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## Theses on Kurdistan – A Marxist-Leninist Framework – Part 1

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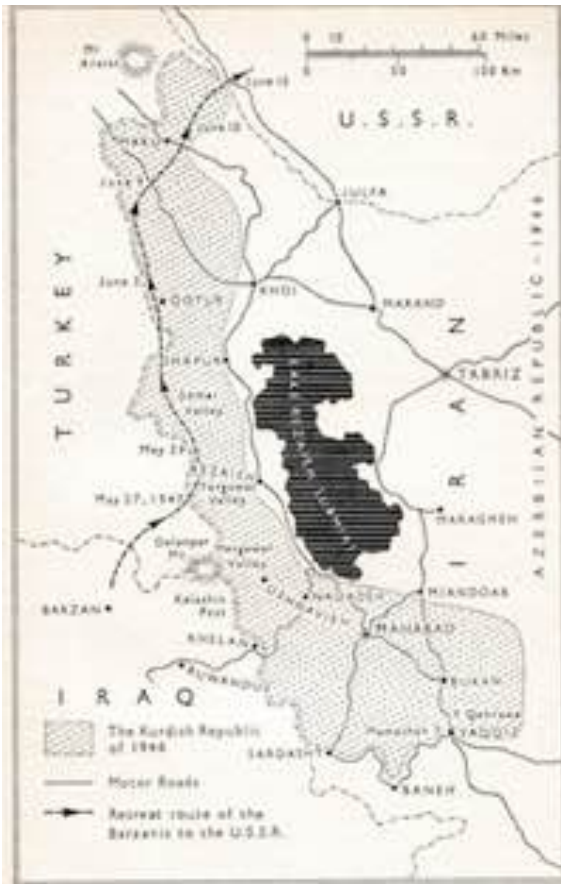
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## Introduction

We believe there has long been a need for a simple, and relatively concise summary of the Kurdistan national struggle, from a Marxist-Leninist perspective. No doubt, the need for such an urgent appraisal is made more acute by the Syrian Civil War, and its aftermath. Confusion about the state of Rojava is common. But when Rojava is dealt with in isolation, the results seem inadequate. This usually reflects the absence of a wider picture of Kurdistan. Regrettably, the history of Kurdistan, is not easily condensed, but this is an attempt to do so.

The current borders of the four modern Middle Eastern states both contain and divide the Kurds. These modern borders were constructed after the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. Naturally, the borders were drawn in such a way as to conveniently ensure Western Imperialism control of the Middle East. It was more expedient for imperialism to ensure control through more powerful and subservient compradors, who as chosen ones - established the new arbitrary states. The imperialists needed to be confident that they would control political events, because it was very likely that oil was present in several locations in these four states. The forgotten promise of the Treaty of Sevres was only the first of many convenient 'broken' cheap promises made by imperialists to representatives of the Kurdish people.

Paradoxically, each such denial did not extinguish Kurdistan nationalist hopes. Precisely because these enveloping oppressor states became so hostile to the Kurds, they simply fueled the search for Kurdish self-dignity and nationhood. Admittedly this was late, indeed, it only developed in the days of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. This left them in a "*dangerous undertaking*", as **Wadie Jwaideh**, an acknowledged academic authority on the Kurds put it:

"As a nation, the Kurds have been to the Arabs, the Turks and the Persians what the Scots have been to the English. Although they contributed such great soldiers and statesmen as Sal al-Din... they have never established a great empire of their own... The Kurds awakened to a sense of nationhood rather belatedly, and in this lies their tragedy and that of the people among whom they live. They seek to wrest what they regard as their divided homeland from the Turks, the Arabs and the Persians – a difficult and dangerous undertaking.."  
*Jwaideh, Wadie, "Kurdish National Movement. Its origins and Development"; Syracuse NY; 2006; Preface, p. xv*

Another scholar of the Kurds, **David McDowall**, also traces the late national development of the Kurds in the relative dearth of Kurdish literature expressing national consciousness:

"With the exception of the 17<sup>th</sup> C poet, **Ahmad-I Khani**, There is virtually no evidence that any Kurds thought in terms of a whole Kurdish people until the later 19<sup>th</sup> Century" (*David McDowall, "A Modern History of the Kurds": London 1996; p. 1*).

Indeed as against their immediate neighbours, Kurds were not as culturally empowered, and still hampered by a tribal, limited perspective:

"In comparison to the Turks and the Arabs, the Kurds were fatally disadvantaged because they lacked both a civic culture and an established literature." (*McDowall; Ibid; p. 2*).

To understand the place of the Kurds in the Middle East, it is helpful to trace the early origins of the Kurds. While the development of the Arab dynasties and the Persian dynasties is only a background, in regards to Kurdistan, it is appropriate to discuss this briefly. Of necessity this is brief outline. It involves a bewildering succession parade of names of long dead early empires (See these #2-8). Much of this narrative background is obtained from two sources – **Maxime Rodinson** a French Marxist ('Mohammed'; London 1985); and an astute bourgeois, admittedly reactionary scholar of the Arabs, **Bernard Lewis** (*Lewis, Bernard; 'The Arabs in History'; New York 1966*). Both by and large agree on the political realities underlying the rise of Islam. Both are insightful on the political origins of Islam, in the mercantile arena of early Mecca under the Arab Quraish tribe. Lewis's description of the religious sectarian division between Sunni and Shi'a as a surface to obscure deeper political struggle, helps understand origins of Shi'a outlook.

These long-dead Dynasties, underwent a complex development that we cannot dwell on here. But it is a series of societal change described by the term 'Oriental Despotism'. This term is now derided by the Marxist left, but this is undeserved. The underlying social realities driving the 'bewildering succession of names' of dynastic changes, were discussed by **Marx and Engels**. All the early dynasties needed to wrest life-giving water out of the adverse desert conditions. Water and its conservation by great hydraulic schemes, was one key impetus driving great dynastic empires in the Middle East and Asia. This reality formed the basis for Marx and Engels to distinguish between the forms of society termed 'feudalism' or 'oriental despotism', as outlined by **W.B.Bland** (*Bland W.B. "Oriental Despotism"; in "The Development of Society - Part One: To Feudalism"; Journal of the Communist League; June 1977. <http://ml-review.ca/aml/CommunistLeague/OrientalDespot1.htm>*)

Marx and Engels pointed out the essential need for vast irrigation systems:

"Great stretches of desert . . . extend from the Sahara straight across Arabia, Persia, India and Tartary up to the highest Asiatic-plateau. Artificial irrigation is here the first condition of agriculture". *F. Engels: Letter to K. Marx, June 6th., 1853, in: K. Marx & F.Engels: "Correspondence: 1846-1895"; London; 1936, p. 67.*

"Climate and territorial conditions, especially the vast tracts of desert extending from the Sahara, through Arabia, Persia, India and Tartary to the most elevated Asiatic highlands, constituted artificial irrigation by canals and waterworks the basis of Oriental agriculture".

*K. Marx: "The British Rule in India", in: "Selected Works"; Volume 2; London; 1943; p. 652.*

Following from this was a need for a 'relative' stability to ensure the state could build and maintain these irrigation systems. Hence the dynastic changes taking place in these societies, including those in the region we now call the Middle East. It is clear that Marx and later Lenin, ascribed the societal stage of Oriental Despotism, to many states including those of the Middle East, Russia, China etc. So Marx's comments on India, serve as a guide to similar phenomena in the Middle East. Marx depicts the dynastic name-changes (*'the political surface'*), as a kind of stage appearance behind which the '*social condition*' remained the same:

"The stationary character of this part of Asia - despite all the movement on the political surface -- is fully explained by two mutually dependent circumstances: 1) the public works were the business of the central government; 2) beside these the whole empire, not counting the few larger towns, was resolved into villages, which possessed a completely separate organisation and formed a little world in themselves. . .

I do not think one could imagine a more solid foundation for the stagnation of Asiatic despotism". *K. Marx; Letter to F. Engels., June 14th., 1853, in: K. Marx & F. Engels: "Correspondence: 1846-1895"; London; 1936; p. 70.*

"However changing the political aspect of India's past must appear, its social condition has remained unaltered since its remotest antiquity until the first decennium of the nineteenth century".

*K. Marx: "The British Rule in India", in: "Selected Works", Volume 2; London; 1943; p. 653.*

While the blanket term 'feudal' is often used for all these early societies, this term was rejected by both Marx, Engels and Lenin (*See Bland Ibid*). Indeed later under the Abbasid empire, tax-farming began and formed the basis of a feudal structure. However it was the Seljuks who formed true recognisable 'feudal' land grant systems. By the time of the Ottomans, as there had been even further trade and growth by then, feudal elements were even more securely embraced by the state. By this stage, the Kurds were being squeezed and oppressed on both sides – to the West by the Ottomans and to the East by the Safavids of modern day Persia or Iran.

Later, as modern state comprador or national capitalists took control, they also tried to crush the tribal rulers. Their wish was for a subjugated, disempowered urban and rural proletariat. But even in the 1900s, the modern states could not extirpate the tribal ties completely, as they were so deep. Indeed such ties formed the backbone of even nationalist organisations such as the **Barzani** led KDP and the **Talabani** led PUK (See below).

One particular problem posed in the history and politics of Kurdistan, is it necessitates discussing the national developments of each individual state. These individual states can be said to both '*contain and divide*' Kurdistan. In this piece, we cannot adequately discuss each essential detail. Therefore, we chose to discuss only some key individual historical developments of each state, as relevant to the Kurdish struggles. To attempt to deal with this sprawl of history, we chose a format of point-form theses, as conducive to a concise and manageable summary. Admittedly, the result is not a full history, and suffers from 'jumps', not being a continuous temporal description. But perhaps it may serve as a start to this question for Marxist-Leninists.

This introduction requires a few words on the references used. While a full bibliography is provided at the end, the text references are deliberately sparse, for brevity and readability. These references are severely limited, as being only from English sources. The author does not have any Kurdish, Arabic, Turkish or other relevant languages.

The readily standard available books are essential, but are not usually written from a progressive viewpoint. We again acknowledge that this not a complete Marxist-Leninist history of the four main 'containing' states, that have curbed Kurdistan national aspirations. Fuller Marxist-Leninist writings on the National Question applied to the

colonial-type countries, can be found elsewhere. These start with Stalin, and the early *Comintern* and 'Congress of the Peoples of the East'. These are often cited in the Marxist-Leninist literature. For example, from 'The Communist League'.

We also cite other key, essential sources, which are less well known. A Marxist-Leninist insight on Turkey is provided from the writings of *Garbis Altinoglu*. Most works by Altinoglu are in Turkish, making them less accessible to the English reader. For Iran, we share some useful insights from the Maoist-inspired *Bizhan Jazani*. He was murdered in prison by *Shah Reza*, after 15 years of imprisonment. His writings for the the *Organisation of Iranian Peoples Guerillas (OIPFG)*, or, *Fedai e Khalq* - are available (*Bizhan Jazani 'Capitalism and Revolution In Iran'; London 1980*). Though he is definitely not a Marxist-Leninist, a word on *Abdullah Ocalan*, is appropriate at this point. His writings are not available in English as far as we are aware. Fortunately, since he became a darling of the anarchist and academic circles, there are a number of key passages in English.

The historic struggles of the 1946 Republic of Mahabad, Azerbaijan and the Iranian crisis – are of great interest to the Marxist-Leninist. The latter was deliberately configured to disrupt agreements with the USSR. This material comes from several sources, including William Eagleton Jr (*"The Kurdish Republic of 1946"; London; 1963*), Archie Roosevelt Jr (*"The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad"; In Chaliand, Gerald, Editor ("A People Without a Country"; New York; 1993)* and the *Cold War History Project*. That latter source, includes new archival material bearing directly, upon *Stalin's* approach to the post-World War II tight-rope. (For *Stalin's* reply to the Prime Minister of the national government of Azerbaijan, *Pishevari*, See Appendix).

The standard current texts, include some pivotal texts for this article. Here we single out a few key ones. The detailed work of Hanna Batatu on the history of Iraq, is unrivalled (*The old social classes and the revolutionary movements of Iraq: a study of Iraq's old landed and commercial classes and of its Communists, Ba'athists, and Free Officers'; Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, c1978*). It is especially of interest in Part Two of these Theses. However its depiction of the changes in class composition and class relations as the Ottoman Empire in Iraq, gave way to the British, is illuminating.

Another key work is that of David McDowall (*"A Modern History of the Kurds": London 1996*) is one, and another is by Wadie Jwaideh (*"The Kurdish National Movement. Its Origins and Development"; New York, 2006*). Both are encyclopaedic, but at times both shade into academicism. Two insightful works help correct this, one by John Bulloch and Harvey Morris (*"No Friends But The Mountains"; London 1992*); and another by Gerard Chaliand (*"A People Without a Country"; New York; 1993; p.103*). The first is progressive but unverifiable, having literally, no references. The primary work in Chaliand is from 1978. A more recent text, gives us the USA establishment insiders view - that of Quil Lawrence (*"Invisible Nation"; New York; 2008*).



**Preface**

The history of the Kurdish people, is tragically – that of a people who found themselves, so often, in the middle of contending states and peoples.

A poet captured the essence in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, of what was to pass until today:

*“Look, from the Arabs to the Georgians,  
The Kurds have become like towers.  
The Turks and Persians are surrounded by them.  
The Kurds are on all four corners.  
Both sides have made the Kurdish people  
Targets for the arrows of fate.  
They are said to be keys to the borders  
Each tribe forming a formidable bulwark.  
Whenever the Ottoman Sea (Ottomans) and Tajik Sea (Persians)  
Flow out and agitate,  
The Kurds get soaked in blood  
Separating them (the Turks and the Persians) like an isthmus”;*  
*Ahmad-I Khani: Mem-u-zin, late 17<sup>th</sup> Century;*  
*McDowall, David; “A Modern History of the Kurds”; London; 1996; p.5*

**1. Ancestors of the Kurds amidst the Early Dynastic History of the Middle East**

1. Kurdistan is an area within which an incipient nation formed. It lies in a disputed corner of the Middle East. The territory and its national status is disputed, because this area crosses across the state borders of four dominant recognized Middle Eastern states and the ex-Soviet Union. There are approximately 30-35 million-strong Kurdish people divided between these 5 states. Turkey (12 million), Iran (6 million), Iraq (6 million), and Syria (2 million). There are just under a million Kurds in former Transcaucasia and Central Asia. Finally there are many emigrants, largely in Germany, who number some half a million. The majority of Kurds reside in Turkey, mostly in the Southeastern and Eastern Anatolia, which areas are also termed “Northern Kurdistan”. (*Maps 1 and 2*). The Kurdish minority in Turkey has been the largest minority. However other minorities were also important, and at one time, one of these was the Armenians.
2. The Kurds are likely descended from Indo-European tribes that were moving west across Iran during the second-third millennia BCE. This particular wave into the Middle East was known as the Medes. But over this early period there were several waves of different incoming hordes. As they warred across the area, it was inevitable they would collide with the resident states. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC, the Assyrian empire and the Urartu faced off for supremacy in the Middle East. Initially the Medes paid tribute to the Assyrians. The ravages of the Sycythians in Central Asia, forced the Cimmerians into the Middle East. The Cimmerians destroyed Urartu power, and as Sycythians followed them West, they dominated

the Medes. But the Medes successfully rose against them. As they did so, they and were also able to destroy the Assyrian empire. By doing so, the **Medes** Empire became a power in the region for a period.

3. Their descendants would eventually form the **Mede** Empire, which is thought to be the most likely precursors to the Kurds, though this is disputed (*Jwaideh; Ibid; p. 12-13*). Some authorities cite other possible early ancestors of the Kurds:

"Sumerian inscriptions of 2000 B.C., as well as early Assyrian inscriptions of a thousand years later, indicate the existence of a people named Kardaka, Kurtie or Guti in the neighbourhood of Lake Van... (By) Grecian times that certain identification is possible. Herodotus mentions the inhabitants of what is now Bohtan, and Xenophon refers to the Garduchi... Strabo speaks of the country of Cordueni where Bait Kardu is located by Aramaic sources. The modern form "Kurd" first appears in Arabic writings of the ninth century A.D. with the plural form "Akrad." (*W.G.Elphinstone; "The Kurdish Question": 1946*)<sup>1</sup>

It was during the imminent Arab expansionism and conquests over the Middle East, in AD 637, that the Kurds first encountered the Arabs. The word 'Kurd' was early on identified by Arabic historians as synonymous with 'nomad', and was applied to all the Iranian nomads (*Jwaideh, ibid; p. 12*). Conversion of the Kurds from early beliefs (*see #4*) largely to Islam was a slow process.

