', *Financial Times*. Retrieved from: https://www.ft.com/content/bbde0bf6-a859-11e2-8e5d-00144feabdc0
3   [330] Aïta, S. (2017, March). **Trade without Religion between Turkey and Syria.** *L'institut Français des relations internationals.* Retrieved from: https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/editoriaux-de-lifri/trade-without-religion-between-turkey-and-syria

with Iran. The PUK has lost its strong position in KRI due to internal splits and the loss of its charismatic leadership Jalal Talabani. The KRG is currently led by Nechirvan Barzani, who has been careful to maintain friendly relations with both Iran and Turkey. However, the PUK and Gorran parties often enter into disputes with the KDP which occasionally results in political stalemates. For example, in June 2015, an intense dispute over presidency took place in KRG when some members of the Parliaments from Gorran and the PUK, backed by Iran, insisted on passing amendments to presidential laws to constrain the authority of the KRI president.[331]

In 2014, a new development in the KRG changed the geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East. Amidst controversy and dispute between the Iraqi government and the KRG, then-president Masoud Barzani requested that the KRG Parliament plan a referendum on independence.[332]

Iran condemned Barzani's proposal without any hesitation. Amir Hossein Abdollahian, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister in charge of Arab and African Affairs, stated, "all Iraqi factions should respect the country's constitution . . . to prevent the country from breaking up." According to him, Iraqi Kurds should "face reality," suggesting that Tehran will prevent an independent Kurdistan carved out of northern Iraq.[333] Iran also encouraged prominent members of the PUK leaders, such as Najmaddin Karim, the governor of Kirkuk, to oppose the referendum proposal.[334] Iran's strong opposition to the referendum has been primarily motivated by its concerns about the KDP's close political and economic ties with Turkey and Israel.

The Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan denounced Barzani's proposal, stating

[331] Mustafa, M. S. (2016, April 20). Iran's Role in the Kurdistan Region. *Al Jazeera Center for Studies*. Retrieved from: http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2016/04/160420105055207.html

4 [332] Iraq Kurdistan independence referendum planned. (2014, July 1). *BBC News.* Retrieved from: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28103124

[333] Vatanka, A. (2014, July 25). Why Iran Fears an Independent Kurdistan. *The National Interest*. Retrieved from: https://nationalinterest.org/feature/why-iran-fears-independent-kurdistan-10950

[334] Chomani, K. (2014, July 9) Push for Kurdish independence divides Iraqi Kurds, *Al-Monitor – Iraq Pulse*. Retrieved from: https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/07/iraq-kurdistan-barzani-puk-division-independence-iran-turkey.html

Barzani was "ruining with his own hands a relationship [with Turkey] that used to go quite well."[335] Later, in a phone call with the Iraqi Prime minister Haider Abadi, Erdogan expressed his "commitment to the territorial integrity of Iraq," and stated his "country's keenness to collaborate with Iraq for the region's security and stability" and promised to provide "full support in all its steps."[336]

As of 2014, a second regional development affected the geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) first emerged in Iraq and then spread into Syria. The areas under its control grew rapidly, alarming the regional powers. However, as ISIS was making its way to Erbil (KRI) and Sinjar (Iraq), Iran, and its Quds Force, became one of the main forces fighting ISIS in the region and supporting the KRG. Later in 2014, Turkey joined the US-led international coalition against ISIS. Turkey also deployed soldiers in Bashiqa (Iraq), close to Mosul (Iraq), to provide training and logistical support to volunteer (mainly Sunni Arab former Iraqi police and local volunteers) and Kurdish forces (*Peshmerga*).[337] However, due to Turkey's long history of military presence in northern Iraq, its military activities in Bashiqa were not well-received by Tehran and Baghdad.[338]

Yet a third regional development affecting the geopolitical calculations of Iran and Turkey relates to the Syrian civil war. Following the anti-Assad uprisings in 2011, which soon spiraled, into a state of civil war between pro- and anti-Assad coalitions, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the Syrian offshoot of the PKK, established canton administrations in the Kurdish

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[335] Uyanik, M. (2017, November 22). Turkey and the KRG After the Referendum: Blocking the Path to Independence. *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. Retrieved from: https://www.csis.org/analysis/turkey-and-krg-after-referendum-blocking-path-independence
[336] *ibid*
5   [337] Pamuk, H. & Coskun, O. (2015, December 4). Turkish Soldiers Training Iraqi Troops near Mosul: Sources. *Reuters*. Retrieved from: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-turkey/turkish-soldiers-training-iraqi-troops-near-mosul-sources-idUSKBN0TN2HZ20151205
[338] Dastmali, M. A. (2016, October 14). Iran and Turkey: Rivalry in Iraq and the Middle East. *Iranian Diplomacy*. Retrieved from: http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/en/news/1963819/iran-and-turkey-rivalry-in-iraq-and-the-middle-east ; Iran Cautions Turkey against Violating Iraq's Sovereignty (2016, October 24). *Fars News Agency*. Retrieved from: https://theiranproject.com/blog/2016/10/24/iran-cautions-turkey-violating-iraqs-sovereignty/

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regions of Syria (including Afrin, Jazira, and Kobane) Kurdish-populated areas including Afrin, Kobane and Jazira. In 2016, the PYD formed the Democratic Federal System for Rojava-Northern Syria as an autonomous region.[339] The existence of a PKK-backed Kurdish autonomous region in Syria could not be tolerated by Iran and Turkey. The two countries pursued yet another set of diverging and competing policies. While the PUK showed signs of support to the PYD and cultivated its relationship with Assad and his allies, that is Iran and Russia, the KDP formed an organization, Kurdish National Council (KNC), to encourage the Syrian Kurdish parties to join Turkey and Syrian opposition forces.[340] In fact, as of 2016, Turkey, in cooperation with Free Syrian Army forces, have been involved in military operations in northern Syria under the pretext of fighting ISIS and the PKK. [341] Not only did Northern Syria turn into a new zone of competition between Iran and Turkey, but also the Rojava's declaration of autonomous administration revived the geopolitical insecurities of both states. While Turkey's primary fear concerns the close links between its own Kurdish militants (PKK) and the Syrian PYD, Iran's anxiety concerns the disintegration of Syria fueling the internal instability of the country and undermining the position of Iran's main regional ally, Bashar Al Assad.

8.3 Iran and Iraq

Up until 1958, Iran and Iraq maintained a relationship by and large characterized by cooperation and coexistence. In the 1920s and 1930s, the two countries cooperated to contain ethnic tribal uprisings in each other's territories. The two countries, both ruled by authoritarian monarchies and close allies of western countries, managed to maintain their at times uneasy

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[339] Syria Civil War: Kurds Declare Federal Region in North. (2016, March 17). *Al Jazeera*. Retrieved from: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/03/syria-civil-war-kurds-declare-federal-system-north-160317111902534.html
[340] *ibid.*
[341] Sergey Lavrov Voices Concern at Turkey's Military Incursion in Syria. (2016, August 31) *Mehr News Agency*. Retrieved from: https://www.mehrnews.com/news/3758014

alliance. However, the Iraqi-Iranian relations soured following the Iraqi coup of 1958 and the rise of radical pan-Arab regimes at odds with the Persian nationalism of Mohammed Reza Shah.[342]

The Kurdish question has historically played an important role in the relations between Tehran and Baghdad. Nonetheless, until the 1958 coup d'état in Iraq marking the overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy established by King Faisal I, neither Iran nor Iraq overtly played the "Kurdish card." It was with the rise to the power of the Ba'ath Party in Iraq that Iran began to see the Kurdish issue as a geopolitical tool against Iraq.[343] Since the 1960s, Iran actively supported the Iraqi Kurds (primarily the KDP) in order to alienate the Iraqi regime. Nonetheless, Iran's support to the Iraqi Kurds was not continuous, as it would often promise to discontinue its support of the Kurds in exchange for concessions from Iraq. A great example of this approach was the Algiers agreement in 1975, territorial concessions made by Iraq as a result of which Shatt-al-Arab River (or Arvand Rud, as it is called on the Iranian side) were seized from Iraq by Iran. In exchange, Iran made practically no concessions except for the promise to discontinue its aids to the KDP.

Under the last Pahlavi Shah, Iran's official nationalist discourse centered around the ideas of "Aryanism" and "pan-Iranism," both of which highlighted the Shah's ambition to revitalize the Persian Empire. It is in this light that Iran's approach to the Iraqi Kurds in this period must be interpreted. In other words, the Shah viewed the Kurds as parts of the greater Persian Empire, lost to Ottomans, and in his words,

> "We must therefore be on our watch, especially since we have Kurds, as do the Turks—incidentally the Kurds are the purest Persians, pure Aryans, from their tradition, their language and their history." [344]

[342] A.R. Ghassemlou,'Kurdistan in Iran'
[343] Entessar, *Kurdish Ethno-Nationalism*, p. 41.
[344] Memorandum of Conversation. (1962, April 13) Foreign Relations of the United States, Vol. 23, Near East: 1961–1962. Retrieved from: https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d247

Moreover, the Shah vigorously denied the existence of a Kurdish question within the territorial boundaries of Iran, claiming, "There may be [Kurdish questions] in other countries, but it [certainly] is not in Iran. The Kurds are 'pure Aryan', like us."[345] The Shah was not alone in his adoption of the Aryanist discourse. The Barzanis (KDP) also often resorted to the same rhetoric in order to win the Shah's support. For example, while at war with Baghdad, Barzani wrote a letter to Mohsen Pezeshkpour, the leader of the Pan-Iranist Party, to express his gratitude for the Party's support for the Kurdish movement, stating:

> "The superficial separation of different groups of a race does not alienate them from one another … [Your Party] has presented the Kurds as a true heir of the Median Empire … when all people of our race lived united together, our World was prospering … and our men defeated Western invasions. Seven hundred years of Roman-Iranian wars and our braveries and victories prevented Roman slavery from passing our Aryan lands to the east. Therefore, we should be proud and be united like the past to free our race and ancestors' land and to destroy imperialist chauvinist conspiracies." [346]

Nonetheless, the Shah's nationalist rhetoric was not his sole justification for the alliance with the Iraqi Kurds. Nor was it the most important one. In fact the Shah's strategic relations with the Iraqi Kurds were meant to contain geopolitical threats against Iran's national integrity and security. In a conversation with his Prime Minister, Asadollah Alam, the Shah stated: "If the Russian pincer manoeuver encircles us through Kabul and Baghdad, we will be in a great trouble."[347] A number of strategic considerations shaped the Shah's Kurdish foreign policy.

