
U.S. Foreign Policy, Iraq, and the Cold War 1958-1975

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the ways in which U.S. policy toward Iraq was dictated by its broader Cold War strategy between 1958 and 1975. While most historians have focused on 'hot' Cold War conflicts such as Cuba, Vietnam, and Afghanistan, few have recognized Iraq's significance as a Cold War battleground. This thesis shows where Iraq fits into the broader historiography of the Cold War in the Middle East. It argues that U.S. decisions and actions were designed to deny the Soviet Union influence over Iraq and a strategic base in the oil-rich Gulf region. This was evident in the Eisenhower administration's response to Iraq's revolution in 1958, when it engaged in covert action to prevent communists from gaining control of the state; in the Kennedy administration's efforts to bolster the first Ba'th regime during its war with the Kurds in 1963 because it perceived it as anti-communist; in the Johnson administration's support for the anti-communist, Arab nationalist regimes during the mid-1960s; and in the Nixon administration's decision to support the Kurdish rebels in 1972-75 after the second Ba'thist regime drew Iraq partially into the Soviet orbit. This suggests a clear pattern.

Using newly available primary sources and interviews, this thesis reveals new details on America's decision-making toward and actions against Iraq during a key part of the Cold War. Significantly, it raises questions about widely held notions, such as the CIA's alleged involvement in the 1963 Ba'thist coup and the theory that the U.S. sold out the Kurds in 1975. Finally, it argues scholars have relied excessively and uncritically on a leaked congressional report, the *Pike Report*, which has had a distorting affect on the historiography of U.S.-Iraqi relations. This thesis seeks to redress these historiographical deficiencies and bring new details to light.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AAD	Access to Archive Database
AU	Arab Union
BNA	British National Archives
BPC	Basra Petroleum Company
CENTO	Central Treaty Organization
CFPF	Central Foreign Policy Files
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CPL	Carter Presidential Library
DCI	Director of Central Intelligence
DNSA	Digital National Security Archive
DoS	US Department of State
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
EPL	Eisenhower Presidential Library
ET	Electronic Telegrams
FCO	Foreign Commonwealth Office
FPL	Ford Presidential Library
GOI	Government of Iraq
HSF	Harold Saunders Files
IAF	Iraqi Air Force
ICP	Iraq Communist Party
IDF	Israeli Defense Force
INOC	Iraq National Oil Company
INR	Bureau of Intelligence and Research
IPC	Iraq Petroleum Company
JCS	Joint Chiefs of State

JPL	Johnson Presidential Library
KDP	Kurdish Democratic Party
KPL	Kennedy Presidential Library
KSF	Kissinger–Scowcroft West Wing Office Files
KT	Kissinger Transcripts
MR	Mandatory Review
NARA	National Archive and Record Administration
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCRC	National Council of the Revolutionary Command
NDP	National Democratic Party
NEA	Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs
NIE	National Intelligence Estimate
NPL	Nixon Presidential Library
NSAM	National Security Action Memorandum
NSC	National Security Council
NSF	National Security File
OCB	Operations Coordinating Board
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PHF	Phillip Halla Files
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
PRF	People’s Resistance Force
RCC	Revolutionary Command Council
RG	Record Group
RKF	Robert Komer Files
SAVAK	National Intelligence and Security Organization (Iran)
SCI	Special Committee on Iraq

SN	Subject Numeric Files
SNIE	Special National Intelligence Estimate
SOV-MAT	Soviet Military Materials
UAR	United Arab Republic
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USAID	United States Aid
USG	United States Government
USINT	United States Interests Section
USIS	United States Information Service
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
USUN	United States Mission to the United Nations

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Introduction

In a perceptive remark made during a meeting of the National Security Council in January 1959, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles observed that the U.S. was “not sufficiently sophisticated” to meddle in the complex mix of internal Iraqi politics.¹ This thesis will show how the U.S. moved from being an unsophisticated observer of events in 1958 to become a direct protagonist in Iraq during 1972-75, through its covert support for Iraq’s Kurdish rebels. The motive for America’s shift was Iraq’s increasing importance to its global Cold War strategy, which was designed to contain the Soviet Union.²

Traditionally, the U.S. had viewed the Gulf as a “British lake” and preferred to rely on Britain for its defense.³ But as tensions between Washington and Moscow escalated in the late-1940s, U.S. military planners recognized the vital role that access to Gulf oil would play in the event of a war with the Soviet Union. A U.S. military study from 1946 concluded that losing Iraqi and Saudi Arabian sources of oil would force the U.S. and its allies to fight an “oil-starved war” against the Soviet Union and vice versa.⁴ This meant America’s regional strategy aimed to defend the Gulf, deny its oil resources from Soviet domination, and ensure the survival of the region’s Western-backed autocrats.⁵ To achieve this, the U.S. sponsored the development of a regional defense system aimed at reinforcing what Secretary Dulles called the “Northern Tier” states, consisting of Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and Turkey. By the mid-1950s, this group had organized themselves into a regional

¹ Memorandum of Discussion at the 393d Meeting of the NSC, January 15, 1959 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc. 157), p.376.

² This argument has been raised in Douglas Little, “The United States and the Kurds: A Cold War Story,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 12/4 (2010), p.63-98; and Peter Hahn, *Missions Accomplished?: The United States and Iraq Since World War I* (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.38-62.

³ Roham Alvandi, “Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The Origins of Iranian Primacy in the Persian Gulf,” *Diplomatic History*, 36/2 (2012), p.338.

⁴ W. Taylor Fain, *American Ascendancy and British Retreat in the Persian Gulf Region* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), p.28.

⁵ See FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.46, p.136.

security alliance known as the Baghdad Pact.⁶ This thesis will show that the overthrow of the pro-Western Hashemite monarchy in 1958 upended America's Gulf strategy, displaced Britain's influence, and led to a Cold War competition with the Soviet Union over which direction the new regime in Baghdad would take. This contest would last for seventeen years—through four coup d'états, five different regimes, innumerable plots, and a fourteen-year long Kurdish War—before the Ba'th Party, led by Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr and Saddam Hussein, achieved absolute control of Iraq in 1975.⁷ In short, the driving force behind U.S. policy toward Iraq between 1958 and 1975 was the application of the broader principles of Cold War strategy on local political developments.