4. Ultimately the Mede Empire was absorbed into a larger Persian empire. Jumping centuries forward, to the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD, the Middle East again was the battleground between two rival empires. Now it was the Byzantine Empire centered on Constantinople, that was pitted against the Persian empire of the **Sassanids** (224-651 AD). "They were disputing economic mastery of the world and what would guarantee it, control of the routes by which the products of China and the Far East - above all silk - were brought to the west." (*Rodinson M; Ibid; p. 26*). These routes were easiest around the seas of Southern Arabia. But these became turbulent in the warfare. During the Sassanid period the Kurds expanded up to Western Persia. After the Sassanids failed to capture Constantinople, their Empire decayed, and it was to be soon conquered by the newly unified Arab Islamic tribes. Meanwhile the Byzantines were also under grave threat. Preoccupied with the Eastern battles, they failed to actively defend their Western reaches, which fell to the Lombards and Visigoths.
5. Overlapping these events was the foundation of the Arab empire, and the ideology that fueled its dynamic expansionism - Islam. As the warring empires sapped each other's strengths, the trade routes of Southern Arabia became threatened. Now the nomadic Northern Arabs of the deserts came into their own, being able to guide the trade caravans in the alternative route. In this process the Oriental Despotic regimes slowly shifted in character. The decline of the Southern Arabian trade routes was linked to the destruction of irrigation:

"The duel of empires, which was echoed in the party strife especially

noticeable in South Arabia, could not fail to have major repercussions in the world of the nomadic Saracens. The conquest of South Arabia by the Ethiopians and later by the Persians reflected a decline in power which had begun long before... As in the north, the desert Bedouin seem to have infiltrated in an increasingly massive and thoroughgoing fashion. Later Arabic legend remarks this decline and attributes it to a technical accident: the breaching of the great Marib dam. It is not at all unlikely that the big dams which controlled the irrigation of a wide area may have suffered severe damage; but, if they were not repaired... this was because the country's resources would no longer allow it. All this gave an added importance to the Bedouin. They were now in a position to charge more dearly for their services as guides or middlemen in overland traffic". (*Rodinson M Ibid; p.34-5*)

6. Inevitably mercantilism developed into a money economy, which outgrew the pantheistic, religious philosophy of the nomadic tribes. As some of them came to be settled merchants, they came into contact with monotheistic religions (Christianity and Judaism) and some converted. A more suitable cultural fit was soon to be provided, as ideas of stepping up from where the Byzantines and Sassanids had left them. *Rodinson* frames it as follows:

"The Saracen lands were suffering from a sense of political inferiority. As mercenaries and auxiliaries, the Arabs were the mainstay of the great empires, who purchased their support, feared their revolts and played off the tribes against one another. Why not use their importance to their own advantage? To do that, a powerful state would be needed to unite all Arabia. It would then be in a position to safeguard its newly acquired wealth and commerce and to direct the avidity of the poorer Bedouin outwards, instead of allowing it to prey on Arabia's own commercial interests. This was what the South Arabian kingdoms, with their colonizing attitude to the nomads and, for all their distant kinship, their lack of contact with the Bedouin, had ultimately failed to achieve. An Arab state, framed according to Arab ideals, tailored to the new conditions and yet still sufficiently close to the Bedouin life that it had to incorporate, and able to take its' place on an equal footing with the great empires - this was the great need of the times. The way was open for the man of genius who could respond to it better than any other. That man was about to be born". (*Ibid p.37*)

7. Muhammed was born in Mecca around the year 570 AD, and began to preach around 610 AD. Forced by nomadic tribal leaders to moderate his preaching, he was invited by merchants in Medina to move there. By his death in 632, he had united most of the warring Arab tribes. In the ensuing struggle for supremacy, a triumvirate leading faction, supported by leaders of Medina, 'elected' (or proclaimed) Abu Bakr, as the First Caliph (Khalifa-Deputy of the Prophet) of the so-called **Rashida Caliphate** (or 'rightly guided caliphate' according to Sunnis). This overlooked the claims of 'Ali - the cousin, and son-in-law of Muhammed (the Prophet). The Arab tribes began an expansionist war led by General Khalid ibn al-Walid. By the reign of the Second Caliph Umar, the Arab armies had toppled

- Byzantine provinces (Syria and Egypt) and the Sassanids. Upon Umar's murder by a slave in 644, the first Islamic civil war broke out, where the old Meccan nomads fought against a centralised state. Uthman the 3<sup>rd</sup> Caliph was then also murdered, likely by adherents of **'Ali**, who claimed power to become the 4<sup>th</sup> Caliph. But following another civil war, he was killed. Following his murder, his followers and descendants proclaimed him the true descendant of Muhammed and therefore, the leader of Moslems, forming the Shi'a (Shi'atu 'Ali - the party of 'Ali). The subsequent accession to the Caliphate by Mu'awiya restored a unity.
8. Mu'awiya began the **Umayyad** Dynasty (named after an ancestor) which ruled between 661 to 750 AD. This was "a Persian and Byzantine succession state" (Lewis, Bernard; *"The Arabs in History"*; New York; 1966; p. 66). As the empire grew, wealth of the Arab ruling class grew, as they became a warrior aristocracy. Conquered peoples, non-Arab Muslims, were absorbed into the empire, and grew into a new class the **Mawali**. They became the artisans, merchants and shop-keepers, but chafed. Ultimately their political and social grievances expressed itself in Shi'a religious discontent.
  9. The discontented Mawali raised revolts calling for the Shi'a *Mahdi* – 'the rightly guided one'. Political leaders took the guise of a "Messianic religious pretender", as did Mukhtar in the revolt of 685-7 (Lewis *Ibid* p. 72). At the same time centralised Arab state faced those who wished to return to a pre-Islamic state, such as the movement of the Khawarij. Magnifying these were internal feuds within the Umayyad dynasty reflecting tribal feuds. As mass conversions of conquered took up Islam, they claimed only lower rate Muslim taxes. As an Umayyad attack on Constantinople failed, all these events precipitated crisis. Another Messianic pretender arose, in the guise of an uncle of the Prophet – 'Ali ibn al-'Abbas – a Hashimite. After his death, his son, Ibrahim, launched a successful coup in 747 AD. This began the **'Abbasid** dynasty, under Abu'l-'abbas. Despite the religious form, this was a revolution of the Mawali merchants and artisans (Lewis *Ibid*; pp. 73-86). Yet having used the Shi'a revolts to come to power, the Abbasids disavowed the Shi'a religious form and adopted Sunni Islam. Although it developed a slave economy, it moved towards a more clearly recognisable feudal arrangement, with tax-farming by governors of areas – often Turkish soldiers Mamluks. They rapidly became the power structure. In the increasing disorder numerous slave rebellions broke out, including that of Negro slaves – the Zanj – between 869-883 (Lewis *Ibid* p. 100-106). During this time, the leaders of the Shi'ite wing claimed lineage from 'Ali and his wife Fatima (the Fatimid) line within Shi'ite leaders, an offshoot of which were more militant, the Isma'ili branch. They established in opposition to the Abbasids, the **Fatimid** Dynasty, in 908, centered on Tunisia and Egypt.
  10. As the Abbasid empire failed to solve the societal problems, it became largely eclipsed. In 945, they became merely the figure-heads for the Persian **Buwaihid** dynasty – who entered from Persia to seize Iraq. They effectively became the real rulers of Iraq, but even though they were Shi'ia, the Sunni Abbasids were used as figureheads – an illustration of their own decay also. Into this weakened structure came further incursions of various Turkic Oguz nomadic tribes, including the Kayi tribe, Osman Gazi's ancestors. These invaders established the

**Seljuq** dynasty in Iran and Persia, by the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> Century. From 907 AD they started invading Persia, Iraq, Syria and Palestine, seizing them from the Fatimids. They also defeated the Byzantines and wrested large parts of Anatolia. They extended the feudal practices of tax-farming, into land grants, in return for providing armed men to the state. Osman Gazi (c1258-1324 AD). Ruling a Turkumen principality in North Western Anatolia, he and his gazis (or raiders) steadily eroded the Byzantine empire's rule and territories, from Baghdad. He became a Bey (prince) over Bithynia. His descendants under Sultan Alp Arslan, defeated the Byzantines at the Battle of Manzikert in 1071. But, they could not breach the defences of Constantinople. So the Seljuk precursors simply bypassed them, establishing territories in what is Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Serbia-Montenegro, Bosnia, and Croatia – up to the River Danube (Shaw, Stanford J. and Gökhan Çetinsaya. "Ottoman Empire." In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*. Oxford Islamic Studies Online. Jan 24, 2019. <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/print/opr/t236/e0611>)

But the Seljuks themselves withered, as they fell to the host of Yelu Dashi – one of the Liao dynasty of Liao Nanjing - in 1141. It was the Mongol hordes of Jenghiz Khan, and later Prince Huleku – who finally defeated the Seljuks in 1243, at the battle of Kosedá. Huleku captured Baghdad, and abolished the decaying 'Abbasid Caliphate in 1258. The Seljuks retreated to Anatolia. (Malcolm Edward Yapp Stanford Jay Shaw; "Ottoman Empire, Historical Empire, Eurasia And Africa"; Nov 27, 2018 <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ottoman-Empire>)

11. The origins of the **Ottoman** Empire are traced to the long and drawn out the Seljuk collapse. But the Seljuk eclipse saw more turkomen clans came into the area. They established principalities, including one ruled by Osman Bey. He grew by attacking the Byzantines, and he and his descendants formed the Ottoman dynasty. Between the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century, under ten rulers, they created seeds of the the Ottoman empire. An exhausted Byzantine Empire, finally fell as Constantinople was captured eventually, by the Ottomans under Sultan Mehmed II in 1453.
12. No single Kurdish sovereign ever ruled over all of later designated Kurdistan, but several dynasties ruled over considerable areas of it. The biggest Kurdish dynasty of the **Ayyubids**, was founded by Salah al-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub ibn Shadi. Perhaps the most famous historical Kurdish personage, Saladin of the Crusades was born 1137 AD in Tekrit. Initially his path to power lay through service on behalf of a Seljuk warrior Nur ad-Din, and then as Wazir to the Fatimid caliph al-'Adid in Egypt. In 1171, Saladin declared an end to the Fatimid Caliphate, first restoring the Abbasids to nominal power in the Fatimid empire. But soon he established his own dynasty. The Ayyubid dynasty included Syrian territory, and Palestine. During the Mongol incursions, in 1260 the Ayyubid Empire was taken over by the Qipchang Turk commander called Baibars, who repulsed the Mongols. He established in Egypt the **Mamluk** dynasty.
13. Meanwhile, going back to the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, to bring Persia into closer view, the Persian Shah Ismael had established the **Safavid** dynasty (superseding the **Qajar** Dynasty). Kurdistan lay between the Turks-Ottomans on the West, and the Safavids on the South-East. The wars between the Ottomans and Safavids in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, geographically compressed the Kurds. The

Ottomans temporarily won the rivalry over the Safavids in 1514 at the Battle of Chaldiran. While this battle was an important “check” on Safavid power by the Ottomans, at the same time the Ottomans “failed to destroy it”: (*Jwaideh Ibid; p. 17*). Nonetheless, Chaldiran established a durable boundary, formalized in AD 1639 by the Treaty of Zuhab between Sultan Murad IV and Shah Safi al-Din. These boundaries remained in place until World War 1, and engulfed most of the Kurdish lands into the two empires. Kurds hereafter often served as mercenaries in both Ottoman and Safavid armies, although the Ottomans were more shrewd in incorporating the Kurds. However there were frequent rebellions in both Ottoman and Persian held Kurdistan.

## 2. Modern Day Kurds and their economy to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century

14. Today, a complex fusion of Arab, Turkoman and Cyrtii, make up the peoples now known as Kurds. Most Kurds today are Sunni Muslims (75%), while 10% are Shi'a – the latter are mainly based in current day Iran. In addition, significant minorities identify as Kurds, with heterodox forms of Muslim and distinct dialects. This heterodoxy reflects remnants of earlier beliefs that resisted a full 'Islamification'. Such minorities include the Alevi on the extreme edge of Shi'i Islam with “a mixture of pre-Islamic, Zoroastrianism, Turkoman shaman and Shiite ideas” (*McDowall; Ibid; p.10*). There are also the Yazidis, also speaking a dialect and professing a “mix of old pagan elements, Zoroastrian dualist elements, and Manichaeic gnosis overlaid with Jewish, Christian and Muslim elements” (*McDowall; ibid p 11*). Finally Sufism mystic brotherhoods are spread throughout the Kurdish Islamists. Surprisingly, Christianity also entered Kurdistan by AD 226, by when Mar Mari of Urfa had converted the king and people of Shahgert. Christians in the region are mentioned by Arab historians such as al-Mas'udi (*Jwaideh, ibid; p. 19*). At times tribal ties superseded religious ones as in the Muslim-Christian Federation of Hakari during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (*Jwaideh Ibid p.33*). There was a sizeable Christian community identifying as 'Kurds', largely amongst the Armenians of Eastern Anatolia; and, Assyrians. However by the time of the Armenian massacres (rightly called 'Genocide') by the Turkish state in 24 April 1915, Christian influence was largely eliminated in the area, and hereafter can be ignored.

15. Nonetheless, all who remain in this area largely consider themselves as 'Kurds'. This term was originally synonymous with 'nomad' (*see #2*) and in Eastern parts with 'tribal', for some centuries. The profusion of these tribes is vividly shown by Map 3 (*Eagleton; Ibid; p.19*). The majority of the peoples calling themselves Kurds, still live in the mountains and plateau areas of the states of Turkey, Iraq and Iran. This lies in the Zagros and Taurus mountain ranges. Largely this is a high, tough terrain, but nonetheless serves for agriculture and animal husbandry.

16. However not all Kurds were nomads, even among the ancient Kurds. Among the Medes, both sedentary and nomadic life co-existed (*Bulloch & Morris; Ibid; p.78*). It is conjectured that the tribal nomadic Kurds, were later invaders – overcoming the older settlers who had become peasants (*Jwaideh, Ibid, p.27-8*). These historically older peasant elements were “almost a different race from the landed aghas and their tribal retainers and fighting men”; (*Batatu H, “The Old Social Classes of Iraq”; Ibid; p. 46*). The nomad tribes ('*ashirat*') became the dominant group – or class - over the

peasant settled tribes (*rayat*). Tribal chiefs in Kurdistan were either titled as 'shaikhs' (or shaykhs) or as 'begs' (*begzada*).

"The Arab tribal shaikhs and the Kurdish tribal begs or aghas who in the monarchic period (i.e 1920-1958 in Iraq) formed the most important segment of the landed class, and until 1958 dominated the greater number of the peasants of Iraq, were historically the product of the life of frequent raids and relatively rapid change that characterised the flatlands of the Tigris and Euphrates and the Kurdish mountain belt in the 19<sup>th</sup> and earlier centuries. In those times the existential tribal situation emphasised the prowess, decision, mobility. Hence the origin of the begs, aghas, and shaikhs as a warrior group, and the tendency for them to rise from among the more mobile tribes,, from the montane mounted nomads in Kurdistan and the nomadic *ahil-il-ibl* (people of the Camel) in Arab Iraq also... in some instances their dominance represented the dominance of one nomadic camel tribe, which was itself but an extension of one family group, over many semi-agricultural tribes, tribal marshmen or tribal sheep breeders; or the dominance of montane tribal nomads over non-tribal cultivators. This dominance assumed more and more the aspect of class dominance..It is the fighting nomadic order that tended to provide the ruling stratum of Kurdish princes and aghas...and shaikhs of the powerful constituent tribes"; (*Batatu H, "The Old Social Classes of Iraq"; Ibid; p;63-64; 71*)

The nomadic tribal passages across settler's lands during the seasonal migrations was an on-going source of tension. But the dominant nomadic tribal elements would slowly become themselves, tied to fixed home and land as peasants over the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Yet even now, strong elements of tribalism survive, as evidenced by the Barzani-Talabani power blocks and their rivalry.