First, the Shah's approach to the Kurdish issue can be understood as a part of his broader strategy of containment. Designed to stop geopolitical rivals' expansions in the region,

> "[t]he Shah's policies targeted a set of threats, that is, the Soviet, the Arab, and the Kurd. Iran's alliance with of the Iraqi Kurds was built with the intention of fueling the internal instability in Iraq in order to distract Iraq from its geopolitical adventures

[345] Telegram From the Embassy in Iran to the Department of State. (1966, January 20). Foreign Relations of the United States. Vol. 21. Near East: 1964-1968. Retrieved from: https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v21/d179

[346] Barzani, M. M. (1967, July 9). Hakemiat Mellat [Nation's Sovereignty] Khak-o-Khoon. No. 246, p.1.

[347] Alam, A. A. (1995) *Yad-dashtha-ye Alam: 1349-1351.* [The Shah and I: the Confidential Diary of Iran's Royal Court, 1971-1972]. IB Tauris.Vol. 2. p. 259.

in the Persian Gulf."[348]

The Shah used the Kurdish card to ensure that "Barzani's maintenance of a secure redoubt will continue to pin down two-thirds of the Iraqi army and deprive the Bathists of a secure base from which to launch sabotage and assassination teams against Iran."[349] (*See Appendix IV*) This way, he thought, he would put pressure on Iraq's internal stability, and would keep it weak and divided.[350] Iran's support for the Iraqi Kurds was also meant to contain its own Kurdish problems. As the Shah increased his financial and military support for the Barzanis, the latter became completely dependent on his aid. The Shah, fearing that a cross-border alliance between the Kurds would undermine Iran's domestic stability used his strategic support to push the Barzani to drop their support of the Iranian Kurds.[351] Prime Minister Alam told Julius C. Holmes, the U.S. Ambassador to Tehran, that:

> "Up to the present Iran had adopted a hands-off policy only taking necessary steps to protect the Iran-Iraq border by the deployment of forces last summer when there was some possibility that Barzani wars might spill over into Iran […] Barzani had approached the Shah on a number of occasions to seek assistance against Iraq. He made grand promises of incorporating Iraqi Kurdistan into Iran in return. While the Shah had rejected his offers, elements of Iran's military believed helping the Kurds might be a viable means of undermining Qasim."[352]

During the second Iraqi-Kurdish war (1974-1975), Barzani even warned Iranian Kurds not to take any step against Iran.[353] Moreover, following its alliance with Iran, the KDP expelled from the Iraqi Kurdistan a number of KDPI leaders, including Ahmad Tofiq who was at the time the leading figure (Secretary General) of the KDPI.

Second, Iran's regional rivals, as well as the U.S. State Department, claimed the Shah's

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[348] Interview ID I020, Tehran (Iran), December 2016.

[349] White House Memorandum (1972, October 5). Progress Report on the Kurdish Support Operations. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Vol. E–4, Documents on Iran and Iraq, 1969–1972, p. 1. Retrieved from: https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve04/d325

[350] Baghdad A424 to U.S. Department of State (No Date) Kurds in Iraq. National Archives. 1964-66: Box2339, p. 2.

[351] SAVAK Documents (1964, June 8) Hezb Democrat Kordestan Aragh be revayat SAVAK. [The KDP in SAVAK Documents] No. 2-490.

[352] Tehran136 to the U.S. Department of State. (1962, August). National Archives. RG59. No. 787, pp. 1–2.

[353] SAVAK Documents. (1964, January 12) *Hezb Democrat Kordestan Aragh be revayat SAVAK*. [The KDP in SAVAK Documents].

main intention was to annex the Iraqi Kurdistan. For example, in 1974, Iraqi Foreign Minister

Shathel Taqa expressed Iraq's concern over his perceived Iranian expansionism to the US

Department of State.[354] The State Department compared Iran's intervention and presence in Iraqi

Kurdistan:

> "Iran's support for the Kurdish rebellion in Iraq has recently reached a level comparable to that of Indian involvement with the Bengalee rebels in East Pakistan just prior to the 1971 war. Although there are significant restraints against the widening of hostilities, there is now a real possibility of major clashes between Iranian and Iraqi forces."[355]

However, the Shah in fact did not support the annexation of Iraqi Kurdistan. His main

objective was to use the Kurds to contain Iraq and to win concessions over Arvand Rud, an idea

that was brought to his attention by SAVAK Director Hassan Pakravan.[356] In 1966, Iran's

Ministry of Foreign Affairs pointed to disputes over Arvand Rud, the Kurdish-Iraqi War, and the

Iranian minorities in Iraq as three main points of contention between Iran and Iraq. It was in the

late 1960s that the Shah began to express his willingness to terminate his alliance with the Kurds

in exchange for Iraqi concession over Arvand Rud.[357] Moreover, the Shah did not support the

territorial disintegration of Iraq and the creation of an independent Kurdish state:

> "The Shah's primary objective was to provide assistance to the Iraqi Kurds with the intention of fuelling the internal instability and insecurity of the central state in Iraq; but also at the same time, to convince the Barzanis not to pursue independence. In fact, he feared, and was very well aware of catastrophic consequences of the disintegration of the neighbouring countries. He thought the state collapse in the Middle East would pave the way for more pronounced Soviet interference in the region. That's not what [the Shah] wanted."[358]

[354] Baghdad 564 to the U.S. Department of State (1974, August 29). Foreign Relations of the United States 1969–1976, Vol. 27: 260. Retrieved from: https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v27/d260

[355] Bureau of Intelligence and Research. (1974, November 18). Foreign Relations of the United States 1969–1976, Vol. 27: 267. Retrieved from: https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v27/d267

[356] Interview with Major General Mansour Qadar (Military Intelligence Officer; Ambassador to Jordan, 1967-1973; Ambassador to Lebanon, 1973-1979). Oral History, Harvard University's Foundations for Iranian History.Retrieved from: https://fis-iran.org/en/content/qadar-general-mansur

[357] Alam, A. (1995). Vol. 2.

[358] Interview ID I016, Tehran (Iran), November 2016.

Third, the Shah used his Kurdish policies as a major tool to legitimize Iran's role as a regional power as he was seeking Iran's neighbours' recognition of its regional leadership. Both Sa'adabad meetings (1972) and the Algiers Agreement (1975) entitled Iran as the "Gendarme of the Region." Given the fact that Iran's support for the Iraqi Kurds eventually forced Iraq to accept the terms of the Algiers Agreement, Iran's Kurdish policies proved to be a critical and effective factor in its ascension to the leading role in the region. In addition, the Shah's Kurdish policies, much like his other regional policies, were, as he argued, intended to maintain regional stability. As the Shah states in his memoire, he believed Iran was the "only nation capable of maintaining peace and stability in the Middle East,"[359] and that the stability in the Middle East depended upon the containment of two major threats: the pan-Arab threat and the Russian threat, both of which he believed he could partially contain by playing the Kurdish card.[360]

Fourth, the Shah's foreign policies in general, and approach to Iraqi Kurds in particular, were in line with his overall plans to reduce Iran's dependence on external power. These policies had especially accelerated since the Iranian coup of 1953 and, by the mid-1970s, Iran was rapidly transforming into a major regional power due to the increase in petrodollar and Iran's subsequent military and economic growth in the preceding decade. More specifically,

> "for a period of ten years from 1961 until 1972 (the year of US involvement in Iraqi-Kurdish war), the Shah's policies in Iraqi Kurdistan more often challenged rather than supported the overall US approach in the country."[361]

The diplomatic and informal exchanges during this period point to a lack of consensus between the two countries over the geopolitical calculations and the assessment of threats to regional stability posed by Iraq. The Shah's approach (i.e. the containment of Iraq through an

[359] Pahlavi, M. R. (1980). *Answer to History.* New York: Stein and Day, p. 142.
[360] Alam, A. (1995). Vol. 3.
[361] Interview ID I016, Tehran (Iran), November 2016.

alliance with its Kurdish groups) contradicted Kennedy and Johnson administrations' policies of

rapprochement to Iraq in the 1960s.[362] However, the Shah effectively used Cold War rhetoric to

justify his foreign policy decisions, including his policies towards the Kurds. This rhetoric, while

exaggerating the Soviet threat in the region, painted Iraq as a Soviet puppet-state. This

justification cleverly linked several of US regional interests together: the security and stability of

oil producing countries, the security of Israel, and the national and territorial integrity of the US

allies in the region. Therefore, the Shah convinced the US that the Kurdish issues in Iraq, rather

than a simple local conflict between a state and non-state actor, was a serious regional matter

with serious implications for the Cold War. By the early 1970s, Barzanis enjoyed the support the