This thesis will show that whenever U.S. officials in Washington believed Baghdad was developing closer relations with Moscow, they took steps to counter Soviet influence, often relying on covert action. Three instances stand out: first, in 1958-59 the Eisenhower administration engaged Egyptian President Gamal Abd al-Nasser to find ways to prevent the communists from coming to power, including the possibility of overthrowing Iraq's strong leader, Prime Minister Premier Abd al-Karim Qasim; second, in 1962 the Kennedy administration ordered the CIA to seek Qasim's overthrow after he nationalized the concessionary holding of an American-owned oil company; and finally, in 1972-75 the Nixon administration financed and armed Kurdish rebels after Iraq signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union in order to destabilize the Iraqi regime and prevent communists from joining the government. However, when it believed an Iraqi regime was anti-communist, the U.S. took steps to bolster and maintain its power, irrespective of the views of its allies. Two examples are prominent: first, after Qasim was overthrown in February 1963 the Kennedy administration lent support to the Ba'th Party, which

⁶ See Behcet Kemal Yesilbursa, *The Baghdad Pact: Anglo-American Defence Policies in the Middle East, 1950-59* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2005); and Nigel Ashton, "The Hijacking of a Pact: The Formation of the Baghdad Pact and Anglo-American Tensions in the Middle East, 1955-58", *Review of International Studies*, 19/2 (1993), pp.123-37.

⁷ For studies of Iraq history, see Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton University Press, 1978); Edith Penrose and E.F. Penrose, *Iraq: International Relations and National Development* (London: Ernest Benn, 1978); Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (London: Westview Press, 1985); Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1987); and Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

was engaged in a brutal war against the Kurdish rebels, who at this point were being assisted by the Soviet Union; and second, in the mid-1960s the Johnson administration bolstered the anti-communist, Arab nationalist regimes of Abd al'Salim Arif and later his brother Abd ar-Rahman Arif in the face of British, Iranian, and Israeli efforts to depose them. In all instances, U.S. actions in Iraq were based on the need to check Soviet influence, reinforce potential pro-Western allies, and undermine perceived enemies. This was a logical extension of America's broader Cold War strategy.

To fully articulate the extent to which U.S. policy toward Iraq was dictated by Cold War strategy, it is important to situate this study within the historiography of the Cold War in the Middle East and U.S.-Iraqi relations. There is a wider debate among scholars on the significance the Cold War has had on the politics of the Middle East. On the one side, Fred Halliday is of the view that "the Cold War ... had a limited impact on the Middle East,"⁸ while on the other Fawaz Gerges has argued "the intrusion of the Cold War into regional politics exacerbated regional conflicts and made their resolution more difficult."⁹ Gerges is supported by another eminent Cold War historian, Arne Westad, who believes, "the Cold War in the Middle East is a much neglected topic in the history of international affairs." The reason for this, he explains, is the uncertainty about "how to place the global conflict within territories that were rife with conflicts of their own making or those held over from the colonial era." Westad argues the Cold War "belongs" in the Middle East because, like Gerges, he believes it shaped not just Middle Eastern politics but its conflicts as well.¹⁰ This thesis will use Iraq as a case study of the Cold War in the Middle East and show how America's application of Cold War principles to Iraq contributed to the escalation of local and regional conflicts into wider Cold War confrontations that drew in the superpowers.

⁸ Fred Halliday, "The Middle East and the Great Powers," in Yezid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim (eds.), *The Cold War in the Middle East* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p.16.

⁹ Fawaz Gerges, *The Superpowers in the Middle East: Regional and International Politics, 1955-67* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), p.246.

¹⁰ Odd Arne Westad, "Forward," in Massimiliano Trentin (ed), *The Middle East and the Cold War: Between Security and Development* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), pp.vii-viii. See also Yezid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim, *The Cold War and the Middle East* (Clarendon Press, 1997); and Nigel Ashton (ed.), *The Cold War in the Middle East* (London: Routledge, 2007).

By comparison to the considerable literature on Soviet-Iraqi relations,¹¹ the historiography of U.S.-Iraqi relations during the Cold War is still in its infancy. To date, there is only a single book examining U.S.-Iraqi relations more broadly: Peter Hahn's *Missions Accomplished? The United States and Iraq since World War I*.¹² Hahn argues the U.S. "monitored Iraq from a distance, aiming to deny any inroads by Soviet-backed communism and to prevent any flair-ups in violence between Iraq and its neighbors."¹³ Relying on primary documents made available through the Department of State's *Foreign Relations of the U.S. (FRUS)* series and other secondary works, Hahn's analysis of U.S.-Iraqi relations is aimed at "undergraduate students" and overlooks many key events. Nevertheless, his core argument that U.S. policy toward Iraq aimed to block Soviet influence is supported by this thesis.

Hahn and other notable scholars have recognized Iraq's revolution in 1958 as an important event for both Middle Eastern politics and the Cold War. Malcolm Kerr, for example, viewed the coup as a key turning point in what he called the "Arab Cold War," since the Qasim regime turned against Nasser's efforts to bring the Arab world under his command.¹⁴ The revolution has also been termed an important turning point by numerous Cold War scholars.¹⁵ From the outset of the Cold War, Iraq had been a key player in America's "Northern Tier" containment plan and was the namesake for the Baghdad Pact. Therefore, the overthrow of Iraq's pro-Western monarch by a group of radical, Arab nationalist military officers had a profound

¹¹ See John Berry, "Oil and Soviet Policy in the Middle East," *Middle East Journal*, 26/2 (1972), pp. 149-160; Francis Fukuyama, *The Soviet Union and Iraq since 1958* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1980); Robert Freedman, "Soviet Policy toward Ba'athist Iraq, 1968-1979", in Robert Donaldson (ed.), *The Soviet Union in the Third World: Successes and Failures* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981), pp.161-191; Galia Golan, *Soviet Policies in the Middle East from World War Two to Gorbachev* (Cambridge University Press, 1990); Oles and Bettie Smolansky, *The USSR and Iraq: the Soviet Quest for Influence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); and Johan Franzén, *Red Star over Iraq* (Columbia University Press, 2011).

¹² Hahn (2012), pp.38-62.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.5.

¹⁴ Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War, 1958-70* (Oxford University Press, 1971), pp.16-20.