17. Organisationally tribalism in the Kurdish communities was previously into descending units. Although tribalism is changing over to a clearer class based system, we outline the original structure. At the top are tribes (*'ashirat*) led by a chief, which contain clans (*tiras*), which is the basic political group and land-owning unit. In turn these are divided into several *hoz* – which are the lineage as male descendants from the same ancestor. When migrating, several hoz may camp as a *khel*, also a lineage based unit, which is led by an elder who is elected. This hierarchy has its leaders at all levels, with the tira headed by a ra'is or **agha** (chief). The agha is an inherited position, and collectively, the agha class is "the nobility of the tiras" – such a nobility of the leaders formed a *begzada* or 'princely house'. (*Jwaideh; Ibid; p. 29*) Many became over time, absentee landlords. Today's female Kurdish guerrillas impress with their leadership and bravery. Historically this reflects Kurdish women's status. They were not secluded, not veiled, and not prohibited from dancing with men at weddings etc. She would often act as head of the household, receiving men as guests. Some became tribal chiefs, such as Maryam Khanim – who negotiated Russian Caucasus army ingression in the First World War (*Jwaideh; Ibid; p.41-44*). But power of the tribes not only stems from the aghas, but also from the **Shaikhs**. They often achieve shaihkdom, by displays of charismatic asceticism to demonstrate strength of

religious wisdom, such as fasting for many days (*Jwaideh Ibid p.48-53*). They established their own familial lineage. But initially were almost always outsiders from the tribe, who settled and acquired reputation for piety, attracting matrimonial alliances with chiefs, and ultimately power. They were became great landowners, where villagers in their lands gained protection from the holy person. Many had the power of summoning their followers to war. Power then amongst the leaders of the Kurds traditionally resided in either the aghas, the hereditary princes or begzada, or shaikhs. (*Jwaideh Ibid p. 259*)

18. The dominant economy of the Kurdish people was largely a nomadic pastoral one (transhumance), until relatively recently. Until the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Kurd nomadic pastoralists drove sheep and goats up to the spring and autumn pastures. The nomads moved at end spring from the lower hotter plains, up to the summer mountain areas (*zozan*) to pasture their flocks. The pastoral herds were historically often driven across parts of the current borders, for example by the Harki and Pizdar tribes. But increasingly a sedentary way of life was adopted, although the livelihood often remained centered on animal rearing. Who owned lands? Batatu describes a tenure dependent upon Ottoman grants:

“In Kurdistan the nomadic tribes had their own prescriptive grazing grounds but the lands in the villages were either in the hands of tribal aghas, who were their own masters, or held – theoretically – for life by the reigning Kurdish families on that kind of heritable feudal tenures which was conditional... upon their providing so many men to the Ottomans or Mamluk Pashas for military service when called upon. These families in turn apportioned the best lands among their trusted followers, or more specifically, among the aghas or the “beyzadehs” that is gentlemen of the first rank.. In practice there was no real security in tenure of land... which made for the prevalence of subsistence agriculture” (*Batatu Ibid p. 72*).

19. The state borders in this region were porous to the dominant nomadic pastoral economy of the Kurds, as they moved across empires and later state. To a very small and residual extent, they still are. This ancient passage did not respect state boundaries. It also formed a living space right in-between the two great power blocks of the Turkish empires and the Persian empires. But all the states that historically and now - enveloped the Kurds, especially Turkey and Iran, worried about the defences of their borders. Consequently the states were hostile to suggestions that their mountainous boundaries should accommodate or reflect, any potential Kurdistan. In addition, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the sources of essential raw materials became increasingly contentious. It is only very lately, that oil reserves became of increasing importance. The contentious resources are water supplies (from the Zagros river, and the Tigris and Euphrates rivers) and oil reserves (of Rumaylan in Syria, Batman and Silvan in Turkey, and Kirkuk and Khaniqin and Mosul in Iraq). These resources make the enveloping states further hostile to any potential Kurdistan.

### 3. Do The Kurds Qualify for National Status?

20. Marxists-Leninists consider as the basis for assessment of nationhood of a peoples, the following key definition of Stalin:



"A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture." *Stalin JV; Marxism and the National Question; Chapter 1.*

21. Admittedly, the claim for nationhood of the earliest Kurdish representatives up to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was weak. It could be said that firstly, there was a lack of 'stability. The wars and oppression of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century definitely ensured this. Secondly, it is true that the Kurdish *language* is complex, with very major differences, that surpass mere differences of dialects:

"The Kurds face a practical difficulty based partly upon language differences, the very recent creation of a literature (since the 1920s) and the prevalence of different scripts – Latin in Turkey, Cyrillic in the ex-Soviet Union, and Persian in Iraq and Iran."

*McDowall, David 'A Modern History of the Kurds'; London; London; 1996; p. 3*

But, perhaps most importantly, is the lack of a single *economic* life since the artificial division of the peoples between the various states. While the earlier nomadic life-style ignores borders, this became more and more difficult in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed as the nomads became sedentary peasants, yet they were still focused on animal husbandry. The four dominant modern states made travel and social contact across the borders, more and more difficult. This attenuated the links across the borders necessary for a true cultural and economic unity. This last, most important caveat on Kurdistan, resembles one pointed out by Stalin upon Georgia. And yet Georgia was able to overcome this obstacle as capitalism developed:

"Before the reform inhabited a common territory and spoke one language. Nevertheless they did not strictly speaking constitute, one nation, for, being split up into a number of disconnected principalities, they could not share a common economic life; for centuries they waged war against each other and pillaged each other, each inciting the Persians and the Turks against the other... Georgia came on the scene as a nation only in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when the fall of serfdom and the growth of the economic life of the country, the development of means of communication and the rise of capitalism, introduced division of labour between the various districts of Georgia, completely shattering the economic isolation of the principalities and bound them together into a single whole" *Stalin JV; Marxism and the National Question; Chapter 1.*

Similarly, in Kurdistan such a "*binding together*" was ensured by the on-going daily oppressions the Kurds faced in these four dominant Middle Eastern countries. Moreover, after 1991, once the lubricant of oil was able to be tapped by the Kurds, such a single economic life was given some basis in reality. This inspired the oppressed Kurds to think beyond the borders of 'their' state. Their long-held dream, appeared to have gotten real foundation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

22. The underlying social and political changes needed to form a nation are those that form a modern class structure of a proletariat (both rural peasantry and an urban working class) and a national bourgeoisie. In Kurdistan this slowly arose out of a chain of steps. And this has even now in 2018, not been completely accomplished. Largely a fully formed national bourgeoisie has been somewhat eclipsed by an opportunist comprador one. Responsible for this slow development, has been the initial elaborate tribal network - the original matrix of Kurdish society. While at times these tribes formed confederations, more often tribes found themselves at war with each other. Blood feuds were a major impediment to advanced class formation. In the era of the Ottomans and the Safavids, such internecine warfare was consciously exploited by the empires to prevent Kurdish unity. Later as British, Imperial Russian Empires and USA entered the stage in turns, tribal sentiments remained a barrier to any necessary unity. Of course these imperialists easily and consciously sowed division. But by modern time, in all parts a process of modern (but incomplete) class development had occurred. Of course the details of each state vary. But in essence was very similar in all. A process of steady encroachment upon nomadism, turned these pastoralists into sedentary farmers. By the 1970s, in Iranian Kurdistan, there were no more nomads, having been 'stripped of rights to cross frontiers' (A.R.Ghassemlou; 'Kurdistan in Iran'; In Chaliand, *Ibid*; p.103). This steady erosion of the nomadic life, was coupled to a process extending over hundreds of years, of reining in the highly independent and war-like tribal chiefs. This policy was first enacted by the Ottomans and Safavids, but then later in Iran by the dictator Reza Shah, in Iraq by the British under their mandate etc. Alongside this the more far-seeing chiefs, went 'modern' and transformed themselves into landowners. From there elements branched into small-scale capitalism, mostly becoming comprador capitalists. Surrounded as Kurdistan was by both larger external imperialist oppressors, and by a more local immediate oppressor in the four 'enveloping' states, development of a Kurdish – a full national capital development - was impeded. Yet a consciousness of national oppression remained vivid, and that flame was not expunged. It lasted until the fuel of an oil-economy enabled a possible real national economy in 1991.
23. Yet the four dominant Middle Eastern states, all denied the nationhood of Kurdistan. This was to preserve their own territory (as discussed above), to maintain their raw materials (oil and water), and finally, to maintain a source of a highly super-exploited proletariat. This enabled the rulers of these recognized states to obtain even higher rates of profit, and to use principles of divide and rule to force down the living standards of the native proletariat and peasantry.
24. To perpetuate this, the ruling classes of the four states had to engage in constant battles. These pitted each ruling class against each other, but also and simultaneously - against "their own" section of Kurdish nationalists. At the same time, to weaken the other opposing state, they would often foster and succor the Kurdish nationalists of the other states. The underlying wish was to erode their rival states' own territory and integrity. Compounding this, was the largely tribal, narrow minded and short term calculations of rival chiefs and aghas. The chiefs may have led rebellions, but these were short lived, given an absent cross-tribal unity. Again, Stalin's characterisation of the behavior of the Georgians is

relevant. The combination of tribal divisions, and superior strategies of the rulers adopting a deliberate policy, ensured defeat of Kurdish rebellions. Another reason can be adduced for failures, the tendency to trust and rely on external imperialisms of the tribal based leaders of rebellion. This has extended into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This led to repeated cycles of hopes betrayed of the Kurdish people, and a corruption of the leading elements of Kurdish nationalists.

25. Marxist-Leninists recognize the rights of self-determination and political independence of all nations. They defend the right of long-suffering Kurdish nation to self-determination, that is the right of Kurdish people to secede from Iraq, Turkey etc. and to establish their own state. Marxist-Leninists do not defend the immutability of the frontiers of states based on national oppression, such as those of Iraq, Turkey, Iran or Syria. Not even when the pretext is offered of their "struggle against imperialism". Lenin said:

"The proletariat of oppressing nations cannot confine itself to the general hackneyed phrases against annexations and for the equal rights of nations in general, that may be repeated by any pacifist bourgeois. The proletariat cannot evade question that is particularly 'unpleasant' for the imperialist bourgeoisie, namely the question of the frontiers of the state, that is based on national oppression. The proletariat cannot but fight against the forcible retention of the oppressed nations within the boundaries of a given state and this is exactly what the struggle for the right of self-determination means."

*("Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination", Selected Works, Vol. 5, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1936; pp.271-72.)*

26. Yet, there is always the possibility that a national liberation movement (or for that matter any other democratic movement) may – objectively, or subjectively - serve the reactionary intentions and policies of imperialism. If this is the case, Marxist-Leninists and all consistent democrats are obliged to withdraw their support from that particular movement, without in any way denying the national and democratic rights of oppressed sections of the population. Lenin said:

"The various demands of democracy, including self-determination, are not an absolute, but a small part of the general democratic (now; general socialist) world movement. In individual concrete cases, the part may contradict the whole; if so, it must be rejected. It is possible that the republican movement in one country may be merely an instrument of the clerical or financial-monarchist intrigues of other countries; if so, we must not support this particular, concrete movement, but it would be ridiculous to delete the demand for a republic from the programme of International Social-Democracy on these grounds."

*("The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up", Collected Works, Vol. 22, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1974; p.34.)*

27. In Kurdistan, often its leaders chose at several crucial junctures, a reactionary path. In some cases, such as the Barzanis and the Talabanis, this entailed a servile obeisance to imperialism – starting with Britain, and then more recently with USA. In the case of Ocalan and the PKK, this has taken the form of

repudiating Marxist-Leninist principles, and descending into an anarcho-municipalism. Finally, Marxist-Leninists recognise that ultimately even the most resolute of bourgeois national parties will renege on the post independence struggle, and obstruct the second stage, the socialist revolution. Ultimately only a determined and self-conscious working class movement, will ensure firstly, a break through to nationhood, and then, to the second stage of a socialist revolution.

We conclude that in Kurdistan, despite the huge problems that led to weakening of their claims to nationhood, by the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, “language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up” – in Kurdistan - together constituted a national status. However, the Kurdish people have been largely failed, by their leaders. Admittedly these leaders faced enormous, complex battles and hurdles. We now explore some critical processes and history of these battles.

#### 4. The Ottomans and The Kurdish Chiefs

28. We have discussed that tribal organization was the key social unit, extending its reach even to current times. In early Ottoman times, Kurds were purely tribal. The tribes were formed as some powerful families acquired increasing influence. Sometimes a religious element also formed durable tribal links, through Sufi Brotherhood *tariqa* networks. Finally, there were some non-tribal Kurds. These were often peasants subject to tribal rule, and regarded as having “little more status than flocks of sheep” (*Bulloch & Morris; Ibid; p.78*). Another group of peasants in a clear landlord-peasant oppression, were subjects of Ottoman fief-holders, former soldiers who had been rewarded. The size of the tribes varied but could be large tribal confederations to clans or sections, or even tented encampments of 20 tents. By and large, these chiefs, insisted upon a:

“basic right of passage for seasonal migration, as well as certain shared pastures” (*McDowall Ibid p.14*).

Regional powerful families became leading tribes, as was in the **Barzani** family. Its power drew many non-tribal peasants to its mast by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century. After the Battle of Chaldiran, the more powerful Kurdish chiefs were initially rewarded for their anti-Safavid efforts, and invested by the Ottomans with territorial responsibilities. They increasingly became formal owners of villages and areas, an economic relationship, in form resembling a feudal one rather than a tribal one. Some peasant rebellions occurred, directed against the landlords, as in the case of Dize landlords (*Bulloch & Morris; Ibid; p.78*). But given the predominance of the nomadic way of life, peasant rebellions were not a major feature. Although it remains true, that the process of settling on land, rather than being nomadic, was accelerated in the 19th Century.

29. Generally both Ottomans and Safavids adopted a policy of coopting leading chiefs. To underpin their wars against the Persian Safavids, the Ottomans strengthened the already existing semi or quasi, feudal arrangement which empowered further the chiefs, who were given great independence <sup>2</sup>:

“To (ensure) certain chiefs in semi or virtual independence in return for their acknowledgment of nominal Ottoman suzerainty... (The Ottomans) created a formalized quasi-feudal system... *hukumats* (governments) or *amirates*...and *sanjaqs* (or counties) under hereditary Kurdish rulers.. and nomadic tribal confederations, or peoples (*uluslar*).” (*McDowell Ibid p, 28*).