Shah of Iran. From the shah, Barzanis received financial aid and ammunition. In the Sa'adabad

meetings (1972), he successfully managed to utilize this Cold War rhetoric to frame a small

regional crisis as a war between the Eastern and Western blocks, successfully compelling the US

to get involved in the Kurdish conflict:

> "In May, 1972, the shah pressed Kissinger and his boss, Richard Nixon, to arm the
> Kurds against the Iraqis. Despite CIA resistance, the White House pair agreed to the
> shah's scheme. Following orders, the CIA smuggled $16 million worth of untraceable
> Chinese and Soviet weapons through Iran to the Kurds […] They fought the Iraqis to
> a standstill."[363]

Or as state in another CIA report:

> "Paramilitary support by the CIA to the Kurdish rebellion against the Iraqi government
> from 1972 to 1975, which cost some $16 million, was initiated at the request of the
> Shah of Iran, then engaged in a border dispute with Iraq."[364]

Moreover, the Shah held a strategic position between the American and the British

coordinating their interactions vis-à-vis Iraqi affairs. As his Prime Minister Alam stated in his

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[362] Baghdad 00379 to U.S. Department of State (1973, July 1) Kurds in Iraq. National Archives. RG59. 1973–1979.
[363] Anderson, J. (No Date). How the Abandoned Kurds Lost Out. CIA Report: CIA-RDP81M00980R002000090053-3. Retrieved from:
https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP81M00980R002000090053-3.pdf
[364] Diamond. G. A. (1976). The Unexpurgated Pike Report: Report of the House Select Committee on Intelligence. p.xiii. Retrieved from:
https://www.offiziere.ch/wp-content/uploads-001/2017/09/Pike_Report_excerpt_Agee.pdf

memoire:

> "I explained to His Majesty that the Americans and the British are separately involved in Kurdistan. Should we not get them work together? His Majesty replied: Let them work separately. It's better this way."[365]

Furthermore, the Shah's decision to sign the Algiers Agreement with Iraq without any consultation with the U.S. points to his growing sense of independence in this period. In March 1975, the Shah and Saddam Hussein met in Algiers on the margins of a conference for heads of state of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and made a deal. The Shah directed that all Iranian military support to the Kurds should cease immediately, along with all financial and other assistance, and that the border between Iran and Iraq should be sealed after a brief delay. In exchange, Saddam concede the control of over exactly half of Arvand Rud (Shatt al-Arab) to Iran. According to Gary Sick, Iran expert on the National Security Council during the Carter and Reagan administrations,

> "[The deal] was done before anyone was notified, that was the key thing. [The Shah] got an offer, he grabbed it, completed it, came back, gave the orders and let the United States and Israel know that the game was over."[366]

A *Washington Post* report on the agreement states:

> "In March, 1975, the Shah abruptly announced he had patched up his differences with Iraq. Over night, American support for the Kurds dried up, and, without weapons, the mountain men were overpowered, Thousands were killed or wounded; thousands more fled into Iran as refugees."[367]

As stated in a report published by the US House Select Committee on Intelligence:

> "Once the Iraqis agreed to a settlement favourable to Iran, the Shah had the support to the Kurds cut off. The rebellion collapsed, over 200,000 Kurds became refugees, and neither Iran nor the US set up adequate refugee assistance."[368]

Therefore,

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[365] Alam, A. (1995). Vol. 2, p. 348.
[366] Parsi, Trita (2007) *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States.* Yale University Press, p. 55.
[367] Anderson, J. (No Date).
[368] Diamond. G. A. (1976). P. xiii.

"when Barzani rematerialized in Iraq some years later to lead a rebellion there, the Shah had no compunctions about supporting his former enemy as long as he considered it to be in Iran's interest to promote trouble in Iraq; he was confident that the rebellion in Iraq would not spill over into Iran. And when, in 1976, the Shah mended his fences with Iraq and ceased supporting Barzani's forces, this rebellion quickly withered away, just like the others had."[369]

Regarding Iraq's approach to Iranian Kurds, Saddam adopted a policy of counterbalancing Iran's support of the KDP (Iraq) by supporting the KDPI. His intention was to prevent the formation of a cross-border alliance between Kurdish groups and to ensure division of these groups into warring sub-factions. Saddam's policies towards Iranian Kurds were more pronounced in the 1980s, that is, after the Revolution and in the course of the Iran-Iraq War. At the height of the Iran-Iraq war, Saddam provided military and logistical support to the Iranian Kurds which allowed them to resist the Iranian Revolutionary Guards' military operation in Iranian Kurdistan.

Iran also received massive support from the Iraqi Kurds and with their cooperation launched major operations in Iraq. The Iraqi Kurds were retaliated by Saddam with the Anfal campaigns once the war ended. Anfal included the use of chemical weapons against military targets and Kurdish civilians of Halabja, leading to the death of about 180,000 Iraqi Kurds and the displacement of many more.

During the war, the Iranian revolutionary regime employed and supported the Iraqi Kurdish movements with two intentions: First, the Islamic regime encouraged the Iraqi Kurds to set aside their differences and form a united front against Saddam. For example, a number of Iranian military operations against Iraq were performed in cooperation with Iraqi Kurds (such as Operation Val Fajr II, as well as operations to free Gadar Valley and Kalashin Heights in

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[369] The Kurds of Iran:A Rugged People in a Rugged Land (1980, February 5). National Foreign Assessment Center. CIA-RDP81 800401 R000500080004-84, p.8.

1983).[370] The fact that this cooperation continued well into the final years of the war and in the

course of major military operations, points to the importance of the alliance between the Iraqi

Kurds and the Iranian armed forces. Moreover, Iran established a military base in KRI to provide

logistical aid and military equipment to its Kurdish allies during the war.[371] Second, Iran used its

alliance with the Iraqi Kurds to contain and suppress its own Kurdish question. After the

revolution, the Barzanis (KDP), who had been defeated by Saddam in the mid-1970s and had

retreated into northwestern Iran, were ordered by Iran's Revolutionary Council to re-arm their

Peshmerga in order to help Iranian security forces in their military campaigns against Kurdish

militias in Iranian Kurdish regions.[372] With the help of the KDP, Iran managed to neutralize a

number of the KDPI attacks and deliver major offences against its bases. After the outbreak of

the Iraq-Iran war in September 1980, the KDP moved to northern Iraq to take control of strategic

locations in coordination with the Iranian authorities.

    Third, the relationship between Iran and the PUK (led by Jalal Talabani who had split from

the KDP to join the PUK in 1975) started in 1980. Iran granted permission to Foad Masoum, the

PUK representative, to open an office in Tehran. However, the relationship turned sour in 1981

when it was revealed that the PUK had been providing support to Iranian oppositional forces.[373]

Moreover, until 1984, and while engaging in negotiations with Saddam, the organization

continued to distance itself from Iran.[374] However, after the negotiations failed:

> "[Once again,] Talabani's position towards Iran changed 180 degrees as he approached
> Iran again. To prove his 'good intentions' to Iran, Talabani launched a massive military
> operation in Iraqi Kurdistan to weaken Saddam's positions. The PUK attacked military
> bases, placed mines in main roads, attacked towns and villages to make a point about

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[370] Sheikh Attar, A. (2003) *Kord-ha va ghodrat-haye mantaghe-I va fara mantaghe-i* [The Kurds, Regional, and Extra Regional Powers. Tehran: Strategic Research Center], pp.139-140.
[371] *Seyri dar jang iran va aragh* [A Survey on Iran-Iraq War] (2004) Tehran: War Research Center. Vol.4, p.170.
[372] Pashang, A. (2011, October 3) Kordha-ye Aragh dar Jang-e Iran va Aragh [Iraqi Kurds during Iran-Iraq War]. Retrieved from: https://ardeshir58.persianblog.ir/post/468/
[373] Office of Kurdistan Governor (1986), p.25.
[374] MacDonald, C. G. (1982). The Impact of the Gulf War on the Iraqi and Iranian Kurds. *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, 7, 261-72, pp. 264–6; Van Bruinessen, M. (1986). The Kurds between Iran and Iraq. *MERIP Middle East Report*, (141), 14-27, p. 14.

its shifted position. In 1985, Talabani sent multiple letters to express its willingness for a resumed relationship with Iran."[375]

Eventually, in 1985 the two sides resumed their relationships following a meeting between the Iranian and PUK representatives, which took place in Azerbaijan province of Iran.

> "The PUK agreed to organize military and political activities in the Kurdish region of Iran which were meant to serve the national interests of Iran, to discontinue its support of the Iranian oppositional forces, to cooperate with Iranian armed forces and help them with their military operations in Iraq, to increase its Peshmerga activities in Iran in order to pacify and secure the border areas by containing the Iranian Kurdish opposition, and to help Iran attack and destroy petroleum plants in Iraqi Kurdistan."[376]

And, in return, Iran agreed to:

> "provide military and financial aid to the PUK, mediate the disputes between the KDP and PUK, allow the PUK to open a formal office in Iran, and provide medical support to the PUK's wounded *Peshmerga*."[377]

In 1986, the PUK played an important role in Iran's military attacks against People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (Persian: *Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Khalgh-e Iran*), an Iranian militant organization with an Islamic-socialist agenda.[378] The PUK also provided indispensible support to Iranian armed forces' strikes against Iraqi oil plants in Kirkuk.[379] Following the agreement, Iran mediated between the KDP and PUK, leading to the establishment of the Kurdish Front in 1987.[380]

A major consequence of the formation of the Front for Iran was the Front's participation in Iranian offensive to free Iranian territories from Iraqi occupation and to capture Halabja (an Iraqi border town) during the war in 1988.[381]

> "The cooperation between Tehran and Iraqi Kurds did not terminate with the 1988

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[375] Interview ID I007, Tehran (Iran), November 2016.