¹⁵ Nigel Ashton, "'Great New Venture'? Anglo-American Cooperation in the Middle East and the Response to the Iraqi Revolution, July 1958," *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 4/1 (1993), pp.59-89; Stephen Blackwell, "A Desert Squall: Anglo-American Planning for Military Intervention in Iraq, July 1958 – August 1959," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 35/3 (1999), pp.1-18; Fain (2008), pp.96-105; David Painter, "Oil, resources, and the Cold War, 1945–1962," in Melvyn Leffler, Odd Arne Westad (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War: Volume I* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.486-507; Douglas Little, "The Cold War in the Middle East: Suez Crisis to Camp David Accords," in Leffler and Westad (2010), pp.311-12; and Hahn (2012), p.40.

affect on America's Cold War strategy.¹⁶ While Stephen Blackwell suggests the U.S. and Britain had a "common perception" of the communist threat to Iraq following the coup, many others argue that Anglo-American perceptions toward Iraq were not so closely aligned.¹⁷ This study disputes Blackwell's notion and argues the Dwight Eisenhower administration saw Iraq as part of its geostrategic contest with the Soviet Union, whereas Britain saw Qasim as an alternative to Nasser in the Arab world and sought to bolster him. This contrasts with the widely held notion of an Anglo-American 'special relationship' during this period.¹⁸

U.S. covert action aimed at denying Soviet influence in the Middle East is a core theme covered in this thesis.¹⁹ Numerous publications have accused the CIA of trying to assassinate Qasim in the fall of 1959;²⁰ seeking unsuccessfully to "incapacitate" him again in 1960;²¹ and finally, assisting in his overthrow by the Ba'th Party in February 1963.²² Another significant claim is that due to their interest in supporting the Ba'th Party's anti-communist tendencies, the CIA provided its death squads with lists of known communists, who were rounded up and in many cases killed.²³ But using newly available documents and interviews, this thesis will show that these claims are open to question and while the CIA was plotting against Qasim in the 1962-63 period, none of its efforts were successful.

Because of the CIA's interest in the Ba'th Party during this period, the party is a major focus of this thesis. Founded in 1943 by Michel Aflaq, a Lebanese Christian, and Salah al-Din al-Bitar, a Syrian Sunni, the party's motto of "unity, freedom, and

¹⁶ *Arab nationalism* is a nationalist ideology celebrating the glories of Arab civilization, Arabic language and literature, and calls for the political union of the Arab world.

¹⁷ Blackwell (1999), p.1.

¹⁸ '*Special Relationship*' is a phrase used to describe Britain and America's close political, diplomatic, cultural, economic, military and historical relations. See John Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship: Anglo American Relations in the Cold War and After* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

¹⁹ Little (2004), pp.694-98; and Little (2010), p.63-98

²⁰ See Richard Sale, "Exclusive: Saddam key in early CIA plot," *Information Clearing House*, April 10, 2003; Con Coughlin, *Saddam: His Rise and Fall* (London: Harper-Perennial, 2004), pp.38-39; Little (2004), p.695; and Nathan Citano, "Middle East Cold Wars: Oil and Arab Nationalism in U.S.-Iraqi Relations, 1958-61," in Kathryn Statler, Andrew Johns, (eds), *The Eisenhower Administration, the Third World, and the Globalization of the Cold War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), pp.254-59.

²¹ David Wise, "Another CIA Disaster," *New York Times*, September 14, 1996, p.A35; Roger Morris, "A Tyrant 40 Years in the Making," *The New York Times*, March 14, 2003, p.A29; and Little (2004), p.695.

²² Little (2004), p.695-96; Citano (2006), pp.254-59; and Painter (2010), p.503.

²³ Batatu (1978), pp.985-86; Morris (2003), p.A29; Sale (2003); and Little (2004), p.696.

socialism” pointed to its Arab nationalist, anti-imperialist, and socialist ideology that was dedicated to bringing about a complete transformation of Arab society through revolutionary activism. After first coming to power in Iraq in 1963 and being overthrown later that year, the Ba’th returned to power in a coup in 1968 and ruled the country until the U.S. invasion in 2003.²⁴ Joseph Sassoon argues that although “the party’s ideology was at odds with Western democracy” because of its belief that democracy masked the tyranny and exploitation of the masses, the Ba’th Party was not inherently anti-Western.²⁵ This thesis will show that this was particularly evident during the first Ba’th regime in Iraq in 1963, again in 1973-74 when the Ba’th improved Iraq’s relations with France and the West, and especially, as my previous research has shown, during the Iran-Iraq war.²⁶

The U.S. also had an interest in Iraq’s Kurdish population due to their historic relationship with Moscow.²⁷ After the Allied powers reneged on their promise to give the Kurds a state composed of the southeastern corner of Turkey in the Treaty of Sevres after the First World War, they carved up the Kurdish territories into modern day Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria with the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923.²⁸ Before long, the Kurds in Iraq rebelled against their new British colonial masters during the 1920s, only to be put down by force.²⁹ The leader of the Iraqi Kurds during the period covered in this thesis was Mulla Mustafa Barzani, a born revolutionary. Having first engaged in combat during a rebellion against the British authorities in 1919 and again in the early 1930s,³⁰ he later went on to play an integral role in the formation of the short-lived Kurdish Republic of Mahabad during 1945-46, in Soviet occupied Iran. As Archie Roosevelt explained, after Mahabad

²⁴ William Cleveland and Martin Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 4th Edition (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009), p.325; and Joseph Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Ba’ath Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), p.9; and Kerr (1971), pp.7-8.

²⁵ Sassoon (2012), p.11.

²⁶ Bryan Gibson, *Covert Relationship: U.S. Foreign Policy, Intelligence, and the Iran-Iraq War, 1980-88* (Boulder, CO: Praeger, 2010).

²⁷ See William Linn Westermann, “Kurdish Independence and Russian Expansion,” *Foreign Affairs*, 24/1 (1945-46), pp.675-86; Archie Roosevelt, “The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad,” *Middle East Journal*, 1/1 (1947), pp.247-69; and William Eagleton, *The Kurdish Republic of 1946* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963).

²⁸ See McDowell (2004), pp.137-43; and Pelletiere (1984), pp.57-61.

²⁹ McDowell (2004), pp.155-63; Pelletiere (1984), pp.61-70; and Tripp (2007), pp.53-54.

³⁰ Lawrence (2008), pp.15-16.

collapsed in late-1946, Barzani led his followers in a fifty-day-long running battle with the Iranian military until reaching safety in Soviet Azerbaijan.³¹ This thesis will show it was Moscow's support for this short-lived project that convinced U.S. officials of the Soviet intention to use the Kurds to bypass America's Middle Eastern containment strategy.

The Kurdish conflict broke out once again during the John F. Kennedy administration.³² Significantly, in terms of the focus of this thesis, Douglas Little claims the U.S. played a role in encouraging the outbreak of the Kurdish War at this juncture.³³ In a review of his article, Roham Alvandi argues by contrast that there is "no substantial evidence to support Little's claim" that the U.S. urged the Kurds to rebel against Baghdad.³⁴ Indeed, evidence unearthed at the Soviet archives in 1994 by Vladislav Zubok, a researcher from the Woodrow Wilson Centre, suggests the outbreak of the Kurdish War was part of a Soviet plan.³⁵ Using declassified primary materials and interviews, this thesis will support Alvandi and Zubok's conclusions and argue the U.S. played no role in the outbreak of the war.