In general much independence had been ceded to regions of the Empire already, under a **vilayet** or **millet** system. So long as a tax was ultimately obtained, the bureaucrats and Sultans of the Ottoman Sublime Porte did not care how it got its hands on it. This meant a ‘tax-farming’ system arose where the aghas collected tributary tax from their dependent population (whether tribesmen or miserable peasants) and gave that to the central Ottoman state. In addition as noted above (#18), a certain numbered levy of men for the military had to be provided. The Ottoman empowered powerful chiefs were called **agha**, just as they had been in Kurdish systems<sup>3</sup>

30. The Empire was under pressure from Western merchant capitalist states. This was manifested by an increasing penetration of modern technology such as the steamer into the Euphrates and Tigris. Of course it was coupled with other major changes:
- “In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, new forces came to disturb the shaikh and shatter his isolation, decompose his military leagues. And undermine his self sufficient communal domain. The new forces had their source ultimately in the increasing entanglement of the Ottoman Empire in the meshes of the world of capitalism. But more immediately in the... change.. that had brought in its wake the extinction of the Janissaries in 1826, the establishment of a new conscripted army, the end of the virtually independent Georgian Mamluk dynasty of Baghdad in 1831, the reincorporation of the Iraq province into the parent empire, the new land laws of 1858, steam navigation on the Tigris, telegraphic communications, the centralised *wilayah* system, the dynamic .. governor of Baghdad Midhat Pasha (1869-1871) and the Young Turk Revolution of 1908”: (*Batatu Ibid pp. 73-4*). All this prompted the ruling Ottomans to move to break the power of the shaikhs.
31. One key problem Ottomans faced was to ensure steady tax income. Mahmud II, attempted to modernise the state. This entailed more centralisation of power, and an attempt to create a new bureaucratic class. These bureaucratic leaders launched the **Tanzimat** programme of modernization. This introduced a money economy, and also tried to revoke ‘tax-farming’. Since land was the only part of the economy under Muslim and Turkish hands, and unaffected by various ‘capitulations to foreigners – such reforms strengthened landowners.<sup>4</sup> Now taxation was to go to the central state by a direct collection, and in cash. This weakened the shaikhs. But the Kurdish chiefs had become too independent for the Ottomans, and gotten used to tax-farming.
32. In turn the Ottoman state tried to draw back, the powers of the peripheral independent agas in the 1830s. But having had a relative independence, the Kurdish chiefs resisted. But such resistance became ineffective, as the Kurdish

- shaikhs warred amongst themselves. This was exemplified by the fall of Mir Muhammed of Rawanduz. These divisions allowed the chiefs to be controlled.
33. The method of reducing the power of the shaikhs followed by the Ottomans was to institute a new form of land tenure. The Ottoman conception had been that all land ultimately belonged to the state (bar some *mulk* and *waql* holdings). The land was under a lease from the state in return for the services described above. But in 1858, a new land law introduced the notion of *tapu* - a form of private ownership with hereditary rights (*Batatu Ibid p. 55*). But this applied to even smaller landholders than the aghas and shaikhs. Thus as the later British imperialists noted: "The British authorities certainly knew what they were doing. A report of 1917 states: "Settled agriculture and extended civilisation have tended to disintegrate the tribe and to weaken the influence of the sheikh. To restore and continue the power of the tribal shaikhs is not the least interesting of the administration which the Baghdad wilayet presents." (Administrative Report, Revenue Board, Baghdad, the period 22 March to 31 December 1918, FO 371/3406/139231.) Again, the Revenue Co in 1919: "We must recognise that it is primarily our business not to give rights to those who have them not, but to secure their rights to those who have them." (Lt. Col. E. B. Howell, Note on Land 1919; FO 371/4150/127807.) Edgar Bonham-Carter, Sir Percy Cox' Legal Advisor, wrote in April 1921, my own experience has been that when Arabs settle down to agriculture they begin to wish to come under a more settled authority and to break away from the Shaikh" (CO 730/3/52858). In Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett; 'The Transformation of Land Tenure and Rural Social Structure in Central and Southern' ; International Journal of Middle East Studies, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Feb., 2008), pp. 3-5.
34. As the power of Kurdish chiefs was for a period reduced by the Ottomans, a new decline of nomadic ways set in. While it was more evident in the Iranian section of the Kurds, this was a widespread development. It partly followed a famine in 1869, and also the new introduction of crops such as tobacco. In the Iranian Kurdish area, the numbers of tribal Kurds dropped from one third to one-quarter, as agricultural settlements grew (*McDowall Ibid; p.69*). Chiefs began to transform more actively into owners of villages, extending beyond their own tribal area. Many chiefs became absentee landlords, to reside in the provincial capital.
35. Nonetheless, even when they tried to, the Ottomans were unable to put true and contrite vassals in place. This was because of Ottoman weakness. As the Ottomans largely destroyed the power of the agas, lower tribal chiefs struggled for power. Periods of disruptive mayhem and near anarchy ensued. Into this feuding and power vacuum, the Sufi *tariqa* (brotherhoods) raised religious Shaykhs into prominence. While several *tariqa* vied with each other, two rose to prominence: The Naqshbandi and the Qairiya. These shaykhs tempered and controlled the warring tribal chiefs. But they continued to make temporary and shallow short-lived alliances with either the Ottomans, or the Persians As the Safavid dynasty in Persia collapsed, the Qajar dynasty had taken over state power from 1794.

36. The tribal system was a major weakness in the drive of a national struggle. It was

responsible for inter-tribal warfare with the blood feud. It was subject to manipulation by the Ottoman and Persian Empires, who divided and ruled. Tribalism became attenuated by the forces of urbanization and forced migration. But tribal clan links are still invoked even in towns (*Bulloch & Morris; Ibid; p.78*). Its influence on the national struggle continued to be reactionary up to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, exemplified by the Barzani and Talabani clans.

37. We saw earlier, that the Ayubiids was in origin, a large Kurdish dynasty, established by Salah al-Din. Other hereditary Kurdish rulers were not as powerful, but established smaller semi-autonomous rule. These survived in some cases, up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century – when the Ottomans were past their zenith, and already starting to decay. Nonetheless Sultan Mahmud II sent Rashid Muhammed Pasha as *wali* (governor) to reassert Ottoman dominion over Kurdish regions. Rashid Mohammed Pasha's main target was the Soran *mir* (prince) Muhammed Pasha of Rawanduz, who was subduing large territories from the Tigris to the Persian frontier (*Jwaideh, Ibid p.56*). The Kurdish mir was Isma'il Pasha of Bahdinan Principality was deposed shortly after.
38. Mir Bedir Khan Beg of Bohtan, came to an accord with the Ottomans, just as the latter were under threat from Muhammed 'Ali's attack from Egypt (*Jwaideh, Ibid p.62-74*). However when Beder Khan massacred the Mountain Nestorian Christian tribes in 1843, this served Ottoman interests. The massacres prompted British pressure on the Ottoman Porte to suppress Bedr Khan. In response he proclaimed himself Emir. He had significant goals of asserting independence:

“By 1845, Bedr Khan had “established a Kurdish State extending from Diarbekr to Siverik, Veransher Sairtr Suleimania and Sauj Bulaq... During his brief reign he struck his own coins and had his own name included in the Friday prayers; his rule is said to have been just and peaceful... (until) 1847... when he was defeated and exiled... But the spirit of revolt he aroused lived on, and there were further insurrections in 1850-51 and 1852-53” (*Elphinstone WG; Ibid*).

But he was defeated after lengthy campaigns and exiled. This finally removed any Kurdistan native leadership by the hereditary rulers. Now an indecisive and damaging inactivity entered Kurdistan.

39. Into this inactivity, the Shakyhs began to emerge as leaders of the Kurdish people. This attested to the vacuum of leadership: the mirs had been forcibly removed, but the Ottomans had not been able to replace local leadership. In the wake of the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78, Shaykh 'Ubad Allah, of Naqshbandi faith (an order of Sufi Sunni Islam), was appointed by the Sultan-Caliph as commander of the Kurdish tribal forces. But he then took what appeared to be an explicitly nationalist position, writing to the British:

“The Kurdish nation, consisting of more than 500,000 families, is a people apart. Their religion is difference (to that of others), and the laws and customs are distinct”. (*Jwaideh Ibid p. 81*)

And to the British Consul-General in Tabriz, he wrote:

“The Kurdish people... is a nation apart. Their religion is different, and their laws and customs are distinct.. the Chiefs and Rulers of Kurdistan, whether Turkish or Persian subjects, and the inhabitants of Kurdistan, one an all are united and agreed that matters cannot be carried on in this way with the two governments (Ottoman and Qajar)... We are a nation apart. We want our affairs to be in our own hands”. *McDowall; Ibid; p. 53.*

While the religious aspect was over-played (on grounds that the Persians were Twelver Shi'a, the Turks were Hanafi Sunni, and the Kurds were mainly Shafi'i Sunnis), and religion is not a feature forming national status – the claim was the first on behalf of Kurdish nationalism.

Even in this early 'nationalist' foray, the Kurdish national movement was willing to subject itself to foreign imperialism. This is shown by Ahaykh 'Ubayd Allah's courting of the British. And even more fundamentally, although a Kurdish League was established, it involved Turkish-Ottoman assistance. When in 1879 the Shaykh rebelled against Turkey, it quickly fizzled out against the superior forces of the Ottomans. It then became evident that the Shaykh had been turned into a pawn of the Ottomans. For he now launched an invasion against Persia in 1880. After a short war, the Qajar armies defeated him. Throughout, Ubayd Allah had professed loyalty to the Ottoman Sultan. The Persians on the Kurdish territory in Persia committed enormous ravages in retaliation.

Shaykh 'Ubayad Allah later proved his Ottoman credentials, by suppressing Armenian Christian aspirations for nationhood. In a sign of the future for the Kurds, one oppressor (the Ottoman Empire) had used Kurdish forces as a weapon in a serious game of divide and rule.

In the aftermath - British, USA and Russian colonists were even more firmly entangled in Kurdish affairs. Broadly speaking, the Russian imperialists favoured Persia, while the British propped up Turkey, as a bulwark against Imperial Russia. The USA was carefully watching, as yet still a cautious 'new' imperialist power.

40. Russian ambition in the Caucasus bordered on both the Kurdish and Armenian territories. Over the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Russia continued to push away at both Persia, and the Ottoman Empire – interested in both territory and access to the Mediterranean. Russian priority at first was the immediate border territories of the Transcaucasia. In both the Russo-Persian conflicts of 1804-12, and 1828, the Russians bested the Persians. This led to the forced migration of Caucasian Muslims (Circassians) to European and Asiatic Turkey. In the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813, and Treaty of Turkmanchai of 1828, the Persian state renounced its claims to Transcaucasia. From this time the Russian colonists fostered links with Kurdish chieftans. By the Crimean War (1853-56), two Kurdish regiments fought with the Russians against Turkey, although the majority of Kurdish leaders fought with their tribes on the Turkish side.

41. In the same period, the rise of nationalist rebellion of Balkan Christians (Serbs, Greeks, Bulgarians etc.) supported by Russia and Western powers led to the



- gradual loss of territory held in European by the Ottoman state, and a mass migration of Muslims to Anatolia. These Muslims, who had been living in these Balkan countries for centuries, lost not only their relatively privileged positions, but also their land etc. Due to lack of proper transportation and lack of hygiene, hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives during their forced journey. The result of both this migration, and the Circassian migration (#36), was to have two significant impacts upon the Ottoman State: a) the change of the demographic composition of the Empire and b) sharpening of the anti-Christian feelings, which were deflected at Armenian farmers, part of whose land was arbitrarily confiscated and given to the new arrivals from Caucasia and European Turkey.
42. In the Crimean War, Russia was confronted by Turkey allied to England, France and Sardinia, and was badly defeated. Nonetheless it continued to bore into the Ottoman Empire. In the later 1877-78 war with Ottoman Turkey, Russia was victorious. At this point the Armenian church had asked Russia for protection against the Ottomans, in the form of Russian troops remaining on Armenia territory. The Armenian people were in no position to defend themselves, being farmers and artisans. As seen above, the Ottomans at times incited Kurdish attacks upon them, as that of Shaykh 'Ubayad Allah. A treaty was signed to retain Russian troops on Armenian territory – the San Stefano treaty. But in alarm the other European colonists convened a conference at Berlin in 1878, of the six major powers, to put brakes on Russia, and limit their territorial gain (see also #38). The Prussians, Austro-Hungarians and English enforced a retreat of Russian ambition. A new pattern quickly took root, whereby one or other of the various European powers would use either Armenia or Kurdistan as countervailing pawns.
43. Why did the various Kurdish rebellions that we have described above fail? Almost all the rebellions were inspired by the wish to retain power for the tribal nobles-chiefs, who wished to: “preserve the feudal rights of the aristocracy against Ottoman encroachment.” (*Bulloch & Morris; Ibid; p. 82*). This was the fundamental reason for failure. Nonetheless, some of these rebellions did have a “strong nationalist tinge which appealed to a spectrum of Kurds who shared the sufferings caused by warfare and Turkish occupation” (*Bulloch & Morris; Ibid; p. 82*).
44. The Ottomans never solved their problem of securing their periphery, with a reliable, loyal vassal representative. At the same time, they faced new problems. (i) First a state financial crisis as foreign capital now entered and controlled state finances by 1881. Sultan Abd al Hamid was also faced by a newly dominant landlord class who stopped all absolutist Sultanate rights to confiscate land. Nonetheless, an attempt to engineer a partial democratic reform took place, but was halted by reactionaries. Moreover, in Egypt, there was a direct British occupation. (ii) Second as seen there were encroachments by the **Russians** (See #36). (iii) In addition the **Armenians**, had been promised democratic reforms by the **Berlin Conference**.<sup>5</sup> This emboldened the Armenians, creating further anxiety of the Ottomans.
45. In response, the Empire created the **Hamidya Cavalry** (named after the Sultan), recruiting Sunni Kurds. Undoubtedly this was to solve the Ottoman problem of

the unruly Kurds, while intending to use the Kurds to potentially suppress another minority, the Armenians. Regiments were often formed out of a single tribe. They were intended to resist Russian incursions, and also to inculcate loyalty to the Sultan. To do so they were able to send their sons to newly created tribal schools in Istanbul and Kurdistan. To pay them, they were re granted tax-collecting rights - but upon local Armenian villagers. Inevitably Armenian resistance grew to the rising depredations. Brutal massacres of Armenians numbering in the thousands were committed by the Hamidaya and Ottoman soldiers and Muslim citizens. This presaged the later genocide of 1915. Ottoman ambition to use the Hamidya to weld a Kurdish loyalty, simply exacerbated the turmoils in Kurdistan and Armenia.

### 5. The Young Turk Coup – Committee of Union and Progress Party in Turkey

46. The continued decline of the Ottoman Empire to solve societal problems, fueled the Kurdish ferment towards a more viable, political means. Initially this took the form of educational and 'modernisation' movements led by Abdallah Jawdat and Ishaq Sukuti. But their hesitancy led to more outspoken Kurdish movements. Shaykh 'Ubayad Allah's earlier idea of a League continued to reverberate, even though it had been assisted by the Ottomans. Such interest led one of Bedr Khan's sons - Midhat Bey – to set up a paper in Cairo, called '*Kurdistan*'. It was suppressed, but eventually resumed publication in Folkestone, in 1892. It helped to solidify the idea of a Kurdish independence. It inspired several Kurdish committees in European countries, and in several Turkish towns, including Constantinople. As the Ottoman Empire further decayed, bourgeois democrats in Turkey had started the secret **Committee of Union and Progress (CUP** - or the 'Young Turks').
47. Members of the CUP led by Major Enver Bey and Major Ahmed Niyazi Bey proclaimed a revolution against the government of Sultan Abdul Hamid II on July 3, 1908. After the Democratic revolution, the CUP proclaimed a *mashruiyat* (Constitutional Government). The Sultan was forced to restore an earlier 1876 constitution, which had been lapsed, on July 24, 1908. In reality, this merely revived the 1876 earlier attempted democratic constitutional reform, which had been halted after it met with resistance. Sultan Abdul Hamid II was forced to abdicate, and his brother – Mehmed V became Sultan till his death in 1918. Following his death, Sultan Mehmet VI became ruler. Both rules were effectively a constitutional monarchy with all authority in the CUP.
48. As part of the times, several Kurd elites started various societies, including the 'Society for the Rise and Progress of Kurdistan'. Overall two strands of Kurd progressives developed. One were the so-called autonomists, exemplified by Sayiid Nursi. They hoped to extend progress into greater autonomy for Kurdish areas, without secession from Ottoman society. The other, a secessionist wing, was led by the Badr Kahns. As the overseas representatives of '*Kurdistan*', were allowed to return to Constantinople, they quickly formed a Kurdish National Society. In return for guarantees, they supported the Committee of Union. But by 1909, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) had turned on its non-Turkish

supporters and closed down all ethnic or national groups, including the Kurdish Society. Its leaders, Amin Ali Badr Khan and Sherif Pasha, fled a death sentence.