[376] Interview ID 067, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018. Also for Jalal Talibani's telegram to Khomeini see Jalal Talaibani's telegram to Khomeini: http://behzadkhoshhali.com

[377] Interview ID I013, Tehran (Iran), November 2016.

[378] Office of Kurdistan Governor (1986), p.85.

[379] *ibid*.

[380] *ibid*.

[381] *ibid*.

ceasefire. After the war, the Front forces continued to settle and establish bases in border regions and received aids from Iran to participate in the military operations against Iranian Kurdish forces."[382]

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the removal of Saddam Hussein from power led to a major shift in the geopolitics of the region, and increased Iran's interference and influence in the social, political and economic affairs of post-Saddam Iraq, especially in southern Shi'a-populated regions of Iraq. To counterbalance the Kurdish autonomy in Iraq, Iran uses all tools at its disposal to maintain its role as an active player in Iraq, by deepening its ties with the Shi'a community, providing military aid to Iraqi Shi'a militias (such as Hashad Al Sha'bi). These militia groups have played a crucial role in pushing the Kurdish *Peshmerga* out of the oil-abundant region of Kirkuk in the aftermath of the Kurdish Independence Referendum in 2018. In addition to cultivating its relations with the new Iraqi government, Iran has also provided assistance to prominent Shi'a leaders such as the Iraqi Ayatollah Ali Sistani while supporting Shi'a tribes, other interest groups, and local leaders.

Iran's alliance with the Iraqi Kurdish political parties (recently more with PUK than KDP) has had far-reaching consequences for Iranian Kurds. As stated above, due to Iranian influence over the Iraqi Kurds and the KRG, both the KDPI and Komala have at times been prevented by the KRG from military, political, and cultural activities against Iran. For instance, under Iranian influence, the KDPI's radio station was closed down and its broadcasts were announced illegal by the PUK.[383] These coordinated actions of Iran and the PUK finally forced the KDPI and Komala to cease their armed operations inside Iran.[384]

8.4   The Impact of Geopolitical Games on Kurdish Cross-border Alliances

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[382] Interview ID 067, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018.
[383] Aykan, M. (1996). Turkish Perspectives on Turkish-US Relations concerning Persian Gulf Security in the Post-Cold War Era: 1989-1995. *Middle East Journal, 50*(3), 344-358.
[384] *Negin Iran.* (1985, Spring), p.25.

Kurdish ethno-nationalism in the Middle East has historically been divided. There are various reasons for the lack of unity amongst the Kurds, including several languages and dialects, lack of a common script, religious diversity, mutual distrust, individual greed, conflict between the tribal and urban Kurds, as well as the meddling of external powers. The influence of external state powers (Turkey, Iran, and Iraq) has been one of the most important factors contributing to the divisiveness of the Kurds. As discussed previously, historically the geopolitical interests of these states have made it common practice to use the Kurds against each other. Therefore, despite the popularity of a pan-Kurdish ideology amongst the Kurdish populations of all three countries, the ethno-nationalist policies of the Kurdish organizations of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey have, by and large, remained confined within the national borders of their respective states. As a leading member of the KDPI stated:

> "We [the Iranian Kurds] have felt been very isolated and the detached from the rest of the Kurds in the region. There's definitely the cultural factor and the closeness of Kurdish and Persian cultures, as well as a long history of state repression which has distanced Iranian Kurds from the rest [*of the Kurds in the region*]… But I think a more important issue here is the divide-and-rule policies of the states, especially during the war, which have kept us apart and made us distrustful of one another."[385]

However, despite divisiveness and lack of unity, Iranian Kurds have at times established alliances with the Kurds from neighbouring countries and have cooperated with them in some of the uprisings. For instance, long before the Shah of Iran developed an interest in playing the Kurdish card against Iraq, Iranian and Iraqi Kurds formed one of the most significant cross-border alliances in the course of the formation and during the existence of the Republic of Kurdistan in Mahabad. The Komala JK (the precursor to the KDPI) reached out to Kurdish organizations in Iraq and Turkey in an attempt to formalize its relations with them. In 1944, the Party's delegation met with representatives from these groups and signed the Three Borders Pact,

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[385] Interview ID 025, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2017.

an important but symbolic agreement affirming the unity amongst Kurds.[386][387]

Later, the Barzanis (KDP) provided extensive assistance during the formation of the

Republic, primarily in the form of military forces to protect the Republic:

> "The Barzanis were forced to flee to Iran. Their political and military participation in the Republic of Kurdistan had substantial impact on Iranian Kurdish ethnonationalism. First, they played a crucial role in bringing non-conforming Iranian Kurdish tribes under the rule of the Republic. Second, the military defence of the Republic was given mainly to the Barzanis [by Ghazi Mohammad]. Third, the Barzanis had more practical experience and aided Ghazi Mohammad with the institutionalization of the political activities of the Republic. Fourth, they stood up for the Republic and defended it until the very end. So historically, this alliance played a significant role, given the importance of the Republic to all Kurds in the region."[388]

Moreover, in the early to mid 1940s, the KDPI provided support to the Barzanis when the

latter organized an uprising against the Iraqi state. According to Behzad Khoshhali,

> "Ghazi stated to the Iraqi Kurds delegation: Take these some 700 firearms. We would like you to be in charge of the military affairs. You will form the main core of the Republic's National Army […] The Barzani forces will form the main foundation of the Republic."[389]

Therefore, an alliance was formed between the Iranian and Iraqi Kurds:

> "The Iranian Kurds provided their support, either by crossing the border to serve as *Peshmerga*, or by smuggling food and military supplies to Iraq. In fact, until the late 1960s, the KDPI was the only major external ally that the Iraqi Kurds had."[390]

However, this relationship did not last long. As explained above, the Shah often played the

Kurdish card against Iraq in order to contain the latter's geopolitical expansions. The Iraqi

Kurds, as a result, became increasingly dependent upon the Shah's military and financial aid.

Under the influence of the Shah, Barzani was pressed to limit the KDP's involvement with the

Iranian Kurds as he believed any cooperation with the KDPI would have catastrophic

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[386] Khoshhali, B. (2000) *Ghazi Mohammad va jomhuri dar ayeneh asnad* [Ghazi Mohammad and the Republic in Documents], Iran: Ferdosi Publisher.
[387] *ibid*, p. 24.
[388] Interview ID 064, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018.
[389] Khoshhali, B. (2000), p. 65.
[390] Interview ID I021, Tehran (Iran), December 2016.

consequences for the Kurdish insurgency in Iraq. In addition, Barzani was ordered by the Shah to contain Iranian Kurdish activities and to return the Iranian Kurds who fled to Iraq back to their country. In the 1960s, one of the members of the "*Revolutionary KDPI*" (RKDPI) writes:

> "Given the circumstances right now, it is futile to take up arms. Given the good relations between the Barzanis and the government in Iran, Mulla Mostafa Barzani will certainly press radical militant groups to abandon their armed struggles. We will most definitely not be able to sustain an armed conflict for long and will vanish all together. The best strategy right now is to engage in non-militant organization activities and the recruitment of new members."[391]

Further, in the 1960s when the Shah stepped up its repressive measures against the Iranian Kurds and the KDPI, a number of Kurdish *Peshmerga* and activists were forced to flee to Iraq. In a meeting between the Iranian Kurds who had fled to Iraqi Kurdistan to ask for Mulla Mustafa Barzani's aid, the latter stated:

> "We have an agreement with Iran which I will not break. You may go to whomever you wish, Iraqi government or East Germany, to ask for supplies and arms. You may occupy a piece of land in Iran and operationalize your plans. If my agreement with remains intact, I won't be able to provide any aide. Otherwise, I'll be able to secretly provide minimal assistance. However, if you anticipate being defeated, don't go after it, because I'd be obliged to capture you and hand you over."[392]

After this meeting, a group of high-ranking members of the KDPI, including Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, Ahmad Tofiq, and Abdollah Hassanzadeh, turned to the Iraqi government. In a meeting between the two sides, the Iraqis promised to provide military aids to the Iranian Kurds and to assist them fight the Barzanis and the Shah.[393] Hassanzadeh states in his memoire that in the course of a meeting between the members of the KDP and KDPI, a KDP member "turned to [Abdullah Hassanzadeh] and stated: You're all a bunch of traitors and spies. You cooperated with the blood-sucking Iraqi regime and now you're back to spy on us again."[394]

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[391] SAVAK Documents (1968, December 20). No. 11517.
[392] SAVAK Documents (1371, June 23). No. 13355-2.
[393] Hassanzadeh, A. (1995) *Nim Gharn Kooshesh va fa'aliat: tarikhche hezb democrat.* [A Half a Century of Struggle and Activities: The History of KDPI]. Unknown Publisher.
[394] *ibid*, p.29.

Therefore, relationship between the KDPI and the Barzani's KDP turned sour as a result of the strategic alliance made by each party with the opposing country's central state. In the 1960s, after a ban placed on its activities in Iran, the KDPI relocated its headquarters to Iraq and for much of that decade and afterwards it received extensive support from both Iraqi and Turkish governments as well as from the KDP's rival in Iraqi Kurdistan, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) led by Jalal Talibani. However, later an alliance formed between Iran and the PUK which alienated the KDPI from the Talibanis.