On the Kurdish question, Hahn asserts the U.S. suspected the Kurds were being "encouraged and abetted by the Soviets, who hoped to gain influence in the country."³⁶ This argument stands in contrast to Little's assertion that the CIA encouraged Iran and Israel to support the Kurds.³⁷ As Alvandi also observed, "the CIA may well have been pursuing its own policy of covert intervention in Iraq, without the knowledge of the State Department."³⁸ But while there is considerable

³¹ Roosevelt (1947), p.268.

³² See Edgar O'Ballance, *The Kurdish Revolt, 1961-1970* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1973); Sa'ad Jawad, *Iraq and the Kurdish Question, 1958-70* (London: Ithaca Press, 1981); Stephen Pelletiere, *The Kurds: An Unstable Element in the Gulf* (London: Westview Press, 1984); John Bulloch and Harvey Morris, *No Friends But the Mountains: The Tragic History of the Kurds* (London: Oxford University Press, 1992); David McDowell, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996); Edgar O'Ballance, *The Kurdish Struggle, 1920-1994* (London: MacMillan Press, Ltd., 1996); and Quil Lawrence, *Invisible Nation: How the Kurds' Quest for Statehood is Shaping Iraq and the Middle East* (London: Walker & Company, 2008).

³³ Little (2010), p.68.

³⁴ Roham Alvandi, H-Diplo Article Review: Douglas Little, "The United States and the Kurds: A Cold War Story," May 2011, p.2. Available online: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/PDF/AR302.pdf>

³⁵ Vladislav Zubok, "Spy Vs. Spy: The KGB Vs. the CIA, 1960-62," *Cold War International History Project*, Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, No. 4 (1994), pp.28-29.

³⁶ Hahn (2012), pp.49-50.

³⁷ Little (2010), pp.71-72.

³⁸ Alvandi (2011), H-Diplo, p.3.

evidence about Iranian and Israeli support for the Kurds from the mid-1960s onward,³⁹ this thesis argues the U.S. did not support the Kurds nor did it encourage them before 1972.

Little and Hahn have also offered the first accounts of the Lyndon B. Johnson administration's policy toward Iraq. Hahn argues the Johnson administration "adopted a policy of detached friendliness," while awaiting opportunities to improve U.S.-Iraqi relations. This approach was successful and eventually resulted in the U.S. providing foreign aid, political consultation, and other forms of normal diplomatic activity. Hahn's work is also significant because it provides the first account of the U.S. response to two key events in U.S.-Iraqi relations: the breaking of diplomatic relations during the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War and the second Ba'thist coup in July 1968.⁴⁰ He argues the U.S. regretted the severing of relations with Iraq and was forced to monitor events from afar—such as the Ba'thist coup in 1968—using information provided by Belgium, which had agreed to run a U.S. interests section. Hahn argues the Johnson administration's initially favourable assessment of the Ba'th waned as Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr and Saddam Hussein brutally consolidated power and pulled Iraq towards the Soviet orbit.⁴¹ Although Hahn's study neglects the impact of the British withdrawal on U.S. policy towards Iraq and the region, there are a number of excellent studies detailing the Johnson administration's adoption of the 'twin pillar' policy that sought to build up Iran and Saudi Arabia to take Britain's place and prevent the Soviet Union from filling the power vacuum left behind.⁴² However, this thesis will provide greater detail than has previously been available on the challenges faced by the Johnson administration over U.S. policy toward Iraq during the 1960s.

³⁹ See Jonathan Randal, *After Such Knowledge, What Forgiveness? My Encounters with Kurdistan* (London: Westview Press, 1999), pp.189-94; and Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the U.S.* (Yale University Press, 2007), pp.52-53.

⁴⁰ Hahn (2010), pp.51-53.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.53.

⁴² Gregory Gause, "British and American policies in the Persian Gulf, 1968-1973," *Review of International Studies*, 11/4 (1985), pp.247-273; John Dumbrell, "The Johnson Administration and the British Labour Government: Vietnam, the Pound and East of Suez," *Journal of American Studies*, 30/2 (1996), pp.211-31; Jeffery Macris, *The Politics and Security of the Gulf: Anglo-American hegemony and the shaping of a region* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp.155-88; Fain (2008), pp.141-200; and Alvandi (2012), pp.338-9.

Until recently, the research on U.S.-Iraqi relations during 1969-71 has been limited, leaving the Richard Nixon administration's policies toward Iraq during that period to be the subject of considerable debate. Even Nixon's Secretary of State and national security advisor, Henry Kissinger's account of the Kurdish operation in his memoir avoids a discussion of U.S. policy before 1972.⁴³ This is because Nixon was uninterested in Iraqi and Gulf affairs during his first term, focusing instead on more urgent matters like the escalating war in Vietnam, the opening to China, and achieving détente with the Soviet Union.⁴⁴ Like previous administrations, the Nixon administration maintained a strict non-interference policy toward Iraq and the Kurds. But in mid-1972, the U.S. policy toward Iraq underwent a major shift, leading to Nixon's approval of a covert operation to support the Kurds.

There has been substantial debate over why Nixon approved the Kurdish operation. The overwhelming majority of scholars explain it as a retaliatory response to the Soviet-Iraqi Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in April 1972,⁴⁵ with Little arguing it was based on "Cold War logic."⁴⁶ In his review of Little's article, Alvandi dismisses the Cold War argument and suggests that Little downplayed the Shah's role in drawing the U.S. into the Kurdish War.⁴⁷ Alvandi reasserts this argument in an article on U.S.-Iranian relations, stating, "Nixon and Kissinger were seeing Iraq and the Gulf through the Shah's eyes."⁴⁸ This theory is supported by Jonathan Randal, who argues the Shah over-emphasized the Soviet-

⁴³ Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), pp.580-81.

⁴⁴ Fain (2008), pp.187-88; Little (2010), pp.74-75; and Hahn (2012), pp.54-60.

⁴⁵ Ismat Sheriff Vanly, "Kurdistan in Iraq," in Gerard Chaliand (ed.), translated by Michael Pallis, *People Without A Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan* (London: Zed Press, 1978), p.169; Pelletiere (1984), p.167; Marr (1985), pp.232-34; John Prados, *Presidents' Secret Wars: CIA and Pentagon Covert Operations from World War II through Iranscam* (New York: William Morrow, 1986), pp.313-15, 323; John Ranelagh, *The Agency: The Rise and Fall of the CIA* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), pp.607-8; Lokman Meho and Michel Nehme, "Pawns in a Deadly Game: Iraqi Kurds and the United States, 1972-1975," *International Studies*, 32/1 (1995), pp.50-54; Randal (1997), pp.145-51; Michael Gunter, "United States Foreign Policy toward the Kurds," *Orient*, 40/3 (1999), pp.427-37; Kenneth Pollack, *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness, 1948-1991* (University of Nebraska Press, 2002), p.176; Sluglett (2003), p.159; William Daugherty, *Executive Secrets* (University of Kentucky Press, 2004), pp.174-76; McDowell (2004), pp.330-31; John Prados, *Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), p.391; Tripp (2007), p.203; Parsi (2008), pp.53-54; Gregory Gause, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.35; Little (2010), pp.74-75; and Hahn (2012), p.58.