49. At this time the chiefs and aghas were affronted by '*mashruiyat*' (constitutional reform) and any notions of reforms. In fact the CUP had turned its back on the peasantry and had continued earlier Tanzimat reform policies of enriching the landlords, to ensure success of a new entrepreneurial capitalist class.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the Kurdish aghas had directly profited by land grabs against the Armenians, encouraged by the Sultanate (*MacDowall Ibid; p. 94*). Of course their power and influence was now threatened. Rebel Kurdish aghas led by Ibrahim Pasha Milli, joined a reactionary counter-revolt in 1909, to support the deposed Sultan (*Jwaideh Ibid p. 109*). But they were quickly crushed by the CUP forces. The chiefs were one in their dislike of events with the religious shaykhs. Now elements of discontented aghas and shaykhs started to consider a united front of Armenians and Kurds. British **Lord Percy** observed that:

“While the government is not afraid of either the Kurds or Christians singly, they view with considerable apprehension to the possibility of an understanding between the two races for the purposes of common defence”; *McDowall Ibid; p. 97*.

50. In response the CUP re-adopted the old Ottoman spice of divide and rule. Again the aghas were courted, the Hamidya Cavalry was reinstated as Tribal Light Cavalry Regiments, and re-propagandized with potent religious Muslim spirits. But confusion reigned and isolated revolts continued. In one of these Shaykh Abd al Salam Barzani revolted. He had demanded in a petition, for the use of Kurdish for official and educational purposes; and that taxation for Kurds should be capped only as sharia' law (i.e. Muslim religious law, lower than the corvee tax revenue to the central Young Turk government). He was hanged.

## **6. The Post-World War Era: Imperialist Designed Comprador States of the Middle East – Promises, Promises...**

At the end of World War I, the Western imperialists were now ready to carve and dismember, both Ottoman and Qajar Empires. Allied British troops occupied Anatolia, the Indian Army Expeditionary Force under British command occupied Iraq, and the Royal Air Force was soon to be bombing Southern Kurdistan. We first will trace developments inside Turkey, and Russia first.

51. The Bolshevik Revolution had already presaged the end of World War One. This impacted Middle East politics, even besides its inspiration to oppressed workers and peasants. At the end of the First World War, under the **Treaty of Brest-Litovsk**, of 1918, Bolshevik Russia ceded Kars, Ardahan and Batum (parts of Armenia) back to Turkey. They had been acquired by Imperialist Russia in 1878. Even as early as in 1917, Shaykh Mahmud (1920), Ismail Agha Simqu (Simko) and Shakyh Taha of Nikri (1919) had brief discussions with the Bolsheviks that did not yield long-lasting alliance. Nonetheless later on in 1922, Simko (in Persian Kurdistan) appeared to have had some encouragement from the Bolsheviks. In October 1921 he established a base in Sawj Bulaq (Mahabad)

- where he began to publish 'Independent Kurdistan'. The Soviet government tried to persuade Persia to grant autonomy to the Kurds. Simko launched armed rebellion in 1922, but it was crushed by Persian forces (*Jwaideh Ibid p.141*). Overall the Bolsheviks were supporting the Turkish government of Kemal Ataturk, which may explain why Bolshevik support to the Kurdish movements was not very obvious at this stage.
52. Bolshevik Russia revoked the Imperial secret agreements, and openly published the details of the secret **Sykes-Picot Agreement** (1916) between Britain, France and Imperial Russia. All along the British and French imperialists had been intent to deny the main known oil-bearing areas to their 'ally', the Russian Empire. Imperial Russia had been promised the prize of Armenia and much of Ottoman Kurdistan, under their 'sphere of influence'. Under this Agreement, France was to obtain the vilayet of Mosul, and the Arab Territories were to be split between France and Britain. Regardless of this, the British later simply entered and seized the prized Mosul four days after the 1918 armistice, forcing the Turkish commander to sign terms relinquishing Mosul. By January 1920, the Kemal National Pact made clear Turkish intent towards the former Ottoman provinces – "all the districts inhabited by a non-Arab Muslim population were to be an integral part of Turkey" – meaning the Mosul vilayet. (*Jwaideh Ibid p. 185*)
53. The Turkish CUP government had first in secret, joined the German side in the First World War. But this attempt at subterfuge did not deceive any power, and they announced their alliance by an attack upon Russian ports of the Black Sea. As World War I raged, the Kurds and their representatives behaved in contradictory ways. Some leading Kurds tried to ensure the defeat of Turkey. The Kurdish National Society and Kamil Beg of Botan, negotiated with Russia to offer support during the Russian advance to Bitlis and Erzinjan in 1916, in return for aid on Kurdish autonomy. However the collapse of Imperial Russia in 1917 upset these plans.
54. Meanwhile, over the same period, the Eastern front lines wandered over Kurdistan, where both Ottoman and Russian empires ranged. Forced misery was rampant. Many died in the Ottoman army at the Fronts, where estimates of Kurdish battle casualties of 300,000 are made. It is unclear how many civilians also died by starving and pestilence (typhus and influenza) in homes, but it was at least as many. For instance in 1917, in the Suleymaniya region, famine killed 70% of inhabitants and soldiers (*Jwaideh ibid p.125-6*). In the midst of this, Kurdish chiefs led Kurd soldiers into action with the Turkish forces in the genocidal Armenian persecutions in Van and Erzerum. Over a million Armenians were slaughtered in 1915. Even while this massacre of the Armenians took place – in which the Kurdish chiefs and their tribes were complicit - the CUP was making plans for the deportation of Kurds to West Anatolia. (*McDowall Ibid p. 105*). An imperial decree by Sultan Muhammad V specified that small groups of Kurds would be re-settled, such that no more than 5% of the total population would be Kurds, in Western Anatolia (*Jwaideh, ibid p.127*)
55. When the Allies won the war, the Ottomans capitulated to them after the Mudros armistice of 30 October 1918. But the British occupation of

Turkey proper (or Asia Minor) was mostly symbolic. Till the occupation of Smyrna on 15 May 1919, there was no serious opposition to the token presence of foreign troops in Anatolia. The Greek occupation of Smyrna and eastward advance of Greek army changed the apathy or indifference of Turks and galvanized the organization of genuine resistance.

As Istanbul was occupied, the British arrested the leaders of the CUP. **Mustafa Kemal** (later known as Ataturk), an army officer, was assigned by Sultan Mehmet VI to oversee demobilization, against British pressure. When Kemal was recalled to Istanbul, he resigned. He had already helped to establish a resistance movement (in the Amasya Circular of 22 June 1919). In July 1919, Mustafa Kemal Pasha headed the Erzurum Congress, (July-August) which became known as the National Pact. The Sivas Congress followed (September 1919). This called for the maintenance of the old Ottoman frontiers-borders, and proclaimed a provisional government (Turkish Grand National Assembly (GNA), which was set up in Ankara. It also rejected special arrangements for any of the minorities. Kemal called for a national election. The elections were followed by the Ankara Assembly held on April 23, 1920. The dissolution of the Ottoman Parliament took place on 16 March 192. This parliament, whose members were mostly pro-CUP, had approved of Misak-ı Milli (National Oath) on 12 January 1920.

Kemal Pasha proclaimed the abolition of the sultanate and Ottoman Empire on November 1, 1922, and Sultan Mehmet VI fled from Istanbul on a British ship on November 17, 1922. The National Assembly convened on August 9, 1923. The National Assembly formally proclaimed the Republic of Turkey on October 23, 1923, where Kemal said bluntly: "The state which we have just created is a Turkish state".

This call was followed by the dissolution of the Ottoman Parliament. Shortly after, foreign troops (British, Italian, French and Greek) forces occupied Anatolia. The ensuing War of Independence, secured the Republic of Turkey (see #50).

56. At the end of World War 1, Western imperialists, led by the USA soon issued statements of their intent to command the Middle East. As far as the Kurds were concerned, this held very mixed blessings. First the USA **President Wilson** explicitly acknowledged in 1918 a Kurdish nation, in his so-called **14 Points**: "The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development" (*Bulloch & Morris, Ibid; p.88*). Kurds were also in touch with the **King-Crane Commission** of the USA. This reported that a Kurdish state and a state in Armenia should be established, as well as Turkish state in Anatolia – all to be under a US Mandate.

57. But isolated statements apart, it was the post-war treaties that were key. As far as the Paris Conference deliberations on the Middle East were concerned, the British views predominated. A Kurdish committee, known as the Committee of Deliverance, made contact with the Allies when they entered Constantinople in 1918. The British, as yet undecided about what to do with Kurdistan, facilitated

- Sherif Pasha to represent Kurds at the Peace Conference; and British staff sent a Kurdish delegation, to gauge sentiment in Kurdish districts of Eastern Anatolia. To forestall any Kurdish credentialing, this delegation was stopped by Mustafa Kemal Pasha in Diarbekar (*Elphinstone; Ibid*).
58. Unexpectedly however, the initial imperialist plan to leave only a rump of Turkey, was fiercely resisted in a War of Independence, by Mutafa Kemal Pasha. His battle successes not only fended off imperialist division of Turkey, but also at the same time, dealt a blow to Kurdish hopes. But he also sowed division amongst the Kurds, for instance by falsely promising Kurdish autonomy. This split the Kurdish forces by bringing the gullible Abdul Qadyr's Istikhlal I Kurdistan (Kurdish Liberation) onto his side. Meanwhile Sherif Pasah at the Paris Peace Conference had no mandate as such, from the Kurdish people. The final nail in Kurdish hopes was when Britain and France simply refused to vacate territories they had occupied in Iraqi and Syrian Kurdistan.
59. These real facts on the ground, made the 1920 **Treaty of Sevres**, a dead letter. It is true that it did formally (but explicitly) recognize Kurdish nationality, in Articles 62 and 64:

“ARTICLE 62 A Commission sitting at Constantinople and composed of three members appointed by the British, French and Italian Governments respectively shall draft within six months from the coming into force of the present Treaty a scheme of local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates, south of the southern boundary of Armenia as it may be hereafter determined, and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia...

ARTICLE 64 If within one year from the coming into force of the present Treaty the Kurdish peoples within the areas defined in Article 62 shall address them- selves to the Council of the League of Nations in such a manner as to show that a majority of the population of these areas desires independence from Turkey, and if the Council then considers that these peoples are capable of such independence and recommends that it should be granted to them, Turkey hereby agrees to execute such a recommendation, and to renounce all rights and title”.

However these were all merely promissory cheques. The various anti-Kurd powers of the conference had absolutely no intention to cash these cheques.

60. Sevres was superseded by the **Treaty of Lausanne**, which in July 1923 only recognized a new Turkish state, which included almost all Kurdish territory. Meanwhile Britain under the League of Nations mandate of 1920 was given “mandate for Iraq” – and was enabled to continue to occupy Mosul. The British bought off the French (with a 25% of future oil revenues), and the USA (by a 20% stake in the British owned Turkish Petroleum – owned by Lord Curzon). Though it remains controversial, several authorities claim Mosul was heavily Kurdish, including Jwaideh. (*Ibid p.147-159; p.278-9*) (See also Thesis #50).
61. As Turkey continued to demand the territory of Mosul, Britain pretended that they

were driven to protect the Kurds, and could not allow this. The British claimed they acted on behalf of Faisal, who they installed as king of Iraq. Faisal was being rewarded for having raised with T.E. Lawrence, the Arab revolt against the Ottomans. But Faisal had never been promised Mosul, only Baghdad and Basra. In reality of course, Britain was unwilling to relinquish Mosul to any force, whether the Turkish state or the Kurds. The British instead used the Kurds as a buffer against Turkey, which was still eyeing Mosul. In 1922, they even proclaimed:

“His Britannic Majesty’s government and the Government of Iraq recognise the rights of the Kurdish living within the boundaries of Iraq to set up a Kurdish government within those boundaries and hope that the different Kurdish elements, will as soon as possible, arrive an agreement between themselves as to the form which they wish that government should take and the boundaries within which it to extend and will send responsible delegates to Baghdad to discuss their economic and political relations with His Britannic Majesty’s government and the government of Iraq”: *Bulloch & Morris; ibid; p.96*).

But this admission of Kurdish national status, was only communicated to one Kurdish faction, that of Sheikh Abdul Karim – who certainly did not understand or disseminate the significance of this. Nonetheless, although ignorant of this statement, all of the Kurdish representatives did not accept the new status of British Mandate easily. Turkish tried to exert influence on Kurds by false promises and by an initial military victory over British and Kurd tribe forces at Ranya in 1922.

62. Shaykh Mahmud’s history in Southern Kurdistan shows how fluid allegiances were. In 1919, the Ottomans in the Suleimaniyeh area surrendered to him. As we noted above the British who had taken the Mosul villayet. Given Shaykh Mahmud’s influence, and the evident Kurdish determination to resist re-entry of Turkish dominance in the area, the British wished to use him to wield an indirect rule. Mahmud was appointed ‘*hukmdar*’ – a governor, the term from British experience in colonial India – of the South Kurdistan Confederation (*Jwaideh, ibid; 163-179*). Some 40 chiefs under Mahmud’s leadership, asked that the British take Kurdistan under British protection, and to protect their own powers. They pointed out these derived from the Kurdish people. Arrogantly the British representatives (led by civil commissioner Sir Arnold Wilson) responded that the British bestowed the only ‘powers’. But the British acceded to the written request. Tensions quickly surfaced. Arab areas of the towns of Kirkuk and Kifri, petitioned to have separate direct British administration. Yet other areas of Persia petitioned to join Shaykh Mahmud’s arrangements with Britain, but were denied. Meanwhile Mahmud used this recognition, and British subsidies to weld his own strength to consolidate his own control. Yet Mahmud was unwilling to permit British restriction upon his territories or behave subserviently. The British undermined him by sowing further division amongst the tribes nominally under Mahmud’s ‘control’. At the same time he made overtures to the Turks. Unsurprisingly, Sheikh Mahmud revolted, and by 1919 had seized Suleimaniyeh, temporarily. After military defeat at Bazyan Pass, he was imprisoned, commuted from sentence to execution, and exiled. But he was brought back, and continued to rebel till the 1930s. In 1922, he proclaimed

himself as King of Kurdistan, to be a short lived reign. After his negotiations with the Turks became evident, he was firmly beaten and removed from any major new role. From 1919 even up to the 1930s, there continued to be many other rebellions against British over-lordship in Iraqi Kurdistan. For example the 'Amidiya in 1919; the Barzani led rebellion of 1919 in 'Aqra close to Mosul; and the Surchi tribes of Arbil in 1919-1921. The British in this period tried to break the power and influence of the chiefs, by trying to bypass them – for e.g. raising local police forces and directing seeds and cash reliefs directly to cultivators and not via the chiefs (*Jwaideh Ibid p.150*).

63. Yet all British attempts to eliminate a Kurdish sense of incipient nationhood were unsuccessful. After the Lausanne conference (See #58), the **League of Nations** sent an international commission of inquiry to the Mosul vilayet to probe the depth of Kurdish feelings. This commission reported in 1925, to the Council of League of Nations that a Kurdish state should be supported, and that there was no consciousness existing of Kurds being a part of an Iraqi nation. But the commission accepted British criticisms, that a cohesive economic viability was lacking, which mandated a Kurdish unity with Iraq. Correspondingly the Council attached Mosul vilayet to Iraq for 25 years, but mandated that the British should “ensure the Kurds (had) local administration”, (having their own officials, justice, education in Kurdish etc. (*Bulloch & Morris; ibid; p.93*). The British of course, had no intention of doing this. In fact, the British racist views of the Kurds at this stage are captured by their Memorandum to the League of Nations in 1930:

“On political grounds... the conception (of autonomy) is almost fantastic... The Kurds of Iraq are entirely lacking those characteristics of political cohesion which are essential to self-government... their mode of life is primitive, and for the most part they are illiterate and untutored, resentful of authority, and lacking in sense of discipline or responsibility” (*Bulloch & Morris; ibid; p.95*).

In 1935, Iraq was granted nominal independence – becoming a British neo-colony – some 24 years before the Mandate was to elapse. Kurdish hopes were delayed for further years.

### **7. Lenin and the Comintern on Turkey and the Middle East**

As discussed above, the Bolshevik revolution had major impacts both directly and indirectly on the Middle Eastern prospects of national fulfillment. (See also Theses 73).