As discussed earlier, in the course of the Iran-Iraq War, in the early 1980s, the KDPI collaborated with the Iranian government and aided the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in their numerous raids into Iranian Kurdish towns and villages in an attempt to cease the ongoing Kurdish insurgency led by the KDPI and Komala. Ultimately, in 1982, the KDPI resumed its relations with the PUK and received assistance to counter the attacks waged by Iranian and KDP forces. Meanwhile, Saddam also provided supplies and military assistance to the KDPI and utilized his alliance with the Iranian Kurds to deal with his own Kurdish problems.

> "The Iran–Iraq War further deteriorated the relationship between Iranian and Iraqi Kurds and divided them even more. We [the Iranian Kurds] who were fighting a two-front war, with Iranian and Iraqi Kurdish forces, and who were also feeling the war (because many Iranian Kurdish towns and villages on the border had turned into major battling grounds between Iranian and Iraqi forces, felt distanced from everyone: our own former allies (the Iraqi Kurds), and from the rest of the world. Our towns were under fire and it was as if no one was seeing us. This in and off itself was very isolating and alienating. This is what motivated the alliance with Saddam, which was broken, on our part, after Anfal genocide."[395]

Nonetheless, more recently and under the leadership on Mustafa Hijri, the KDPI established closer relationships with the Iraqi Kurds, and more specifically the KDP, and received permission to set up several camps in KRI:

"We [the KDPI leaders] felt it was time to put our differences aside and try to build

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[395] Interview ID 052, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018

bridges over that widened gap. The outside influence is still there. The KDP and PUK are still under significant pressure from Tehran and Baghdad to limit our activities, both military and non-military activities. But it's time to put the differences aside and create opportunities for cooperation. […] Given our past history, it's now not so easy to completely trust our Kurdish allies, but we prefer dialogue. We're very hopeful that we'll ultimately be able to manage our differences and form a united front against our common enemies. It shouldn't be that hard."[396]

However, despite the recent rapprochements, after the Gulf War in 1990, the cooperative relationship between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Iran meant that any armed struggle against Iran by the Iranian Kurdish organizations, which had been based in KRI for many years, had to stop. Therefore, both the KDPI and Komala were initially prevented from military acts against Iran. As a result, the KDPI has established a militant wing comprised of highly trained *Peshmerga* fighters, Zagros Eagles, to carry out sporadic guerilla operations on Iranian military check posts. Although the KDPI denies links to the Zagros Eagles,

"[there] is sufficient evidence to suggest that the group was founded as separate and seemingly decentralized militant organization, carrying out attacks under the command of the KDPI, in order to prevent KDPI-KRG relations from deteriorating as a result of [the former's] military actions in Iran."[397]

8.5 Conclusion

As shown in this paper, the Kurdish issue has deeply affected Iran-Turkey and Iran-Iraq relations for many years. It has been a source of security concerns and contentious relations amongst the regional powers. It has also occasionally resulted in cooperation amongst these powers. More specifically, Iran, Turkey, and Iraq have perceived the Kurdish issue as a security matter, and Kurdish demands for autonomy as a threat to their national security. The perceived geopolitical insecurities have often entailed such policies as using each other's Kurdish population as a means to fuel the rivaling states' domestic instability and to attain geopolitical

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[396] Interview ID 037, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2018.
[397] Interview ID I007, Tehran (Iran), November 2016.

gains. In turn, Kurdish political organizations in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey have, at one time or another, relied upon the external support of a neighbouring state, and consequently, most have become highly dependent on it, to the extent that their major mobilizing decisions were highly influenced by foreign powers. Moreover, these rivalries have led to the fragmentation of Kurdish movements in the region, and to competition, rather than cooperation, amongst the Kurds. For instance, the KDPI found itself increasingly alienated from the KDP, whose leaders collaborated with the Iranian government during the civil conflicts of the 1980s to bring the Iranian Kurdish territory under the control of the revolutionary government. Iranian Kurds "felt betrayed by those [they] had historically considered as their brothers and allies."[398] Therefore, although the fragmented character of Kurdish ethno-nationalist claim making certainly reflects socio-political realities within Kurdish society, it should also be understood in relation to external conditions and geopolitical realities of the Middle East. While regional powers have deliberately attempted to divide the Kurds, Kurdish organizations, in their attempt to seek the support of these states have further reinforced this fragmentation.

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[398] Interview ID 038, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2017.

9 CONCLUDING REMARKS

By combining insights from the fields of nationalism, geopolitics, social movement studies, and by placing the main focus on state actors, non-state groups, individual insurgents, and regional dynamics, this thesis has presented a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between these factors and the shifting character of ethno-nationalism. More specifically, Iranian Kurdish ethno-nationalist claim makings have served as a case study to analyze this process in detail. This thesis, therefore, underlines the importance of a multilevel approach to understanding ethno-nationalism. The domestic macro- and meso-level analyses employed here highlight the importance of regime-created contours of political opportunities and the organizational readiness of ethno-nationalist groups. It shows that the extent and forms of ethno-nationalist claim-making and the opportunities to express such claims might vary over time, are determined by the nature of opportunity structures created by the state with which the ethnic group interacts. Government policies can suppress nationalist potentials, either by supporting traditional power structures, repressing ethno-nationalist activities, or co-opting the movement. The outcome, depending on the organizational readiness, subjective assessments of the prospects of change, and the availability of powerful external allies, will vary from full-scale armed conflict to guerilla warfare. Further, the absence of mobilizing structures such as legal political parties, legitimate nationalist leaders, (indigenous) financial resources, and powerful allies prevents the growth of ethno-nationalism inside a country, resulting in phases of inactivity and dormancy. Similarly, where nationalist leaders are given semi-legitimate status and have access to political networks, nationalist organizations are likely to flourish; the recognition of ethno-nationalist demands and ethno-nationalist leaders encourages the elites to pursue their goals from within the existing legal frameworks. I have also argued that internal factionalization and fragmentation limits the

representation and influence of the nationalist elite and national sentiment.

Additionally, it has been shown that the amount of time that ethno-nationalist organizations have at their disposal to express their demands influences the relationship between these groups and their political center. This temporal aspect allows for the analysis of ethno-nationalism in relation to the amount of time during which ethnic group are granted legal political and cultural space. The continuous opening and closure of the political opportunity structures has resulted in a great variability in claim-making behaviour of Kurds in both pre and post- revolutionary Iran. This is especially noticeable when one compares Iranian Kurds' ethno-nationalist efforts with that of Kurds in Turkey, until very recently, where there were almost no changes in the political space over time. This important consideration allowed for the periodization of Kurdish nationalist mobilizations during the time frame under study (early 1900s-early 2010s)

Moreover, it has been shown that the organizational readiness of the ethno-nationalist groups partly depends upon the groups' ability to mobilize forces and recruit new members. I argue that ethno-nationalist mobilizations must be understood at two inter-related levels: micro ad meso While the micro-dimension deals with individuals' decision to participate in a conflict, the meso-dimension concerns how organizations' recruitment strategies can affect this decision. Further, at the micro-level, it has been argued that individuals' incentives to join an ethno-nationalist organization are not solely ideological ones. In fact, there is no single reason underlying individuals' decisions: various individual factors such as the socioeconomic situation of the individual, his/her family conditions, together with discriminatory policies and strategies implemented by the state may push or encourage individuals to join ethno-nationalist organizations. At the meso-level, I argued that ethno-nationalist organizations pursue various

strategies to attract and recruit prospective members. Ethno-nationalist ideologies are communicated via TV broadcasts, social media platforms, and clandestine group meetings. Individuals who consume these media products and/or attend the group meetings prior to joining the organization, internalize the organizational ideology. This internalization, along with kinship ties and community networks established amongst the existing and prospective members, creates a unique pathway towards recruitment.

Furthermore, this research project also highlights the importance of external factors, or, in other words, the international macro-level factors in shaping (both aiding and impeding the formation and growth) ethno-nationalist mobilizations. I argued that internal politics, organizational strategies, and movement entrepreneurs are not the only factors affecting ethno-nationalism in Iran (and more generally in the Middle East). The Kurdish question in Iran has not been isolated from regional developments and has not been immune to outside interference. Therefore, it is sociologically important to consider the geopolitical factors that continue to shape the fragmented and shifting nature of Kurdish ethno-nationalist movements. From this perspective, the character of Kurdish politics should be analyzed in view of external regional forces.

One of the main limitations of this study is that although it looks at the mobilization of ethno-nationalist identity as a common strategy in ethnic insurgencies, it does not explain why such efforts are not effective on all co-ethnics. That is to say, affiliation with ethnic identity does not resonate with all co-ethnics to the same extent. Collective ethnic consciousness may range from radicals who join the insurgency as fighters to those who refuse to identify themselves with the ethnic group despite sharing the descent-based attributes. The fundamental questions to be examined are: What explains this variation? What are the processes through which the

constructed social identities are espoused as group memberships? When and why do ethnic group identities become salient for some but not others in times of ethno-nationalist conflict? Ethnic identities are central to the study of ethnic violence. In the existing literature on ethnic conflict, ethnic identity is often considered as an independent variable explaining the onset of war. However, identity formation does not cease at the onset of conflict; in contrast, conflict itself can restructure the extant ethnic groupings.[399] Brubaker underscores "contingent, waxing and waning nature of groupness,"[400] and the fact that high levels of groupness may be more a result of conflict than its underlying cause. Cederman, Gleditsch, and Bauhaug also consider the possibility of identity crystallizations as a result of conflict rather than the reverse sequence in their analysis of conflict processes.[401] Balcells's work on the role of victimization in the generation of new political identities or redefinition of existing ones is another contribution to this rather nascent literature.[402] It is, therefore, increasingly more recognized that ethno-nationalist conflicts evoke ethnic identities. The puzzle, however, is that in times of ethnic conflict, the nationalist discourse of the insurgency does not resonate with every member of ethnic groups by elevating ethnicity as a primary social identity.