⁴⁶ Little (2010), p.77.

⁴⁷ Roham Alvandi, H-Diplo Article Review: Douglas Little, "The United States and the Kurds: A Cold War Story," May 2011. Available online: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/PDF/AR302.pdf>

⁴⁸ Alvandi (2012), p.363-64.

Iraqi threat and played the “superpower rivalry card” to convince Nixon to build up Iran as the regional hegemon and tie down Iraq, his only regional rival.⁴⁹ It could be argued that both Alvandi and Randal ascribe too much agency to the Shah, as evidence suggests the U.S. decision to aid the Kurds was driven by Cold War strategic considerations in response to Iraq’s growing importance to the Soviet Union.

Controversy also surrounds the way in which the Kurdish operation came to an abrupt halt in March 1975, with one scholar stating the Nixon-Ford administration never “cared one whit” about the Kurds and “dropped [them] cold” when the Shah traded his support for them in exchange for a border concession from Iraq at an OPEC conference in March 1975.⁵⁰ The source of this outrage stems from an article published by William Safire in 1976 which accused the U.S. of selling out the Kurds, abruptly halting its Kurdish Operation, ignoring Barzani’s heartfelt pleas for help, and failing to provide humanitarian assistance.⁵¹ Safire’s claims are based on a leaked copy of a top-secret congressional report on the CIA’s activities, known as the *Pike Report*.⁵² While the report provides valuable information on aspects of the Kurdish operation, this thesis will show it was not an objective analysis. Furthermore, since the leaking of the document in February 1976, numerous scholars have uncritically repeated the arguments presented by Representative Otis Pike, who was the chair of the House Select Intelligence Committee which drafted the *Pike Report*, and William Safire without investigating the sources on which their claims were based.⁵³

In recent years, Kissinger has tried to challenge the *Pike Report*’s assertions. After leaving the White House in 1977, he published a memoir, *The White House Years*, but appeared reluctant to reveal his side of the story, allocating three

⁴⁹ Randal (1999), p.150; and Fain (2008), pp.193-94.

⁵⁰ Daugherty (2004), pp.174-76.

⁵¹ William Safire, “Mr. Ford’s Secret Sellout,” *New York Times*, February 5, 1976, p.26; and “Son of ‘Secret Sellout,’” *The New York Times*, February 12, 1976, p. A17.

⁵² United States Congress, House Select Committee on Intelligence, *CIA: The Pike Report* (Nottingham, England: Spokesman Books, 1977), pp.195-98, 211-17. Herein the *Pike Report*.

⁵³ Vanly (1978), p.169; Pelletiere (1984), pp.167-68; Marr (1985), p.234; Ranelagh (1987), pp.607–608; Bulloch and Morris (1992), p.136-41; Meho and Nehme (1995), p.53-54; Randal (1997), pp.145-51; Gunter (1999), pp.428; Daugherty (2004), pp.174-76; and Prados (2004), pp.393-94.

sentences and a brief footnote in which he promised to “explain these [events] in a second volume.”⁵⁴ Two decades later, Kissinger published, *Years of Renewal*, which provided a detailed account of Nixon’s decision to aid the Kurds in May 1972; U.S. interests in the operation; his efforts to stave off a Kurdish offensive against Iraq during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war; and details about a U.S.-Israeli operation to transfer captured Soviet weapons to the Kurds during 1974-75.⁵⁵ In effect, Kissinger set out to challenge the existing historiography and explain his reasons for supporting the Kurdish operation. Prior to this publication none of these details were publicly available. While self-serving at times, Kissinger’s account does reflect records now available at the Nixon and Ford presidential libraries and the State Department’s recent publication of documents detailing U.S. policy toward Iran and Iraq between 1969-76. What has become clear is that the *Pike Report* has distorted the study of U.S.-Iraqi relations and the Kurdish operation. Recently declassified evidence supports Kissinger’s argument that the Shah’s decision to abandon the Kurds was presented to the U.S. as a *fait accompli*. Thus, this thesis will to some extent exonerate Kissinger and will disprove many of the *Pike Report*’s most controversial assertions.

More broadly, on the basis of newly available documentation, this thesis seeks to redress some of the limitations of existing works detailing U.S.-Iraqi relations during the 1958-75 period. Chapter 1 will assess the Eisenhower administration’s response to Iraq’s revolution and its leader, Abd al-Karim Qasim. Chapter 2 recounts the Kennedy administration’s policy toward Qasim, in the period between Kennedy’s coming to office and Qasim’s overthrow in February 1963. Chapter 3 examines Kennedy’s policy toward Iraq during the brief, nine-month rule of the Ba’th Party and argues Iraq was a Cold War battleground. Chapter 4 analyses the Johnson administration’s evolving relationship with the two nationalist regimes of Abd al-Salim Arif and his brother, Abd ar-Rahman Arif and the clear divergence of perception toward Iraq between the U.S. and its closest allies, particularly Britain, Iran, and Israel. Chapter 5 examines the Nixon administration’s policy toward Iraq

⁵⁴ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1979), pp.1265-66.

⁵⁵ Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), pp.586-87.

and the decision-making process that led to the Kurdish operation in 1972. Chapter 6 details how the Nixon administration set up the Kurdish operation in the period leading up to the Arab-Israeli war in October 1973. Finally, Chapter 7 focuses on the central role of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in both the running of the Kurdish operation and the tragic way in which it ended in March 1975. In doing so, it will be evident that from Eisenhower to Ford, U.S. decisions and actions were based on a single, unifying perception: the Soviet Union posed a threat to Iraq's sovereignty. Because of this, U.S. policy towards Iraq between 1958 and 1975 was based almost exclusively on Iraq's perceived role in the Cold War.

In examining U.S.-Iraqi relations, a number of primary sources were acquired in addition to the various secondary sources referenced herein. Primary research was conducted in the United States at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in College Park, Maryland, and the Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, and Ford presidential libraries. Through an examination of the documents obtained at these archives, a detailed account can be crafted of U.S. perceptions, debates, policy recommendations, and actions on the ground. In instances where documents remained classified, Mandatory Reviews (MR) were requested, leading to the further declassification of relevant documents. Besides archival research, a wide range of online sources were consulted. First, the State Department's *FRUS* series is a valuable source of information on each of the administrations covered. However, these volumes are limited by a concentration on high-level political exchanges and political sensitivity, meaning important documents were excluded.⁵⁶ The Johnson administration's volume is particularly limited. Another online source utilized was the CIA's CREST system, which offers a wide range of declassified CIA materials covering all periods relevant to this study, including materials not available through other sources.⁵⁷ A third source is the State

⁵⁶ All *FRUS* volumes are available online: <http://history.state.gov>. The *FRUS* volumes used in this thesis are: *FRUS*, 1958-60, Vol. XII, "Near East Region; Iraq; Iran; Arabian Peninsula, 1961-62" (1992); 1961-63, Vol. XVII, "Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, 1961-62" (1994); 1961-63, Vol. XVIII, "Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, 1962-63" (1995); 1964-68, Vol. XXI, "Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, 1964-68" (2000); and 1969-76, Vol. E4, "Documents on Iran and Iraq, 1969-72" (2006). In December 2012, the State Department published, 1969-76, Vol. XXVII, "Iran; Iraq, 1973-76".