64. Lenin and the Comintern had only realistic, and qualified hopes of Kemal Pasha. **The Congress of the People's of The East** in 1920, held in Baku warned:

“1...It will support national-revolutionary movements that seek to free the oppressed peoples of the East from the yoke of foreign imperialists.  
2. However the congress notes that the broad national-revolutionary movement in Turkey is directly only against foreign oppressors. Success for this movement would in no way signify the emancipation of the Turkish peasants and workers from oppression and exploitation of every kind.



The success of this movement would not entail resolution of the questions that are most important for the Turkish toiling classes, namely, the agrarian question and the question of taxes, and would not eliminate the principal obstacles to the liberation of the East, namely, national discords.

3. The Congress finds it necessary to act with special caution towards leaders of the movement who in the past led the Turkish peasants and workers to the slaughter in the interests of one of the imperialist groups... these leaders (should) prove in deeds that they are now ready to sever the toiling people and make amends for their false steps in the past”  
September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1920; Resolution; Session 4; Read out by Bela Kun; <sup>7</sup>

65. The Bolshevik led USSR and the Turkish independence movement, faced similar foes at this stage:

“The international support for the Turkish national struggle came from the Soviet Union, which was itself threatened by the Western powers in the midst of a strenuous civil war. Thus throughout the political upheaval of the post-war period the Turkish national movement and the Russian Bolsheviks found themselves on the same side. Common struggle against the foreign powers threatening both countries led to a mutually advantageous collusion between the two.” (*Bülent Gökay The Turkish Communist Party: The Fate of the Founders*; *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Apr., 1993), pp. 220-235).

Hence as far as they could, Lenin and the Bolsheviks supported Kemal.

66. Obviously the Bolsheviks supported rights of independence of nations, which included the Turkish independence movement. But there were also strategic considerations. In September 27, 1920 **Chicherin** (Soviet Foreign Affairs Public Commissioner) wrote to Lenin that:

"According to the western radio, Kemalists were in poor conditions due to inadequacy of their military materials. Defeat of the Kemalists would result in the victory of the Muslim fanaticism supported by Antanta. Moreover, for the purpose of spread of holy war against us, it was also possible to a re-emergence of the Sultan in Asia Minor. It would reach to start the movement of Muslim which was highly anti-revolutionary, the loss of Baku, even Turkestan, and even serious danger in our Eastern regions. Therefore, the continuation of the presence of the Kemalists was highly important for us, and weapons had to be sent them". (*RGASPI, Rusya Devlet Sosyo-Politik Tarih Arşivi, Fon 159, Sayı 2, Dosya 57, varak 003. Cited in, Telli Korkmaz, "Mustafa Kemal and Turkey in the Correspondences of Soviet Bureaucrats (1918-1922)"; The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations, Volume 48 (2017), p. 37-49).*

67. Rapidly however, relations of Turkey with the imperialists improved, making Kemal less interested in relations with the Bolsheviks. At the same time, the imperialists were worried about links between Turkey and the Bolsheviks: “By October 1920, the Turkish national movement had already frustrated the Sevres provisions concerning Armenia by reconquering Turkish Armenia. Turkish-Soviet

relations also began to receive serious consideration by the Allied powers. Some British officials in London and in the Middle East, began to identify the dangers of a Kemalist-Bolshevik friendship and urged to introduce radical change in the established premises of British policy. They were campaigning for active support for Mustafa Kemal. Meanwhile the very thing that Kemal had long striven to achieve occurred rather unexpectedly: the Ankara government was invited to a peace conference in London. This followed an understanding that Kemal Pasha had very little, if anything, to do with communism. On 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1921, Mustafa Kemal in an address to the Grand National Assembly declared that 'the relationship with the Russians were not in opposition to capitalism'. (*Bülent Gökay The Turkish Communist Party: The Fate of the Founders*; *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Apr., 1993), pp. 220-235). To effect their aims, the imperialists acquiesced in Turkish state power passing over to non-communist, even though of nationalist stripe - bourgeoisie. Kemal Pasha no longer needed the Bolshevik assistance to the same extent. Three days later in the notorious **Black Sea incident**, the Turkish government arranged the murders at sea of 15 leaders of the Turkish CP, including **Mustafa Subhi**.

68. Nonetheless, the Bolsheviks maintained as good relations with Kemal as they could. Even the provocation of the murder of Mustafa Subhi and other leaders of the Turkish communists, did not provoke the Bolsheviks to disrupt the diplomatic relations: "In this bleak winter of 1920-21, the murder of Mustafa Subhi and his comrades, the mass liquidation of an entire communist party leadership, most probably the first case of its kind in the Comintern, did not cause comparable mayhem in the Soviet Union. Neither diplomatic relations nor material aid was suspended as might have been anticipated.... The Soviet state had pursued a consistent policy towards the Turkish national movement, which continued with no significant alteration in the aftermath of the Black Sea incident. The war waged by Mustafa Kemal to regain national sovereignty and establish an independent Turkish state was persistently interpreted as genuinely anti-imperialist by the Soviets.

The murder of the 15 communists was not seen as an obstacle to the established Comintern strategy of supporting such national liberation movements, as the latter were seen to be potentially more fruitful in the future. Besides, by helping the Turkish national struggle in the area, the Soviet state would be surrounded by a potentially less threatening belt. Thus an independent Turkish state hostile to the plans of the Western Allies, even headed by a determined anti-communist nationalist clique, would adequately serve this purpose". (*Bülent Gökay The Turkish Communist Party: The Fate of the Founders*; *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Apr., 1993), pp. 220-235).

69. Specifically on Kurdistan itself, the Comintern had little comment. They noted that Kurds had been Ottoman instruments in killing the Armenians during the massacres of 1915-16<sup>8</sup>, but no other major mention was made. However, the process of creating the comprador class is very relevant to Kurdistan. And this process was summarized by the **Second Congress of the Comintern** (July 1920 in Moscow), which stated:

"In all backward countries alien imperialism makes the feudal (and in part also semi-feudal, semi-bourgeois) upper class of native society into an

instrument for the exercise of its rule (the military governors –Tuchuns - in China, the native aristocracy and the land-tax farmers - zamindars and talukdars - in India, the feudal bureaucracy and aristocracy in Persia, the more or less capitalist plantation owners in Egypt, etc.).”<sup>9</sup>

In Kurdistan, it was the tribal system, which became the basis of a landlord-peasant relationship, in which the landlords would form a comprador class. As Comintern pointed out, when the chief layers (*indigenous aristocracy*) were not separated off from the masses (*“as for example, among nomads”*), the *“upper strata”* could present themselves as *“active leaders in the struggle against imperialist oppression”*:

“Only where feudal-patriarchal relations are not sufficiently disintegrated to separate the indigenous aristocracy completely from the masses - as, for example, among nomads and semi-nomads - can the representatives of these upper strata come forward as active leaders in the struggle against imperialist oppression (Mesopotamia, Mongolia).”<sup>10</sup>

This was exactly the situation of the chiefs in Kurdistan. In general all over the Middle East, the watchword used by national movements was the one of pan-Islamism.

“In Moslem countries the national movement at first finds its ideology in the religio-political watchwords of pan-Islam, and this enables the officials and diplomats of the great Powers to exploit the prejudices and ignorance of the broad masses in the struggle against this movement (English imperialism's game with pan-Islamism and pan-Arabism, English plans to transfer the Khalifate to India, French imperialism's playing on its 'Moslem sympathies'). But to the extent that the national liberation movements grow and expand, the religio-political watchwords of pan-Islam are increasingly replaced by concrete political demands. The struggle recently waged in Turkey to deprive the Khalifate of temporal power confirms this”.<sup>11</sup>

But this did not apply to the Kurds. Largely, the Kurds were indeed Islamic, but a stronger force exerted was the one of tribal loyalties. By even the late 1920s, (and even more so by the 1950s) these ties, were becoming transformed into class relationships. It was the class relations to the agricultural-agrarian mode of life, that became paramount:

“In most eastern countries (India, Persia, Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia) the agrarian question is of primary importance in the struggle for emancipation from the yoke of the great Powers' despotism. By exploiting and ruining the peasant majority of the backward nations, imperialism deprives them of their elementary means of existence, while industry, which is only poorly developed and confined to a few centres, is incapable of absorbing the resulting surplus agricultural population, who are also deprived of any opportunity to emigrate. The impoverished peasants remaining on the land become bondsmen. In the advanced

countries before the war industrial crises played the part of regulator of social production; in the colonies this part is played by famine. Since imperialism has the strongest interest in getting the largest profits with the least capital outlay, in the backward countries it supports as long as possible the feudal-usurer forms of exploiting labour power.“<sup>12</sup>

As a social class, these ruling elements are often termed 'semi-feudal' remnants.<sup>2</sup> While there have been objections to the term 'feudal' in relation to non-Western countries, for ease and pending further clarifications, we continue to use this term.

70. In fact, not all of these post-war Middle Eastern states contained, even a small national bourgeoisie. But each certainly contained powerful tribal warlords, who wished to attain the power of a bourgeoisie. As seen above, these were granted an ability to become a comprador bourgeoisie by the foreign imperialists. However, as comprador bourgeoisie, they inevitably created further conditions for an aspiring national bourgeoisie. Eventually, these nascent national bourgeoisie attempted to seize state power. Both the comprador and national bourgeoisie of these enveloping states, were ranged against potential Kurdish nationhood.

### 8. Republic of Mahabad and the Azerbaijan Crisis 1946

We turn to the Iranian Kurds and their struggle. In this we also consider struggles in Azerbaijan. To set the stage for the eve of World War II, the post First World War events in Iran, are reviewed (#42-47), relying on Jwaideh (ibid), Jazani and Abrahamian<sup>13-14</sup>.

71. The feudal-monarchic state of Persia (Iran) was long eyed by both the Czarist Imperial Russian Empire and the British Empire. It was a multi-ethnic state, with many incipient nationalities, including Kurds. As we discussed above, the Russian Czar defeated the Iranian Gajar Empire in battle. In the subsequent 1828 **Treaty of Turkomanchei**, Russia won the 'right' to interfere in Gajar court decisions, and entry for Russian business, and rights to hold military force inside Iran - the Russian Cossack regiments. The Cossacks even defended Iranian Gajar monarchs against their own people. A jealous Britain however, forced their own entry into Iran. By the **Treaty of Paris** in 1857, they forced Persia out of Afghanistan, and gained parity inside Iran, with Russia. By the First World War, both imperialists had come to dominate the economic life of Iran.

72. Nonetheless, capitalism had now been implanted inside Iran allowing a nascent bourgeoisie, to both rise, and also to chafe at foreign imperialism. This class militated against feudal relations. As the Japanese forced a Russian loss in the Manchurian war, followed quickly by the 1905 Russian Revolution - the Russian Imperialists were severely weakened. Britain seized its opportunity to gain the upper hand. Class forces in Iran now divided as follows: The despotic feudal Iranian Monarchy was supported by Russian imperialism, while a small bourgeoisie called for constitutional government, supported by Britain.

73. But soon the British and Russian imperialists realized the German imperialist threat. Therefore they came to an accord - the 1907 **Anglo-Russian**

- Compromise.** Both imperialisms now tried to retard the Iranian bourgeoisie. Nonetheless, a **Constitutional Revolution** in Iran took place in 1906-09. This allowed the bourgeoisie, supported by the progressive urban petty-bourgeoisie to destroy the Qajar dynasty, and release the hold of the feudal aristocracy on taxations. However, the British advised them to compromise rather than unleash the masses. The Russians then forcibly closed parliament (Majlis). All revolutionary forces, including that of the Mujaheds (freedom fighters) of Tabriz were suppressed. Despite this repression, an on-going ferment arose, now aimed at the perceived main threat, of Russian imperialism.
74. Progressives now found themselves courted by Turkish and German agents, anxious to enter Iran. A nationalist government was formed in Qom, and then Kermanshah. In reality it was in a comprador relationship to Turkey and Germany now. But these anti-feudal forces, had a military wing. This was led from the Northern province of Gilan, by **Mirza Kuchek Khan**, termed the **Jingal, or Jangalis, Movement (Men of the Jungle)**. It obtained aid from both Germany and Turkey. While this led to a tendency towards being a comprador force for Germany and Turkey, it was eclectic enough to cite Marxist influence. It had both a religious wing and a more secular more radical wing. They harassed Russian forces.
75. The Revolution of 1917 transformed the situation, as Bolshevik Russia withdrew. The **“Appeal to All Toiling Muslims of Russian and The East”**, proclaimed:

“Comrades! Brothers! ...The kingdom of capitalist plunder and violence is falling in ruins. The ground is slipping from under the feet of the imperialist robbers. In the face of these great evens we turn to you, the toiling and disinherited Muslims of Russia and the East... We declare the treaty providing for the partition of Persia null and void. Once military activities cease, troops (of Russia) will be withdrawn from Persia, and the Persians assured the right to determine freely their own destiny”.<sup>16</sup>

Correspondingly the anti-imperialist forces turned their fire on Britain. The Jangali movement now controlled large territory, in Gilan – and called for a British withdrawal from Iran. The Democrat Party (Firqeh-I Demokrat) established in 1910, became riven by demands from the various nationalities. At the same time, the **Justice Party** (Firqeh-I ‘Adalat) Party was formed in 1917, and sent a delegate to the 6<sup>th</sup> Bolshevik Congress in Petrograd. Many of its leaders had worked with Bolsheviks since 1906, including **Assaldallah Khan Ghafarzadeh** (from Azerbaijan), and **Ahmad Sultanzadeh** (From Armenia), and **Haydar Khan**. The group was given further strength when the **1919 Anglo-Iranian Agreement** was published. This enchained Iran to Britain even more clearly. After the Soviet Bolsheviks denounced the agreement, Russian Bolshevik detachments were sent to Enzeli. In 1920, the Justice Party fused with the Jangalis, and adopted the new title of **Communist Party of Iran**. Debate on the stage of the revolution was intense, Haydar Khan urging a democratic revolution; against Sultanzadeh who urged the socialist revolution. The Founding Congress accepted that the bourgeois democratic stage had passed, and that the socialist revolution was next. It proclaimed with the Jangali movement the **‘Soviet Socialist Republic of**

**Iran**, in Gilan. However, at the Baku Conference of the Peoples of the Eastern People, Haydar Khan's view was endorsed <sup>17</sup>. By the end of 1920, the Soviet Socialist Republic and the Bolshevik Red Army was poised to march into Tehran.