Co-ethnics start off at different points on the scale of salience for ethnicity in their hierarchy of identities. A three-fold categorization of ethnic identity may be useful in this regard:

1. Null membership when individual may be within the ethnic category but denies membership into his/her own ethnic group and/or is assimilated into another group;

2. Non-politicized membership when individual who self-categorizes into the ethnic group she/he shares common ancestry with. However, it is more of a symbolic and covert

[399] Smith, A. D., & Smith, A. D. (1981).
[400] Brubaker, R. (2004). *Ethnicity without groups*. Harvard University Press, p. 19.
[401] Cederman, L. E., Gleditsch, K. S., & Buhaug, H. (2013). *Inequality, grievances, and civil war*. Cambridge University Press.
[402] Balcells, L. (2012). The consequences of victimization on political identities: Evidence from Spain. *Politics & Society*, *40*(3), 311-347.

expression without much commitment, affective or interactional;

3. Politicized membership when individual is committed to the ethnic group both in affective and interactional terms.

When ethnicity is politicized, individual engage in different forms of political activities ranging from voting behaviour along ethnic lines to being active in civil society organizations (clandestinely or overtly in legal or illegal organizations) that work for improving the political, social or economic status of co-ethnics, to joining rebel groups. Understanding the shift in individuals' ethnic identity from categories 1 and 2 to category 3 where ethnic identity may be used as a basis for making claims or challenges towards the state must be central to studying ethno-nationalist insurgencies. By parsing out the mechanisms and processes by which ethno-nationalist conflicts affect ethnic identity formation one can further shed light onto consequences of civil wars such as social fragmentation and political polarization as they are in part driven by changing identity frameworks.

10 FURTHER THOUGHTS: THE STATUS OF KURDISH ETHNO-NATIONALISM IN IRAN

Since the late 20th century, the Iranian Kurdish insurgency has seen two period of revival: one along with the rise of the reform movement in Iran with the election of president Khatami in the late 1990s, and the other along with the Kurds and ISIS. While the former is largely attributed to the revitalization of Kurdish ethno-nationalism amongst Kurdish civil society groups, artists, writers, political activists, and intellectuals in Iran, the latter can be attributed to the resurgence of Kurdish ethno-nationalist groups in exile. While the present work discusses Kurdish ethno-nationalism as a political movement largely led by Iranian Kurdish organizations in exile, it is important to notice that in recent decades the Iranian Kurdish movements, similar to Iranian women's, students, and labour movements, has been influenced by the proliferation and growth of civil society organizations under Reform, but contrary to the other movements, has had to keep a low profile and organize its activities under close scrutiny of Iranian security forces.

In Iran, the expression of politicized Kurdish identity is further influenced by a number of other factors: First, due to the prohibition of ethnically defined political parties (that is political parties formed along ethnic lines) and a generally repressive political environment, the ability of Kurdish organizations to mobilize public support (from both Kurds and on-Kurds) and to wage a visible challenge to the center has been severely constrained.

Second, Kurdish identity itself is a heterogeneous and dynamic concept. Variation in Kurdish identity is in accordance to geographic location, as well as differences in the spoken dialect, religious affiliation (Shi'a, Sunni, Ahl-i Hagh,etc.), tribal and kinship connections as well as urban-rural divides, and gender.

Third, the interplay of individual, organizational, and contextual-level triggers have also affected shifts in Kurdish identities: two different but overlapping individual experiences can be

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identified at the individual level: experiences of victimization which encompasses excessive punishment and the loss of family members in conflict and discrimination which is often in the form of intentional economic underdevelopment of Kurdish regions, exclusion of the Kurds from important political positions, and has been a manifestation of the separation between Kurds and Persians. While the experiences of victimization and discriminatory practices might trigger the latent Kurdish identities, it is the ethnic entrepreneurs, i.e. Kurdish organizations, that skillfully interweave these new suppressions with the grievances endured by the previous generations of Kurds and reconstruct a rhetoric of "marginalized identity" to portray it as a continuity rather than a new state policy designed to constrain the organizations' activities. However, while ethnic entrepreneurs might be able to move the salience of ethnic identity up in the hierarchy of social identities, they operate within a larger political and social context: the available channels for exploration of ethnic identity might vary from context to context. Context may be understood as a bounded locality in which one is established (e.g. a village, town or a city). In the case of civil conflict, context also determines exposure to violence, likelihood of victimization, and local forms of resistance. The importance of context comes from the effect of collective character and structure of a location on one's identity. Three different contexts are distinguishable in the Kurdish case:

1. Towns or localities that are rife with organizations, associations, or groups that are part of the Kurdish ethno-nationalist movement; these organizations serve as fertile ground for the manifestation of a politicized Kurdish identity. However, these towns are in varying degrees of proximity to hot conflict zones (during the inter-state and civil conflicts of the 1980s) and harbor different types of organizational activities:

a. The towns closer to Iran-Iraq border and to conflict zones (e.g. Sardasht, Mahabad and Baneh) are the strongholds of Kurdish ethno-nationalist organizations. My research suggests that these towns serve as guerilla fighter recruitment bases for the Iranian Kurdish organizations.

b. In towns further away from the conflict zones, Kurdish mobilization often occurs within student associations on university campuses and in other civil society organizations (e.g. Sanandaj).

2. Towns or localities where the social stigma attached to the Kurdish language and identity forces many Kurdish-speaking individuals to hide their ethnic origins and adopt new public postures (e.g. Urmya).

3. Towns or localities where other lines of identity (for example, Shi'a Islam) have considerable grassroots support and where Kurdish inhabitants do not necessarily share the priorities of the Kurdish nationalist organizations led by Sunni Kurds (e.g. Kermanshah). Additionally, due to the presence of a majority Shi'a Kurdish population and cross-cutting categories of identity along ethnic and religious lines, the Iranian regime has successfully managed to co-opt Kurdish ethno-nationalism in these areas.

Iran has historically had a more moderate, yet inconsistent and ambivalent, stance on recognizing its ethnic groups' cultural, social, and ethnic diversity, at times approving of Kurdish radio broadcasts and even more recently opening the University of Kurdistan. More recently and under President Rouhani administration, for instance, Iran allowed for Kurdish language to be taught in high schools when in 2015 the head of the Kurdistan Education Board announced, "the high school literature books in the Kurdish areas will be modified so that three chapters of the

book be allocated to local dialects (Kurdish)."[403] Although the change is incremental and slow, it signifies that "the taboo of teaching non-Persian languages, including Kurdish, in schools has been broken."[404] Nonetheless, the expression of the Kurds' political rights (e.g. local self-administration, autonomy and local police forces) has in recent years faced the greatest level of repression seen since the period after the revolution.

Although many candidates running for the office of presidency or the Parliament continue to run on platforms of promising economic improvement of the Kurdish peripheries and the needs of the financially disadvantaged Kurds, as well as the recognition of Kurdish political rights, these promises have not gone beyond campaign slogans meant to entice Kurdish electoral support. Once in office, elected officials have shown little concern with recognizing the needs of the ethnic and religious minorities in Iran, including the Kurds. Therefore, many scholars, expects, Kurdish activists and leaders interviewed for this project expressed that real changes in the lives of Iranian Kurds will not be achieved unless Iran opens its doors to a more productive dialogue and relationship with the West. After the announcement of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in 2015 (also known as the Iran Nuclear Deal) many expressed hope that the rapprochement,

> "[will] work to the benefit of everyone in the country including the Kurds. With barriers and economic sanctions being lifted, there is a great chance of productive interactions between the two sides [Iran and the West]. European organizations and institutions, for example, could establish direct relations with different groups in the Kurdish regions and initiate cultural and scientific projects. [These exchanges] can work to improve the everyday lives of the Kurds and people living in other areas who have been the main victims of Iran's post-revolution isolation."[405]

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[403] Teaching Kurdish in Iranian Kurdish Schools. *Deutsche Welle*. Retrieved from: https://www.dw.com/fa-ir/%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%B3-%D8%B2%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86-%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87-%D8%AA%D8%BA%DB%8C%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA-%DB%8C%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B2%DB%8C-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%DB%8C/a-18619255
[404] Interview ID I023, Kermanshah (Iran), December 2016.
[405] Interview ID I026, Kermanshah (Iran), December 2016.