⁵⁷ A truncated version of CREST is available online: <http://www.foia.cia.gov>.

Department's Access to Archive Database (AAD), which made available thousands of diplomatic cables produced between 1973 and 1976. This source allowed for the reconstruction of U.S.-Iraqi relations between 1972 and 1975 and provided details that would otherwise not have been known.⁵⁸ Another important source of information was the *Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection* made available through the Library of Congress, which helped provide anecdotal evidence that confirmed key details.⁵⁹ The National Security Archive (NSA) at George Washington University also provided useful information, especially its full set of the Kissinger transcripts and memorandums of conversation.⁶⁰ These documents helped re-construct key events leading up to the outbreak of the Kurdish War in 1974. Finally, in 2008, the CIA released a cache of documents, *A Life in Intelligence: The Richard Helms Collection*, which provided original documents detailing key aspects of the Kurdish operation, which Helms helped run in his role as U.S. Ambassador to Iran between 1973-76.⁶¹ These sources, in addition to news articles from the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, provide a full picture of U.S.-Iraqi relations and the Kurdish operation and form the basis of this study.

To further contribute to this research, interviews were conducted with General Brent Scowcroft, Ambassador Ronald Neumann, and a former high-level CIA official. This former CIA official was a *bona fide* participant in the events detailed in this thesis. He was stationed in Iran between 1958 and June 1963, assigned to Tabriz to monitor the Kurds in 1959, in charge of the CIA's "denied area" operations in the Middle East from late-1968 through June 1970, and deputy station chief in Tehran from August 1973 to 1976. He has asked to remain anonymous because he still consults for the CIA.⁶² Two Israeli intelligence officials, Zuri Sagy and Eliezer Tsafir, were also interviewed on the subject of Israel's involvement in the Kurdish War. Sagy played a crucial role in directing Kurdish military operations against Iraq during the 1960s and later in 1974-75, and Tsafir is a former senior Mossad official.

⁵⁸ <http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=4073&cat=all&bc=ls>.

⁵⁹ <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/diplomacy/about.html>.

⁶⁰ <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/>.

⁶¹ <http://www.foia.cia.gov/helms.asp>.

⁶² Email correspondence with CIA official, November 3, 2011; November 16, 2011; November 29, 2011; July 5, 2012; and November 12, 2012.

Both explained in detail Israeli operations inside Iraq during the 1960s and 1970s. While interviews have their methodological limitations, details provided here have either been confirmed or supported by documents or secondary sources.

As a whole, this study relies upon recently available primary documents, interviews, and the available secondary resources to construct a detailed narrative of U.S.-Iraqi relations and the Kurdish War between 1958-75. This thesis advances existing historiographical debates by bringing to bear a significant body of newly available primary source material. In doing so, it underlines that the established historiography has relied excessively on the *Pike Report*, which has distorted our understanding of events. Ultimately, this thesis seeks to redress these historiographical deficiencies and further develop the argument that U.S. policy towards Iraq between 1958-75 was based on denying Soviet influence over Iraq, inline with its Cold War strategy.

Chapter 1: Eisenhower and the Qasim Regime

July 1958—January 1961

The following chapter examines the Dwight Eisenhower administration's policy toward Iraq during its revolution on July 14, 1958 and the chaotic period that followed. It will analyze the American decision making process and assess the effectiveness of the Eisenhower administration's approach, while identifying any missed opportunities, where had the U.S. acted differently, it might have been able to salvage a working relationship with the new Iraqi regime. Finally, it is important to understand how U.S. officials in Washington and Baghdad perceived these events, how these perceptions compared or contrasted with those of its allies, and how they translated into the implementation of U.S. policy. In doing so, it will become clear that following Iraq's revolution, the Eisenhower administration's policy contrasted with its regional allies due to concerns about the new Iraqi regime's flirtation with the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) and its perceived Soviet patron. Consequently, rash decisions were made, opportunities to ensure Iraq's non-alignment in the Cold War were missed, and America's actions helped push the Iraqi regime closer to the Soviet Union.

The historiography of U.S. policy toward Iraq's revolution and the 1958-59 crisis is more extensive than other periods of U.S.-Iraqi relations. The first account of the Eisenhower administration's management of the crisis was published by Nigel Ashton in 1993, following the State Department's publication of a *FRUS* volume on the subject.⁶³ In his article, Ashton argued the Anglo-American response to the crisis was not a joint venture, but "mirrored many of the suspicions which limited the relationship of the two powers in the region throughout the 1950s."⁶⁴ Ashton's argument stands in contrast to Stephen Blackwell's piece on the revolution, where

⁶³ Ashton (1993), pp.59-89.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.59.

he argued Britain and the U.S. held “a common perception of the Cold War threat that ensured their respective Middle Eastern strategies remained broadly in step.”⁶⁵ More recent works, however, support Ashton’s argument and have emphasized the importance of the Cold War on the American response. Peter Hahn’s study of U.S.-Iraqi relations, for example, argues the Eisenhower administration’s reaction was premised on its recent experiences in the Middle East and across the developing world, and sought to “bolster friendly states, prolong Western influence, and deny Soviet encroachments.”⁶⁶ Ashton and Hahn’s arguments are further supported by W. Taylor Fain’s study of Anglo-American policies toward the Gulf region.⁶⁷ Building on Ashton, Hahn, and Fain’s arguments, and as a result of the recent declassification of the Special Committee on Iraq (SCI)’s files, this chapter reappraises the Eisenhower administration’s response to Iraq’s revolution. It supports the conclusion that U.S. policy was driven by Cold War concerns about the Qasim regime’s relationship with Moscow and disputes the notion that Britain and the United States viewed the Iraqi crisis in the same light.