76. In response, Colonel **Reza Khan**, of the former Cossack army, rallied his own forces. He was supported by the British, to carry out a coup d'état against the democrats in Tehran. With **Sayyid Ziya**, a journalist now named as Prime Minister, they "threw dust in the eyes of the Bolsheviks and native malcontents"<sup>15</sup>, by signing an **Soviet-Iranian treaty of Friendship**. In addition they abrogated the Anglo-Iranian Agreement, and bided their time. Reza Khan now intrigued and split the forces of the Jingali, whose religious wing killed Haydar Khan and outlawed the CP Iran. By December 1921 Reza Shah had destroyed the Jingali movement, and the first CPI. He established brutal military repressions. By 1926, he constituted himself as Shah-in-Shah. He re-inaugurated the landed feudal state, one largely subservient to British imperialism. He signed to Britain, an oil lease to 1993, at minor costs. He also pursued a policy of intense minority suppression, including outlawing of ethnic costumes and obligation to wear a 'Pahlavi cap'. As noted earlier, he intensified the attack on the nomadic existence of the Kurdish tribesmen, in the process, accelerating the power of land-holders. He was intent on "destroying the tribal organization, preventing migration, and attempting to convert all aspects of tribal life". <sup>18</sup>
77. Although receiving less attention than their counter-parts in Turkey, Iraq, and Syria – the first explicitly pan-Kurdish (cross-border) Kurdish alliances were spurred by Iranian and Iraqi Kurds. In 1942, Mir Haj of the **Hewa** party of Iraq (an urban group in Northern Iraq), and Iranian Kurds from Mahabad – together founded the **Komala I Zian I Kurdistan** ('Committee for the Rebirth of Kurdistan'). This established itself in Mahabad by 1943. It adopted a clandestine and open structure. Its representatives were mainly urban petit bourgeois and educated intelligentsia. By 1944, many leading chiefs joined with them, as they saw its potential strength. By August 1944, a treaty between Kurds from Turkey, Iraq and Iran was signed at Mount Dalanpar – the point where the 3 countries meet. It was the **Peman I Se Senur** (The Pact of the Three Borders), and adopted the Kurdish Flag.
78. Both Turkey and Iran, had adopted a supposedly 'neutral' position after the war. But in especial, Iran, had been in reality heavily engaged with Germany. After the **Molotov- Ribbentrop Pact** of 23 August 1939, the British imperialists realized the USSR had spiked the guns trained upon it, and temporarily evaded the imperialist plot to sic Nazi Germany on it. <sup>19</sup> British leaders therefore swiftly regrouped, making probes, as they were concerned about the German access to the Black Sea. **Winston Churchill** (First Lord of the Admiralty) explained to **Ivan Maisky**, USSR Ambassador to Great Britain, on the 6 October 1939. <sup>20</sup>

"Churchill walked up to a big map of Europe and drew a sweeping line which approximately traced the new Soviet-German border and northern Rumania and Yugoslavia. He then exclaimed: 'Germany must not be allowed any further! It is especially important not to let Germany reach the Black Sea.' ... The Soviet government is greatly mistaken if it thinks that

Britain is plotting against it in Turkey and the Balkans. Britain is interested in one thing only: not to let Germany reach the Black Sea. Hence its Balkan policy, its friendship with Turkey, and its wish to be able to send its navy through the Straits if need be. But if the Soviet Union, alone or together with Turkey, blocked Germany's access to the Black Sea, Britain might wrap up its Balkan policy and abandon its right of passage through the Straits. Britain has enough cares in other parts of the world.

What conclusion can be drawn from the above?

The conclusion is that today, just as before, the basic interests of Great Britain and the USSR do not collide, but coincide. It means that there is a common basis for good relations between our countries. The British government treats our declaration of neutrality as a positive fact, merely wishing for it to be *benevolent neutrality*.

...Then, as though summing up his thoughts, he noted with a sly smile: 'Stalin is playing a big game at the moment and is doing so felicitously. He can be satisfied. But I fail to see why we should be dissatisfied.'

Churchill was pointedly sharp about Reza Shah's policy of tacit agreements with Germany: <sup>21</sup>

'The shah must not be allowed to pursue *monkey tricks*,' the prime minister uttered heatedly. 'Persia must be with us! The shah must choose one way or the other.'

Churchill added that if the Shah persisted, a military occupation of Persia by Anglo-Soviet forces would be necessary'.

79. After the German invasion of the USSR (code named **Barbarossa**) in June 1941, an alliance between Britain and the USSR was signed. A division of Iran into Soviet and Western spheres took place, by **Operation Countenance**, from 25 August to 17 September 1941. This denied Germany access to the Black Sea, and to the oil in Iran and Iraq. It also served to act as a supply line for the USSR to obtain military aid from Great Britain. A formal treaty sanctioning the troop stationed in Iran, was signed in Tehran on 29 January 1942, between Iran, Britain and the Soviet Union. The entry of these troops led the Iranian army to flee, leaving considerable armaments in the hands of the Kurds of Northern Iran in particular. But the formal treaty specified that troop withdrawal should occur 6 months after end of the war. Finally, Reza Shah was deposed in favour of his son, Muhammed Reza Shah. The British line stayed South of Kermanshah – the southern limit of Iranian Kurdistan. The Russian troops were at a line North of Mahabad.

80. The state of the **Iranian Communist Party of Iran (Tudeh)** was considered to be problematic. While founded in 1941, it had aimed at being a mass party. Although it is true it supported both the Azerbaijani and Mahabad attempts at autonomy. However it was thereafter guarded on the question of Iran as a multi-national state. Even in 1941, doubts on its '*sectarian*' line had been expressed. **Dimitrov** advised Stalin to rely upon a broader democratic People's Party Azerbaijan:

“A group of Iranian Communists, former political prisoners, has begun to revive the Communist Party of Iran. They have created a temporary bureau, identified one comrade (Arashes-Oganesyan) for liaison with the IKKI [Executive Committee of the Communist International], and turned to us for directions... these Iranian Communists can be considered completely honest revolutionaries and pro-Soviet people.

At the same time a People's Party with a democratic program has been created in Iran by a democratic figure Suleiman Mirza. Mirza has been fighting for democratic reform in Iran for 30 years now. Some Iranian Communists also participate in this People's Party.

Considering the special conditions of Iran (joint occupation with the British, the democratic and subversive work of the Nazis and their agents, the wariness and hostility of part of the Iranian ruling circles, we think that the revival of the Iranian Communist Party, which was always a small sectarian group, would hardly make a difference at the present time, but would definitely cause certain difficulties and complications. This will strengthen suspiciousness and dissatisfaction in the ranks of the ruling circles and provide more opportunities for German agents to frighten the Iranian bourgeoisie with the danger of the Sovietization of Iran, and indeed they make the British themselves suspicious with respect to the Soviet Union”.<sup>22</sup>

By 1945, the Azarbaijan Democratic Party had been formed by **Jafar Pishevari**, and had close links with the Tudeh.

81. Concurrently, in Mahabad, which is close to the Kurdish border with Azerbaijan, **Qazi Mohammed** was from a leading family of hereditary qadis (judges or magistrates practicing by Islamic, or Sharia law) – although not a family of hereditary shaykhs. Even though his family was well respected, they were urban and, some tribal leaders looked askance at Qazi's rise to power. He himself was a former respected judge, of both Western law and Sharia law. As central Iranian power dwindled, with the presence of foreign troops and Muhammed Reza's army splintering, Mahabad increasingly became a bastion of Kurdish aspirations to independence. Qazi Mohammed became the acknowledged leader of the area. There is little doubt that initially the Soviets were discreet to the point that British authorities stressed their behavior was “very correct”, and USA authorities acknowledged that the Soviets were “only requiring” security and grain (*Cited Jwaideh Ibid p. 245-6*). Although Soviet presence was low key, it became over time close to (Sawj Bulaq). While Russian policy was not to directly foster Kurdish independence, their respect of Kurdish rights encouraged the Komala. Jwaideh draws attention to the fact that the slogans of both the British and the Soviets in the Second World War were generally in agreement. Namely that there should be ‘self-determination’ (*Jwaideh Ibid p. 246*). But both the British and Britain did not want to inflame the Turkish government on the matter of Kurdish independence, lest Turkey officially enter the war on the side of the Germans. Nonetheless, these fears receded by 1942 to some extent, and the Soviets certainly sent in expert party workers. Kurdish representatives were invited also to Baku for meetings. By 1944 the Komala and the Bolsheviks had established contacts. The Kurds in Mahabad were encouraged to establish the **Kurdish Democratic Party**



- (KDP).** By this time the USSR was openly supporting the moves of Azerbaijan for full autonomy. In 1945, the Komala came out into the open in Mahabad, and formed with the VOKS (Society of Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries) a Kurdistan-Soviet Cultural Relations Society.
82. First in 1944, and then in September 1945, a Kurdish delegation led by Qazi Mohammed visited the USSR. At this meeting, initially the Azerbaijan leader Bagirov tried to persuade the Kurd delegation to join the Azerbaijani party, which was untenable of course since they had a Kurdish national agenda – so they refused. However support was offered, specifically as arms, and printing presses, and for Kurdish military cadre to enter USSR military academies. The delegation was urged to form the *hizb-i-Demokrat-i-Kurd* (Kurdish Democrat Party), and they did this in November 1945. A manifesto called for “freedom and self-government in the administration of their own affairs, and obtain autonomy within the limits of the Iranian state” – and language rights, local origin of state officials. It also stated that “the KDP will make a special effort to establish unity and complete fraternity with the Azerbaijani people” (*Jwaideh Ibid; p. 252*)
83. Meanwhile, the British imperialists and the Iranian ruling classes together, ensured sabotage in Azerbaijan, including creation of famine, as reported here:

“At the end of 1942 at the insistence of our government, Governor-General Fakhimi was removed from his post and Mokkadam was appointed in his place. . . .

In the first place, Fakhimi, created a famine [*golod*] in Azerbaijan in order to discredit us. In August 1942 Fakhimi said that the Soviet government supposedly was taking away [*otberet*] grain and gave an instruction not to remove grain from villages, as a result of which, before the closing of the roads, in not one city of Azerbaijan were there reserves of grain for the winter, and beginning with the end of January 1943 there occurred interruptions in the supply of grain to the city population.

The food situation was also considerably complicated by the arrival of an American adviser in Azerbaijan who removed all the reserves of grain to Tehran from points accessible to automotive transport; as a consequence of this, an exceptionally serious situation was created with the delivery of grain to supply the urban population. In snowdrift conditions all the cities should have been supplied only by transporting grain using pack animals. In the second place, the local governmental staff, on the directive of Fakhimi, who had achieved his restoration to the post of Governor-General, began sabotaging the measures being carried out by Mokkadam and had actually ceased normal activity.

In the third place, the Iranian government, inspired by the British and Americans, from the day of Mokkadam’s arrival as Governor-General created an unbearable situation for normal work. In particular, the financing of state institutions and the release of funds for the purchase of grain were stopped, etc., as a result of which Mokkadam could not manage to organize the supply of cities before the day he was recalled; there were great interruptions [in supply] until June. There were days when Mokkadam gave the population potatoes instead of grain”.<sup>23</sup>

- In Moscow Mr. Byrnes and Mr. Bevin in December 1945, urged Stalin to ensure Azerbaijan's trajectory would fall within that of a 'general provincial reform' in Iran. Stalin refused (*J.F. Byrnes 'Speaking Frankly', London 1947; p. 120*) Azerbaijan finally declared independence in December 1945, after the USSR halted two Iranian battalions aiming for Tabriz.
84. The entry of a major fighting force from Iraqi Kurdistan, rather changed the equation in Mahabad. It was around this time that **Mullah Mustafa Barzani** and his brother, **Sheikh Ahmad** (the spiritual guide of the Barzanis, and a follower of Naqshabandi Sufism) arrived with 10,000 people – and 3000 fighting men. The Barzani tribe was based in Iraq, where they had been in the forefront of rebellion against the British and Iraqi compradors. In 1931 the Baghdad government had engaged in war, and were initially routed. But, the new technology of British led air-power was used to force submission. Both brothers were placed in house arrest in Suleimaniyeh. Escaping into exile, and then launching a new rebellion, Mullah Mustafa was able to effectively rule most of Iraqi Kurdistan. In 1945 he called for a new revolt. But this time the new Iraqi Air Force was used, and suppressed the revolt. The entire Barzani tribe retreated into Iran. Initially the Barzanis asked for an accord with the central government, but were rebuffed. Only then did they consider to, and actually did join forces with Qazi Mohammad, although this was from the start, a rocky relationship. In especial other tribal chiefs of the area felt aggrieved. The Barzanis refused to follow orders from Qazi Muhammad. The Barzani fighters routed the Iranian army in 2 large battles. Although he wished to go on the offensive, Soviet advisors warned of risk of retaliation from Britain.
85. Although only a few of the promised arms from the USSR arrived, on 22 January 1946, Qazi Mohammed proclaimed the "Republic of Kurdistan" in the center of Mahabad. Shortly after a parliament of 13 members formed, and elected Qazi Mohammed as the President of the Republic. Rather quickly, and repeatedly, Mohammed came under pressure from both USSR representatives, and the Azerbaijanis. They disputed the need to proclaim independence. Instead they argued that Kurdistan-Mahabad, should be semi-autonomous within the autonomous Azerbaijan. However repeatedly Qazi Mohammed refused this, emphasizing that the Kurdish people in the region could not accept that. This seems irrefutable. But the Azerbaijanis continued to have some rancor about this (*Eagleton; Ibid; pp76, 81, 82; 106*). Undoubtedly this weakened the anti-Iran forces, disrupting their unity. Yet by the April of 1946, the governments of Azerbaijan and Kurdistan were reconciled enough to sign a joint mutual defence and friendship treaty. Some months after independence, many Kurdish notables sent a signed document to Tehran asking for a "Supreme Council of Kurdistan". Again, being quite at pains to stay within the Iranian state (*Jwaideh Ibid p. 253*). Nonetheless, there was tribal division, in spite of the respect and authority for Qadi Muhammad. Those chiefs with settled tribesmen and who were producing tobacco crops, wanted to be able to trade in the Iranian wide market (*Jwaideh Ibid p. 258*). Some tribal chiefs, especially 'Amr Khan Sharif maintained close relations with the USA Ambassador in Tehran, George Allen. Meanwhile Haji Baba Shaykh and Qobad, maintained constant contact with the central Tehran Iranian

government.

86. It is known that the USA Consul in Tabriz, Rossow visited Pischevari, to discuss his intentions on the Soviet troops stationed in Azerbaijan. Upon being asked, Pischevari said he had no problems with these troops, but that Tehran might have.<sup>24</sup> However at the United Nations marked pressure was placed upon the Soviet Union, to honour their commitment to withdraw from Iranian soil 6 months after the war ended (See above). Foreign Minister of the USSR, Andreii **Gromyko** announced suddenly, that all Soviet troops would leave by 6 May. Shortly after, the newly appointed Iranian Prime Minister **Qavam Sultaneh** and the Soviet Ambassador **I.G. Sadchikoiv** signed an agreement for a joint **Irano-Soviet oil** company:

“Letter of [Prime Minister Ahmad] Qavam to Sadchikov about a joint oil company; 4 April 1946

Mister Ambassador!

In addition to the verbal discussions held between us, I have the honor to report to you that the government of His Majesty the Shah of Iran has agreed that the governments of Iran and the Soviet Union form a joint Soviet-Iranian company to explore and exploit oil fields in northern Iran in the following conditions:

1. For the first 25 years of operation of the company 49% of the stock will belong to the Iranian side and 51% to the Soviet side; for the second 25 years 50% of the stock will belong to the Iranian side and 50% to the Soviet side”.<sup>25</sup>

It is alleged by Trotskyites and progressives, that: “Kurds and Azerbaijanis were being abandoned for the prospect of new oil supplies”. (*Bulloch & Morris Ibid p. 107*). Our alternative explanation is that the USSR post the Second World War, needed desperately to avoid further war, hence it was forced to retreat. Indeed to not have withdrawn Soviet troops from Azerbaijan, was to invite a riposte of not withdrawing British and USA imperialist troops from: “*Egypt, Syria, Indonesia, Greece, and also... China, Iceland, in Denmark*”. (*Stalin JV; See thesis 84*). To disguise his intentions to destroy the communist base, Qavam also allowed three Tudeh members into the Iranian national cabinet. Qavam rescinded the oil deal with the USSR, with pressure applied by the USA on the USSR.

87. Under increasing pressure, Azerbaijan gave up the unequal struggle and re-joined the Iranian state as a provincial council by 13 June 1946. But by 13 December 1946, the Iranian army had entered Tabriz, and the supporters of independence were attacked. A tribal revolt in the south, justified the dismissal of the three Tudeh national cabinet officers. Without Soviet backing, they fled to the Soviet Union. **Stalin** wrote to Peshavari just before this, explaining how tenuous it would be for the USSR to resist:<sup>26</sup>

“There is no profound revolutionary crisis in Iran. There are few workers in Iran and they are poorly organized. The Iranian peasantry still does not show any serious activism. Iran is not waging a war with external enemy that could weaken Iran's revolutionary circles through a military failure.

Consequently, there is no such situation in Iran that could support the tactics of Lenin in 1905 and 1917.

*Second.* Certainly, you could have counted on a success in the cause of the struggle for the revolutionary demands of the Azerbaijani people had the Soviet troops continued to remain in Iran. But we could no longer keep them in Iran, mainly because the presence of Soviet troops in Iran undercut the foundations of our liberationist policies in Europe and Asia. The British and Americans said to us that if Soviet troops could stay in Iran, then why could not the British troops stay in Egypt, Syria, Indonesia, Greece, and also the American troops - in China, Iceland, in Denmark. Therefore we decided to withdraw troops from Iran and China, in order to seize this tool [*oruzhiie*] from the hands of the British and Americans, to unleash the liberation movement in the colonies and thereby to render our liberationist policy more justified and efficient. You as a revolutionary will certainly understand that we could not have done otherwise.