Unfortunately, this optimism did not last long as the recent developments in American politics and the repeal of the Nuclear Deal by Trump administration has pointed to the fragility of the Iran- US rapprochement. More importantly, western nations have not demonstrated a genuine commitment to establishing the kind of relations that would allow for this type of situation to occur. The loss of optimism amongst Iranian Kurds for a change from *within* or *without* has led many to look for more lasting political alternatives. This has important implications for the politicians inside Iran, and international community and policy makers alike, who are concerned with the regional stability in the Middle East. As long as the political, economic, and cultural integration of the Kurds remains promised but unachieved,

> "Iranian Kurds will continue to rise as opposition forces. So long as [they] are denied the means and the rights to be anything other than a marginalized minority, [their] movements will continue to grow and will increasingly target the very nature of the political establishment in Iran."[406]

The Iranian Kurdish ethno-nationalist movements has been pursued on two fronts: a grassroots youth and civil society-led movement inside Iran, and a movement primarily led by traditional Kurdish ethno-nationalist organizations based in Iraq. Inside Iran, Kurdish activists, similar to other oppressed groups, are taking advantage of the space for activism available to them in social media in their attempts to expand and broaden their movement impact. The expression of Kurdish identity has not remained restricted to political protests and demonstrations. Iranian Kurdish activists have also found artistic expression an effective means to convey their messages. Numerous Kurdish singers, poets, filmmakers, painters, and artists have been using their platforms to raise global and national awareness on the Kurds' situation in Iran.

Moreover, the role played by Iranian Kurdish women has become more significant since

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[406] Interview ID I018, Sanandaj (Iran), December 2016.

the Reform movement in Iran. Whether organizing urban protests and gatherings, civil society groups primarily focused on women's consciousness-raising groups and the improvement of women's situation in Iranian Kurdistan, or producing innovative material, Kurdish women have become an integral part of the Kurdish movements inside Iran. Kurdish women, finding common grounds with other groups such as non-Kurdish women, have successfully managed to form alliances with feminist and leftist organizations in Iran and to generate public support and sympathy towards their cause.

In fact, it is reasonable to expect that the majority of the Kurdish organizations and groups based in Iranian Kurdistan support a broader framework than those solely focusing on Kurdish ethno-nationalism. These organizations have tended to endorse a broader "pro-democracy" and "human rights for all Iranians" as their frames of action. These organizations attempt to extend their appeal to non-Kurdish regions of Iran by developing bridges with and promoting the causes of other rights movement in Iran.

The proliferation of Kurdish activists and organizations inside Iran has meant that the Kurdish ethno-nationalist agenda has become increasingly more diverse in terms of demands, frames of action, and tactical choices. Although the traditional Iranian Kurdish organizations operating in Iraq, and more specifically the KDPI and Komala, remain at the fore of the actions and the most recognized groups claiming to represent the interests of the Iranian Kurds, many other local and community-based groups in Iran are now challenging the KDPI and Komala for their strategies and political stances.

Since the mid-2000s, establishment of another organization mounted yet another significant challenge to the KDPI and Komala. PJAK, an organization with ideological, political, and military outlooks similar to the PKK, began an armed struggle in 2004 and has been

successful at appealing to urban Kurdish youth and mobilizing the Iranian Kurds to rise up

against the state. Influenced by Turkey's PKK, PJAK's insurgency redefined the Kurdish

agenda. It has called for a free democratic and political system in Iran, in which Kurdistan would

exist as an autonomous entity. It has highlighted the failure of non-violence and traditional

parties seeking "Kurdish autonomy and rights within a democratic federal Iran"[407] through

diplomacy and nonaggression. Instead, the movement has drawn attention to the necessity of

armed struggle for defending the ethnic and cultural rights of the Iranian Kurds. By this token,

PJAK violence has helped the Iranian government discredit Kurdish demands, and center the

problem on security, rather than democratic political solutions. Ordinary Kurds were held

responsible for PJAK insurgency, and they were marginalized because of their ethnic

background.

In the wake of the above-mentioned recent development, the Iranian Kurdish organizations

based in Iraq have been struggling to regain their historically strong presence on the ground in

Kurdish areas of Iran:

> "The KDPI and Komala are yet to recognize the crucial need to recognize the emerging
> and diverse views within the Iranian Kurdish society. They must recognize the need to
> engage these rising civil society actors as partners. They must begin to genuinely listen
> to and support these new voices rather than trying from a top-down position, as they
> are, to dictate their own solutions to the real problems that the Kurds are dealing with
> inside Iran. Their leaders must begin to acknowledge that because of their particular
> situation [i.e. being based in Iraq and not having direct presence in Iranian Kurdish
> regions] they have been removed from the realities of people's daily life."[408]

Therefore, Iranian Kurdish ethno-nationalist organizations are facing a serious dilemma: on

the one hand they are gradually losing their strongholds to the growing voices. On the other

hand, they are unable to make the necessary reforms that might place them back on the track:

> "Most of the leading positions of these organizations are held by those who haven't

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[407] Interview ID 032, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), August 2017.
[408] Interview ID I029, Tehran (Iran), December 2016.

been back to [Iranian] Kurdistan for more than three decades hold. They have lost actual physical contact with the realities of Kurdistan. So they need to rejuvenate. But there s an inevitable opportunity cost to this: historically, such moves led to further internal divisions within these organization. So this is a serious issue these organizations are facing, and there are lots of talks around it but not much action."[409]

In the late 1990s until the early 2010s, both the KDPI and Komala ceased their armed struggles stating that "change won't come from guns but from real activism in urban areas."[410] However, they both resumed their armed activities against Iranian security forces in border areas and some Kurdish towns close to the Iran-Iraq border (such as Baneh and Piranshahr). This apparent resurgence of armed activities may be attributed to the recent developments in the Middle East.

Overall, it is important to recognize that Iranian Kurds and Kurdish are not a homogenous group with a unified and coherent set of pre-determined interests around which they all unite. Rather, Iranian Kurds, as other Kurd in the Middle East, are divided by many interests, demands, and visions all of which continue to shape the very character of Iranian Kurdish ethno-nationalism. It is, however, equally important to recognize that Iranian Kurdish activists, by and large, "support grassroots actions and demand solutions from within."[411] This points to what has been discussed earlier regarding the role of Kurdish organizations in this process and the need for them to re-evaluate their positions.

Moreover, although the unification of all Kurdish regions and the formation of an independent Greater Kurdistan remain to be espoused by many Kurds, the geographic boundaries of the countries that transcribe Kurdish regions have unstoppably shaped and reshaped the realities of life experienced by the Kurds on different sides of these borders over the past

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[409] Interview ID 045, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2018.
[410] Interview ID 044, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2018.
[411] Interview ID I023, Kermanshah (Iran), December 2016.

century. Therefore, most Kurds and Kurdish organizations have adopted a pragmatic approach: they "support the right to self-rule and autonomy for the Kurds within the boundaries of the existing nation-states while, in general, standing in solidarity with all Kurdish efforts in the Middle East."[412] From this perspective, the independence of the greater Kurdistan,

> "[has] been perceived as a sweet but unrealistic dream. Although the dream continues to occupy the Kurds' thoughts, the Kurds experience different realities in the Iranian, Iraqi, Turkish and Syrian Kurdistans [*in plural rather than singular*]."[413]

Geopolitically, the regional geopolitical changes have undoubtedly affected the Kurds in their ethno-nationalist efforts. While the Kurds have enjoyed short-term benefits from the alliances with regional powers, the long-term implications of such alliances have been further divisiveness amongst Kurdish communities and the strategic dependence of Kurdish organizations on regional powers.

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[412] Interview ID 042, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2018.
[413] Interview ID 042, Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq), July 2018.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW GUIDES
(English Translation)

All of the interviews conducted for this project were semi-structured and open-ended.

A. Interview guide used for interviews with the members of KDPI

Place of residence:
Place of birth:
Age:
Gender:
Marital Status:
Occupation:
Education:
Other Family members in the organization:

1. Where in Rojhelat (Iranian Kurdistan) do you come from?
2. What was life like before joining the organization?
3. When did you first get involved in the organization's activities?
4. When did you join the organization?
5. What motivated you to join the organization?
6. What kinds of activities do you participate in right now?
7. How do your activities affect the future of the Kurds in Iran?
8. How do you find your life in the organization camps?

B. Interviews guide used for interviews with leading members of the KDPI, Komala, and PJAK

1. Could you provide a brief history of the organization (+probes).
2. What are your main activities within the organization?
3. What is the organization's current position vis-à-vis Kurdish independence in Iran?
4. How do you describe the organization's relationship with other Kurdish groups/organizations?
5. What's the nature of the organization's relations with regional/international powers?
6. How does the organization keep up-to-date with the everyday demands of Kurds in Iran?
7. In what ways have the recent changes in the Middle East affected the organization's strategies and positions?
8. How do you see the future of the Kurds in Iran?
9. And additionally, in the case of the leading members of KDPI: the organization's recruitment strategies, activities inside Iran, activities in the camps.

C. Interview guide used for interviews with Kurdish activists in Iran

Age:
Gender:
Occupation:
Ethnicity:
Education:

1. How do you describe the situation of the Kurds in Iran?
2. What kinds of activities are you involved in?
3. How did you first get involved?
4. What main goals do you pursue in your activism?
5. What is your position towards Iranian Kurdish organizations based in KRI (Komala, KDPI, PJAK)?
6. How do you see the future of the Kurds in Iran?

D. Interview guide used for interviews with Kurdish historians and regional experts

1. What role did Komala JK and the Republic of Mahabad play in the formation of Kurdish ethno-nationalism in Iran?
2. What role did external powers play in the formation and growth of Kurdish ethno-nationalism in Iran?
3. What factors explain the internal fragmentation of Iranian Kurdish organizations?
4. How do you evaluate the role of these organizations in Kurdish ethno-nationalism today?
5. How do you compare/contrast the Shah's policies towards the Kurds with those of the current regime?
6. How do you see the future of the Kurds in Iran?