I

Before examining the Eisenhower administration’s response to Iraq’s revolution, an understanding of America’s policies toward Iraq and the region needs to be established. Israel’s defeat of the Arab armies in 1948 led to profound changes throughout the region, as Arab nationalism emerged as a dominant ideology. The Egyptian Revolution in 1952 was the first instance in which Arab nationalist, military officers overthrew the corrupt, Western-backed monarchy of King Farouk, and brought to power Egypt’s longtime, charismatic president, Gamal Abd al-Nasser.⁶⁸ The loss of Egypt from the Western camp concerned the Eisenhower administration, leading his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, to consider bringing together the “Northern Tier” states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Pakistan into

⁶⁵ Blackwell (1999), p.1.

⁶⁶ Hahn (2012), p.40.

⁶⁷ Fain (2008), pp.25-28.

⁶⁸ See Joel Gordon, *Nasser’s Blessed Movement: Egypt’s Free Officers and the July Revolution* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1966).

a collective security alliance aimed at containing a potential Soviet thrust southward toward the Gulf.⁶⁹ With Iraqi Premier Nuri al-Said taking the initiative, the Baghdad Pact—as the alliance was commonly known—was formed in 1955, sparking a fierce debate among other Arab states, like Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, about whether to join. But when Britain joined the pact in April 1955, Nasser rallied support against it and formed a mutual security alliance with Saudi Arabia and Syria.⁷⁰ The debate over the pact underscored just how fractious Arab politics was in the aftermath of the 1948 war. It also showed that Iraq stood out from the rest by joining in a non-Arab, pro-Western alliance.

The U.S. and Britain differed greatly in their understandings of and approaches toward Arab nationalism. As Fain observed, the U.S. was predisposed toward sympathizing with anti-colonialist attitudes and was able to view British imperialism in the region as “both morally wrong and politically destabilizing.”⁷¹ Indeed, by the mid-1950s, U.S. officials recognized that nationalism could be used to America’s advantage and channeled in directions consistent with its containment policies.⁷² This, of course, put the U.S. at direct odds with the British, who viewed Nasser’s brand of Arab nationalism as a threat to its national interests, so much so that it attacked Egypt along with France and Israel in October 1956 with the objective of removing Nasser from power. Significantly, Britain and its allies failed to consult the U.S. in advance, which forced the Eisenhower administration to issue threats and force their withdrawal. This left Nasser relatively unscathed, allowing him to emerge as a hero and a champion of a new pan-Arab, nationalist ideology, often referred to as Nasserism. Buoyed by his success, Nasser commenced a subversive effort throughout the region aimed at overthrowing Western-backed, “reactionary” monarchies and replacing them with Arab nationalist regimes.⁷³

In January 1957, Eisenhower issued his eponymous doctrine that called for the U.S. to offer economic or military assistance “to secure and protect the territorial

⁶⁹ See Yesilbursa (2005); and Ashton, “The Hijacking of a Pact,” (1993), pp.123-37.

⁷⁰ See FRUS/1955-57/XII/doc. 1, pp.1-2.

⁷¹ Fain (2008), p.40.

⁷² Ibid., p.47.

⁷³ See Simon Smith (ed.), *Reassessing Suez 1956: New Perspectives on the Crisis and Its Aftermath* (Ashgate, 2006).

integrity and political independence of such nations ... against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism.” By not naming the Soviet Union directly, Eisenhower’s vague reference to “any nation controlled by international communism” meant that it could be used in other circumstances.⁷⁴ This would become important in the first half of 1958, when Nasser achieved considerable success with the formation of the United Arab Republic (UAR) in February 1958.⁷⁵

Iraq’s premier, Nuri al-Said, was alarmed by the UAR’s creation and sought to establish Iraq as a counterbalance to it two weeks later by forging a union with Jordan, known as the Arab Union (AU). In early July 1958, King Hussein of Jordan requested Iraqi assistance to quell internal disturbances. But unknown to Nuri, the military units he dispatched had been infiltrated by self-styled Iraqi Free Officers—an homage to Nasser’s Free Officer movement—and had to pass close to Baghdad on their way to Jordan. Upon receiving his movement orders, Colonel Abd al’Salim Arif led his forces into Baghdad, seized the radio station, occupied all strategic buildings, and announced the formation of an Iraqi Republic. In the process, the rebels killed King Faisal II, Crown Prince Abd al-Ilah, and eventually Nuri al-Said.⁷⁶

By mid-1958, it was already clear that British and American policies toward Arab nationalism and the region were at odds with each other. Britain, with its colonial empire in decline, appeared to be clinging haplessly to its Middle Eastern assets, which were considered crucial to its postwar economic survival. Consequently, Britain viewed Nasser’s brand of Arab nationalism as a threat to its national interests and could not allow him to dominate the Gulf region and its vital oil supplies. For the Americans, the region was viewed in terms of its Cold War rivalry with the Soviet Union and its policy was geared toward preventing Soviet control of the region’s oil resources, even if this meant accommodating Nasser. The

⁷⁴ DoS, “The Eisenhower Doctrine, 1957,” in *Milestones, 1953-1960*. Available online: <http://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/EisenhowerDoctrine>.

⁷⁵ See Kerr (1971); Robert Stephens, *Nasser: A Political Biography* (Simon & Schuster, 1971); and Said Aburish, *Nasser: The Last Arab* (St. Martin’s Press, 2004). For Nasser’s ideology, see Gamal Abdel Nasser, “The Philosophy of the Revolution,” in (ed.) Sylvia Haim, *Arab Nationalism: An Anthology*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), pp.229-32.

⁷⁶ Tripp (2007), pp.141-42.

only condition was that Nasser keep communist forces on the fringes of power, which his union with Syria suggested he was willing to oblige. In short, the stage was set for further disagreements between Washington and London over how to assess Iraq's revolution in 1958.

II

The Iraqi coup had a profound impact on America's strategy to contain the Soviet Union. After all, Iraq had been a vital member in the Baghdad Pact, was pro-Western, and held considerable oil wealth. U.S. companies also had a 23.75% stake in the Iraqi Petroleum Company (IPC).⁷⁷ Given the zero-sum nature of the Cold War, whereby a loss by one side was viewed as a gain by the other and vice versa, U.S. policymakers feared the Soviets could leapfrog past the Northern Tier containment shield, establish a satellite in the Gulf, control Iraq's vast oil reserves, and transform the Cold War balance of power. While this was a worst-case-scenario, it was not beyond the realm of possibility. Consequently, the U.S. and British were forced to take immediate action in Lebanon and Jordan to shore up the West's position. However, on the question of intervention in Iraq, the British and Americans departed. The British wanted the U.S. to intervene militarily, but the Eisenhower administration was inclined to "wait-and-see" how the new Iraqi government behaved before it would react.