*Third.* All this said, one can come to the following conclusion with regard to the situation in Iran. There is no profound revolutionary crisis in Iran. There is no state of war in Iran with external enemies, and, consequently, no military failures which could weaken the reaction and aggravate the crisis. So long as Soviet troops stayed in Iran, you had a chance to unfold the struggle in Azerbaijan and organize a broad democratic movement with far-reaching demands. But our troops had to leave and left Iran. What do have now in Iran? We have a conflict of the government of Qavam with the Anglophile circles in Iran who represent the most reactionary elements of Iran. As reactionary as Qavam used to be in the past, now he must, in the interests of self-defense and the defense of his government, carry out some democratic reforms and seek support among democratic elements in Iran. What must be our tactics under these conditions? I believe we should use this conflict to wrench concessions from Qavam [*virvat ustupki u Kavama*], to give him support, to isolate the Anglophiles, thus, and to create some basis for the further democratization of Iran. From this assumption stems all our advice to you. Of course, one could adopt a different tactic: to spit on everything, to break with Qavam and thereby ensure there a victory of the Anglophile reactionaries. Yet, this would not have been a tactic, but stupidity. This would have been in effect a betrayal of the cause of the Azerbaijani people and Iranian democracy”.

This position of Stalin’s makes absolute sense: Both the USSR and the possible development of socialism in parts of Central Europe; the threat of nuclear weapons; and the increasing bellicosity of the erst-while Allies of the USA and Great Britain – made it clear that Azerbaijan was very much a ‘lost cause’ – especially given the conditions in Iran described by Stalin.

88. On 14 December several tribal dissidents inside Mahabad secretly betrayed Mahabad, and met with **General Homyuni** to ensure a submission. On 16 December, Qazi Mohammed, his brother Sadr Qadi and his chief ministers were forced to do so also. Three Qadi brothers – Mohammed, Sadr and Sayf Qadi another brother - were executed by hanging in March 1947.

89. The Barzanis, were faithful to the idea of Mahabad Kurdish aspirations to the end. However now there was nothing concrete to defend. Mulla Mustafa, remarked: "The Kurds have not been defeated by the Iranian army; rather it was the Soviet Union that was defeated by the United States and Great Britain". (*Eagleton; ibid; p. 114*). The Barzanis attempted to obtain safety guarantees from the British and the Iranians, but this was not forthcoming. By March 1947, the Iranian army attacked. The Barzani fighters were forced back into Iraqi territory. While Sheikh Ahmad led the women and children back into submission to Iraqi Government, the fighters took a different course. In an epic trek, Mullah Mustafa and some 800 men in May 1947, went through the snowy mountains to the USSR. Pursued by Iranian troops, they entered safety in the USSR, where they stayed for years (See below).
90. In February 1949, the Tudeh was blamed for an attempt on the Shah's life, and its leaders fled abroad or were arrested. The party was banned. Similar crack downs on the KDP occurred. Subsequent events whereby the USA took increasing monopoly power over the young Reza Pavlavi Shah, and steadily eclipsed Great Britain are well known. The nationalist Prime Minister **Muhammed Mussadiq**, moved to bring the **Anglo-Iranian Oil Company** under nationalization, thereby provoking the confrontation with Great Britain. This unequal treaty had long origins of British monopoly in Iran, dating back to the 1872 Reuter Concession. Of this the imperialist **Lord Curzon** had boasted that it was:

"The most complete and extraordinary surrender of the industrial resources of a kingdom into foreign hands that has probably ever been dreamed of".<sup>27</sup>

Of course the USA had long eyed the Iranian oil resources. As US Secretary of State Cordell Hull stated in 1943:

"It is to our interest that no great power be established on the Persian Gulf opposite the important American petroleum development in Saudi Arabia".<sup>28</sup>

The USA used this nationalization attempt, to counter the diminishing Great Britain. Having placed Great Britain at a disadvantage, when the dust had settled, the CIA in a coup removed Mussadeq.<sup>29</sup> **Operation Ajax**, was coordinated by **Kermit Roosevelt**, **General Norman Schwarkopf** and Iranian army based compradors, on August 15. Tragically Musaddiq showing his own conservatism, fired on Tudeh Communist masses. The success of Operation Ajax, ensured the subservience of Iran to the USA into the period of the 1978 rising of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Shah Reza Pavlavi in the meantime, was no friend either of the Iranian workers, or Kurdish peoples.

#### Footnotes and Bibliography

1. W. G. Elphinston, "The Kurdish Question"; International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-), Vol. 22, No. 1 (Jan., 1946), pp. 91-103

2. The term semi or quasi feudal is not a perfect one since it carries overtones of the classic feudal economies of Britain, France, Spain etc. However even British colonial observers freely used the term. However the system of chiefs vassalage, who were only responsible for troop provision when called upon – yet otherwise independent – was exactly what both the Ottomans and Qajars imposed on the Kurdish chiefs. (See *MacDowall Ibid*). It was also a term used by the Comintern in this context.
3. “Aga, also spelled Agha, Turkish Ağa, in Turkey, person of high rank or social position, especially during the era of the [Ottoman Empire](#). Combined with the names of military units or administrative departments, it formed the official titles borne by the chief officers of the Janissaries and of the cavalry, by the principal members of the imperial household, and by the eunuchs who controlled the sultan’s harem. Later it was applied to officers of lower rank and, socially, as a term of respect, to heads of families and villages and to landowners. In republican Turkey the official title disappeared, the social use of the word surviving only among the lower classes”.  
Encyclopaedia Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/aga>
4. Feroz Ahmad, “The Making of Modern Turkey”; London; 1993; p. 28-29
5. The Berlin Conference of 1884-5, was convened by Otto von Bismarck, the Chancellor of Germany. It initiated formally the ‘Scramble for Africa’. Article 61, which read: “The Sublime Porte undertakes to carry out, without further delay, the improvements and reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by Armenians, and to guarantee their security against the Circassians and Kurds. It will periodically make known the steps taken to this effect to the powers, who will superintend their application”. Wikipedia at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian\\_Question](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armenian_Question) citing: *Hurewitz, Jacob C (1956), Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East: A Documentary Record 1535–1956, I, Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand, p. 190.*
6. Ahmad, F; *Ibid*; pp.43-44
7. September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1920; Resolution; Session 4; Read by Bela Kun; In Editor: John Riddell; “To See The dawn, Baku 1920. First Congress of the Peoples of the East”; New York; 1993; pp. 129-30
8. “Peasants and workers of Armenia! For years you have been victims of the intrigues of foreign capital, which protested loudly against the massacres of the Armenians by the Kurds, and stirred you up to fight against the Sultan only in order to get greater profits from your struggle. During the war they not only promised you independence, they incited your merchants, your teachers and your priests to demand the land of the Turkish peasants so that there should be unending hostility between the Armenian and Turkish peoples, a hostility from which they could draw unending profits. For so long as there is enmity between you and the Turks so long will the English, French, and American capitalists be able to keep the Turks on a leash, threatening them with the danger of Armenian revolt and intimidating the Armenians with the danger of a Kurd pogrom”; Jane Degras Volume 1; p.108.
9. *Degras, Jane; Volume 1: 1919-1922; London 1971; p. 385.*
10. *Degras Ibid; Volume 1; p. 385*
11. *Degras; Ibid; Volume 1; p. 385*
12. *Degras; Ibid; Volume 1; p. 386*
13. *Bizhad Jazani, “Capitalism and Revolution in Iran”: London; 1980; pp.1-20;*
14. *Ervand Abrahamian; ‘Iran Between Two Revolutions’, Princeton 1982).*
15. *Abrahamian Ibid p. 118*
16. Council of People’s Commisars; “Appeal to all Toiling Muslims of Russia and the East”; December 7, 1917. In Riddell J: “To See the Dawn – Baku 1920, First Congress of the Peoples of the East”: *Ibid*; pp.251.
17. *Abrahamian Ibid; p. p.116.*
18. *Jwaideh Ibid p.243; citing Ann K.S.Lambton, ‘Landlord & peasant in Persia: A Study of Land Tenure and Land Revenue Administration (London 1953; p. 285).*
19. For the Marxist-Leninist view on the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, See Bland W.B. for ‘The Communist League’; at: <http://ml-review.ca/aml/AllianceIssues/WBBJVS-NaziPact.htm>
20. The full relevant quote and citation is:  
“Churchill walked up to a big map of Europe and drew a sweeping line which approximately traced the new Soviet–German border and northern Rumania and Yugoslavia. He then exclaimed: ‘Germany must not be allowed any further! It is especially important not to let Germany reach the Black Sea.’ He set about arguing, with some feeling, that if Germany were to reach the Danube estuary, it would not only seize the Balkans, but would inevitably extend itself also to Asia Minor, Iran and India. It would want to possess the Ukraine and Baku. Neither Britain nor the USSR can allow this to happen. Here, too, their interests coincide rather than clash. The Soviet government is greatly mistaken if it thinks that Britain is plotting against it in Turkey and the Balkans. Britain is interested in one thing only: not to let Germany reach the Black Sea. Hence its Balkan policy, its friendship with Turkey, and its wish to be

able to send its navy through the Straits if need be. But if the Soviet Union, alone or together with Turkey, blocked Germany's access to the Black Sea, Britain might wrap up its Balkan policy and abandon its right of passage through the Straits. Britain has enough cares in other parts of the world. What conclusion can be drawn from the above? The conclusion is that today, just as before, the basic interests of Great Britain and the USSR do not collide, but coincide. It means that there is a common basis for good relations between our countries. The British government treats our declaration of neutrality as a positive fact, merely wishing for it to be benevolent neutrality.

...Then, as though summing up his thoughts, he noted with a sly smile: 'Stalin is playing a big game at the moment and is doing so felicitously. He can be satisfied. But I fail to see why we should be dissatisfied.' Gabriel Gorodetsky; 'The Complete Maisky Diaries', Volume 2; New Haven 2015; p.642-3

21. Gabriel Gorodetsky; 'The Complete Maisky Diaries', Volume 2; Ibid; p.1123
22. "Cable from Dimitrov to Stalin, Molotov, Beria, and Malenkov," December 09, 1941, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, RGASPI, f. 558. op. 11, d. 66, ll. 43-44. Obtained by Jamil Hasanli and translated for CWIHP by Gary Goldberg. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119104>
23. "Report on the Political and Economic Situation in Tabriz in 1943," 1944, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Central State Archives, f. 28, op 4, d. 19. Obtained for CWIHP by Jamil Hasanli and translated for CWIHP by Gary Goldberg. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120069>
24. "Message from Bagirov to Stalin and Molotov Containing a Record of a Conversation between Rossow and Pishevari," February 07, 1945, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, GAPPOD, f.1, op.89, d.112. Obtained for CWIHP by Jamil Hasanli and translated for CWIHP by Gary Goldberg. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120483>;
25. "Message from Prime Minister Ahmad Qavam to Ambassador Sadchikov About a Joint Oil Company ," April 04, 1946, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, GAPPOD AzR, f.1 op.89, d.113. Obtained for CWIHP by Jamil Hasanli and translated for CWIHP by Gary Goldberg. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/120469>
26. "Joseph V. Stalin to Ja'far Pishevari, Leader of the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan, 8 May 1946 ," May 08, 1946, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVP RF, f. 06, op. 7, p. 34, d. 544, ll. 8-9; translation for CWIHP by Vladislav M. Zubok. Published in CWIHP Working Paper No. 15. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117827>
27. James A Bill; "The Eagle and the lion – The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations"; New York 1988; p.4; citing George N. Curzon 'Persia and the Persian Question'; London 1892; p. 480.
28. Cited by Bill; Ibid; p. 19; citing Alexander Y & Nanes A; 'The US and Iran'; Frederick MD 1980; p.99.
29. Bill; extensively documented pp 72-94.

## 1. Appendix 1:

"Joseph V. Stalin to Ja'far Pishevari, Leader of the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan, 8 May 1946," May 08, 1946, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, AVP RF, f. 06, op. 7, p. 34, d. 544, ll. 8-9; translation for CWIHP by Vladislav M. Zubok. Published in CWIHP Working Paper No. 15.  
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117827>

To comrade Pishevari,

It seems to me that you misjudge the existing situation, inside Iran as well as in the international dimension.

First. You want to meet all revolutionary demands of Azerbaijan right now. But the existing situation precludes realization of this program. Lenin used to put forth revolutionary demands as practical demands - I stress - as practical demands only when the country experienced a grave revolutionary crisis aggravated by the unsuccessful war with external enemy. Such was the case in 1905 during the unsuccessful war with Japan and in 1917 during the unsuccessful war with Germany. You here want to emulate Lenin. This is very good and laudable. However, the situation in Iran today is totally different. There is no profound revolutionary crisis in Iran. There are few workers in Iran and they are poorly organized. The Iranian peasantry still does not show any serious activism. Iran is not waging a war with external enemy that could weaken Iran's revolutionary circles through a military failure. Consequently, there is no such situation in Iran that could support the tactics of Lenin in 1905 and 1917.

Second. Certainly, you could have counted on a success in the cause of the struggle for the revolutionary demands of the Azerbaijani people had the Soviet troops continued to remain in Iran. But we could no longer keep them in Iran, mainly because the presence of Soviet troops in Iran undercut the foundations of our liberationist policies in Europe and Asia. The British and Americans said to us that if Soviet troops could stay in Iran, then why could not the British troops stay in Egypt, Syria, Indonesia, Greece, and also the American troops - in China, Iceland, in Denmark. Therefore we decided to withdraw troops from Iran and China, in order to seize this tool [*oruzhiie*] from the hands of the British and Americans, to unleash the liberation movement in the colonies and thereby to render our liberationist policy more justified and efficient. You as a revolutionary will certainly understand that we could not have done otherwise.

Third. All this said, one can come to the following conclusion with regard to the situation in Iran. There is no profound revolutionary crisis in Iran. There is no state of war in Iran with external enemies, and, consequently, no military failures which could weaken the reaction and aggravate the crisis. So long as Soviet troops stayed in Iran, you had a chance to unfold the struggle in Azerbaijan and organize a broad democratic movement with far-reaching demands. But our troops had to leave and



left Iran. What do have now in Iran? We have a conflict of the government of Qavam with the Anglophile circles in Iran who represent the most reactionary elements of Iran. As reactionary as Qavam used to be in the past, now he must, in the interests of self-defense and the defense of his government, carry out some democratic reforms and seek support among democratic elements in Iran. What must be our tactics under these conditions? I believe we should use this conflict to wrench concessions from Qavam [*virvat ustupki u Kavama*], to give him support, to isolate the Anglophiles, thus, and to create some basis for the further democratization of Iran. From this assumption stems all our advice to you. Of course, one could adopt a different tactic: to spit on everything, to break with Qavam and thereby ensure there a victory of the Anglophile reactionaries. Yet, this would not have been a tactic, but stupidity. This would have been in effect a betrayal of the cause of the Azerbaijani people and Iranian democracy.

Fourth. You, as I found out, say that we first raised you to the skies and then let you down into the precipice and disgraced you. If this is true, it surprises us. What has really happened? We used the technique here that every revolutionary knows. In the situation similar to the situation of Iran today, if one wants to achieve a certain minimum of demands pursued by the movement, to movement has to run ahead, to progress beyond the minimal demands and to create a threat for the government, to ensure a possibility of concessions on the part of the government. Had you not run far ahead, you would not have had a chance in the current situation in Iran to achieve these demands [sic: concessions? -trans] that the government of Qavam has to make now. Such is the law of revolutionary movement. There could not be even mention of any disgrace for you. It is very strange that you think that we could have let you down in disgrace. On the contrary, if you behave reasonably and seek with our moral support the demands that would legalize essentially the existing factual position of Azerbaijan, then you would be blessed both by the Azeris and [by] Iran as a pioneer of the progressive democratic movement in the Middle East.

I. Stalin