APPENDIX II: LIST OF CONDUCTED INTERVIEWS

Affiliation	Interview ID	Location	Date	Interviewee's Position
KDPI (56)	002	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	June 2017	Member
	003	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	June 2017	Member
	004	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	June 2017	Member of Political Bureau
	005	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	June 2017	Member
	006	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	June 2017	Member
	007	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	June 2017	Member
	008	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	Jul-17	Member
	009	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	Jul-17	Member
	010	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	Jul-17	Member
	011	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	Jul-17	Member
	012	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	Jul-17	Member
	013	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	Jul-17	Member
	014	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	Jul-17	Member
	015	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	Jul-17	Member
	016	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	Jul-17	Member
	017	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	Jul-17	Member
	018	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	Jul-17	Member of Political Bureau
	019	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	Jul-17	Central Committee member
	020	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	Jul-17	Member
	021	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	Jul-17	Member
	022	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	Jul-17	Member
	023	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	Jul-17	Member of Political Bureau
	024	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	Jul-17	Member
	025	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	Jul-17	Central Committee member
	026	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	Jul-17	Central Committee member
	027	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	Jul-17	Former Central Committee member
	028	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	Jul-19	Member
	029	Sulymaniyah (Kurdistan Region of Iraq	Jul-19	Member
	031	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2017	Member
	032	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2017	Member of Political Bureau
	033	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2017	Member
	034	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2017	Member
	035	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2017	Member
	037	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2017	Top-ranking Representative
	039	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2017	Member
	040	Sulymaniyah (Kurdistan Region of Iraq	July 2018	Member
	041	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	July 2018	Central Committee member
	042	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	July 2018	Member of Political Bureau
	043	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	July 2018	Member

Affiliation	Interview ID	Location	Date	Interviewee's Position
	045	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	July 2018	Former Central Committee member
	046	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	July 2018	Member
	047	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	July 2018	Member
	048	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	July 2018	Member
	049	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2018	Member
	050	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2018	Member
	051	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2018	Member
	052	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2018	Top-ranking Representative
	053	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2018	Member
	054	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2018	Top-ranking Representative
	055	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2018	Member
	056	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2018	Central Committee member
	057	Sulymaniyah (Kurdistan Region of Iraq	August 2018	Member
	058	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2018	Member
	060	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2018	Member of Political Bureau
	062	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2018	Former Central Committee member
	067	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2018	Top-ranking Representative
Komala (5)	036	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2017	Top-ranking Representative
	038	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2017	Top-ranking Representative
	044	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	July 2018	Cadre
	059	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2018	Central Committee member
	065	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2018	Top-ranking Representative
PJAK (2)	063	Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2018	Top-ranking Representative
	066	Koya Sanjaq (Kurdistan Region of Iraq)	August 2018	Top-ranking Representative
Field Experts (5)	I007	Tehran (Iran)	November 2016	Regional expert
	I012	Tehran (Iran)	November 2016	Kurdish Historian and expert
	I015	Tehran (Iran)	November 2016	Kurdish Historian and expert
	I016	Tehran (Iran)	November 2016	Kurdish Historian and expert
	I020	Tehran (Iran)	December 2016	Regional expert
Government Officials (5)	I013	Tehran (Iran)	November 2016	Former top-ranking official of Ministry of Internal Affairs (Iran)
	I017	Tehran (Iran)	November 2016	Former official- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs
	I021	Tehran (Iran)	December 2016	Former top-ranking official of Ministry of Internal Affairs (Iran)
	I023	Tehran (Iran)	December 2016	Former top-ranking official of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Iran)
	I025	Tehran (Iran)	December 2016	Former top-ranking official of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Iran)
Kurdish Activists (5)	I026	Kermanshah (Iran)	December 2016	Kurdish Activist-Iran
	I029	Tehran (Iran)	December 2016	Kurdish Activist-Iran
	I018	Sanandaj (Iran)	December 2016	Kurdish Activist-Iran
	I022	Sanandaj (Iran)	December 2016	Kurdish Activist-Iran
	I023	Kermanshah (Iran)	December 2016	Kurdish Activist-Iran

APPENDIX III: CODING SAMPLE

Interview Excerpt	Open Coding	Closed Coding-1	Closed Coding-2
"Three people in my town had joined PJAC and Komala. People used to talk about them all the time. I did not personally know them, but my friend knew one of them. They lived in the same neighbourhood. People in our community were talking about these guys as if they were heroes. I envied them. So, I also later decided to join. I had a friend who was connected to the KDPI, so I joined the Party. Since childhood, I always wanted **to become someone important.** Some friends told me that if I join the organization I would be able to become a commander. I joined for that." (ID 047)	"To become someone important"	Pull factor: Social status/prestige (non-material incentive)	Individual Factor
"When I was 15, I dropped out of high school and found a job in construction […] A friend, who also worked in construction in [*name of a Kurdish town*], showed me the Party's social media posts and the pictures of the *Peshmerga*. I was really impressed by the pictures I saw […] One of them was exactly my age **standing next to the Party leaders** in a Party uniform, with a gun. I really envied that person. I wanted to be like him." (ID 009)	"To stand next to party leaders"	Pull factor: Social status/prestige (non-material incentive)	Individual Factor
"I was in police custody for about five months in 2012. I wasn't told why I was arrested, but I can make a guess… I had been very active on the Party's social media pages before the arrest… used to post pictures, comments, tagged people, you know that kind of stuff. I was finally **released on bail** because they had no proof, maybe only my IP address. Anyway, once I was released, my life was literally over. I took the university entry exam that same year and the year after but wasn't eligible to go due to my **prison records**. So I thought of joining the Party… I already had a friend there. What other options did I have?" (ID 048)	"Released on bail/prison records"	Push factor: Criminal Status	Individual Factor
"My dad [*killed in 1985*] and both of my brothers [*killed in 1987 and 1991*] were *Peshmerga* and fought for the party in the mountains. I also had some members of my extended family here in the organization. I was in **the Urban Cell** of the party in [our town]. In 1997, I was **arrested** and released six months later. Then arrested twice during protests between 1998 and 2004. They had very minor charges against me. I was **released** in 2006. Then I received another letter from the court to attend a trial for attending the Party's meetings and organizing Kurdish writing classes. I **went into hiding and was told the police were looking for me**. So I decided to cross the border and join the Party here." (ID 039)	"Arrested/released/ Went into hiding"	Push factor: Criminal Status	Individual Factor

APPENDIX IV: WHITE HOUSE MEMORANDUM: PROGRESS REPORT ON THE KURDISH SUPPORT OPERATIONS

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

DECLASSIFIED in Part
PA/HO, Department of State
E.O. 12958, as amended
Date: 6/6/2006

INFORMATION

October 5, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT

FROM: HENRY A. KISSINGER

SUBJECT: Progress Report on the Kurdish
                                       Support Operations

At Tab A is a memorandum from Director Helms providing information
on the current status of our support for Mustafa Barzani's Kurdish
resistance movement. In short, Director Helms reports that:

-- Money and arms have been delivered to Barzani via the
   Iranians without a hitch.

-- More money and arms are in the pipeline, not only from
   Agency stocks but also ███████████████████
   captured Fedayeen ordnance.

-- Barzani received the first two monthly cash payments of
   ███████ each for July and August. The payment for September
   will be made early in October and a fourth payment for October
   will be made at the end of the month.

-- The first planeload of ten tons of arms and ammunition included
   500 Kalashnikov AK-47 assault rifles, 500 Soviet submachine
   guns and 200,000 rounds of ammunition.

-- By the end of October, the Iranians will have received for onward
   shipment to the Kurds 222,000 pounds of arms and ammunition
   from Agency stocks and 142,000 pounds from ████████████

-- Director Helms reports excellent cooperation ███████████
   ████ the Shah.

Director Helms also reports that the Baghdad regime and the Soviets are
extremely concerned about the independent course being followed by

SECRET/SENSITIVE

~~SECRET/SENSITIVE~~   - 2 -

Barzani. Also, according to CIA, all is not well with the Bathist
regime.

-- Reduction of oil revenue is causing fiscal stringencies and some
discontent. Barzani's maintenance of a secure redoubt will con-
tinue to pin down two-thirds of the Iraqi army and deprive the
Bathists of a secure base from which to launch sabotage and
assassination teams against Iran.

~~SECRET/SENSITIVE~~

APPENDIX V: FIELD OBSERVATION: LIST OF ATTENDED EVENTS

Event	Organization(s)	Date	Location
Commemorative Talk: Assassination of Abdul Rahman Ghassmlou, former party chairman in Vienna in 1989.	KDPI	July 13, 2017 July 13, 2018	Erbil (KRI)
Commemorative Talk: Formation of KDPI in the city of Mahabad, in Iranian Kurdistan, in 1945	KDPI	August 16, 2017 August 16, 2018	Erbil (KRI)
Ceremony: The 1979 Khomeini declaration of holy war against Iranian Kurds followed by the Revolutionary Guards' attacks on Iranian Kurdish towns.	KDPI, PJAK, Komala, Other.	August 17, 2017 August 17, 2018	Koya Sanjaq (KRI)
Course: Social media activism and data security	KDPI	July 26, 2017	Koya Sanjaq (KRI)
Course: Kurdish women and politics	KDPI	July 28, 2017	Koya Sanjaq (KRI)
Course: Kurdish History	KDPI	August 5, 2017	Erbil (KRI)
Discussion: Kurds' human rights in Iran	KDPI	August 2, 2018	Erbil (KRI)
Course: Kurdish women's rights	KDPI	July 15, 2018	Koya Sanjaq (KRI)

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