It took almost eleven hours for officials in Washington to determine that a coup had taken place in Baghdad. At 8 a.m. (EST), Secretary John Foster Dulles informed Eisenhower that elements of the Iraqi army "had moved upon the royal palace and had murdered Crown Prince Emir Abdul Illah." He was uncertain about the King's fate and that of his premier, but feared the worst. This led Eisenhower to call in his national security team to review the situation and "make sure that no facet of the situation was overlooked." When the group gathered in the Oval Office, the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), Allen Dulles, explained:

⁷⁷ See CIA, "Some Implications of Iraq's Oil Nationalization," IM 72-92, June 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.311), p.2.

The coup ... was executed by pro-Nasser elements of the Iraqi army, and a 'Republican' government has been set up that includes pro-Nasser people. We have no information as yet that Nasser himself is behind the coup. A strict curfew has been instituted in Iraq and almost fifty officers of the Iraqi army have already been 'retired,' including a large proportion of pro-West officers. We have no reports on Iraqi forces outside Baghdad, and there is still just a possibility that the brigades in or near Jordan might prove loyal to the monarchy. King Faisal and Prime Minister Nuri as Said have disappeared but are presumed dead.

On the question of whether Nasser was behind the coup, Allen Dulles said that while the conspirators were pro-Nasser, the CIA "lacked hard evidence implicating [him]." This conclusion dispels the notion that U.S. thought Egypt was behind the plot.⁷⁸ Eisenhower agreed little could be done in the short term and adopted a "wait-and-see" approach.⁷⁹

Meanwhile, the Iraqi coup prompted the U.S. and Britain to take action in the region to protect Western interests in Lebanon and Jordan. A few hours after the coup, Lebanon's embattled President, Camille Chamoun, informed the Eisenhower administration that he "wanted U.S. military intervention in Lebanon within 48 hours." This meant the U.S. could act militarily under the basis of the Eisenhower doctrine. After consulting with Congress, on July 14, Eisenhower issued orders to the Commander of the Sixth Fleet for U.S. Marines to land in Beirut the next day.⁸⁰ Similarly, Jordan's economic and political crisis was only further exacerbated by the Iraqi coup, since it meant the loss of subsidized petroleum, which soon led to shortages. On July 17, the Jordanian Foreign Ministry informed the U.S. Embassy that it wished for military assistance to "crush [the] insurrection [in] Baghdad, [and] restore peace in accordance with AU constitution."⁸¹ While King Hussein believed he was the rightful heir to Iraq's throne, as stipulated in the AU constitution, he could,

⁷⁸ For consistency purposes, the UAR will be referred to its more common name Egypt throughout this thesis.

⁷⁹ Dwight Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Waging Peace, 1956-1961* (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1966), pp.269-71.

⁸⁰ See Beirut 358 to State, July 14, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/XI/doc.121), p.208; Eisenhower, pp.271-271; White House, Memorandum of Conference with the President, July 14, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/XI/doc.128), pp.226-28; and U.S. Navy, Chief of Naval Operations to the Commander in Chief, U.S. Naval Forces, July 15, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/XI/doc.130), p.231.

⁸¹ State 203 to Amman, July 19, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/XI/doc.203), pp.344-45.

therefore, call on the U.S. to intervene on Iraq's behalf, but the Eisenhower administration proved hesitant.⁸² There were several reasons for this: 1) there was no guarantee a U.S. invasion of Iraq would work; 2) it could spark a regional war; and 3) it ran the risk of pushing the new Iraqi regime, which had shown initial signs of moderation, right into the arms of the Soviets. Given this, the U.S. refused to endorse such a move:

[The] U.S. believes [the] primary concern at [the] moment ... should be preservation [of the] independence and integrity of Jordan. [The] New request for assistance to destroy [the] insurrection in Iraq goes far beyond scope of purpose for which [the] U.S. and UK were requested and agreed to help Jordan.⁸³

Consequently, Eisenhower endorsed the sending of a British expeditionary force to Jordan and the implementation of a petroleum airlift to help alleviate the economic crisis. Taken together, this suggests that the Iraqi coup was the catalyst for the American intervention in Lebanon and the British operation in Jordan to shore up the West's uncertain position in the region.

On July 15, the new leader of Iraq, Brigadier Abd al-Karim Qasim, met with the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, Waldemar Gallman, to offer assurances of the safety of U.S. citizens and property. Reporting to Washington, Gallman described Qasim as "affable" but appeared "anxious to get [the] revolutionary regime off to as good a start as possible with [the] U.S." Though a brief exchange, Gallman was pleased Qasim was willing to meet him so soon after the coup. He then returned to the embassy, where he learned that Nuri had been discovered and was hanged. "How tragically ironic that on [the] very day [of the] landings made from [the] Sixth Fleet [in Lebanon], which Nuri had so long pleaded for, [that he] was put to death."⁸⁴ On July 17, the ambassador met with the newly appointed Iraqi Foreign Minister, Abd al-Jabbar al-Jumrad, who reiterated Qasim's assurances and the regime's desire to maintain good relations with the West. He also emphasized that Iraq would adhere to all international treaties, maintain the flow of oil, and wished to maintain western

⁸² See DoS, Memorandum, Cumming to Reinhardt, July 20, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.126), p.329.

⁸³ State 203 to Amman, July 19, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/XI/doc.203), pp.344-45.

⁸⁴ Baghdad 139 to State, July 15, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.116), pp.318-19.

technical assistance. These were all good signs, which led Gallman to conclude that there would be some moderate civilian influence within the new government.⁸⁵

The Eisenhower administration's failure to anticipate the coup led to an investigation by the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs (NEA). The report, released July 16, concluded that "no significant indication of the impending action in Iraq appeared in any sources available to [the Bureau of Research and Analysis or INR], despite the fact that a very close watch was being kept for precisely this development." While there had been rumours regarding an impending coup, the NEA believed Nuri had countered these conspiracies. The problem, it seemed, was the coup was conducted by a small, close-knit group of officers and while Iraqi and U.S. intelligence knew of Qasim, he was never believed to be a cause for concern.

The former Iraqi government maintained a very complete intelligence net within the Army itself which did not discern any questionable contacts on the part of Col. Qasim, even though the Iraqi government was itself aware (as were we) that Col. Qasim had been exposed to Syrian subversive efforts while stationed in Jordan in late 1956.

The NEA concluded that the closeness of the conspirators, absence of outward signs (like social discontent) of an impending coup, and skillful deception efforts made detecting the plot difficult.⁸⁶

On July 19, the embassy in Baghdad explained the coup was "remarkably rapid and successful", the new regime was dominated by military figures, and was trying to "encourage normal functioning civilian departments."⁸⁷ The next day, the INR concluded the regime was in complete control of the country and warned that any "move by force from outside into Iraq would meet very little Iraqi support and its success would be highly unlikely."⁸⁸ That day, Hugh Cumming, the INR's director, sent Foster Dulles a memo suggesting additional positive signs coming from Iraq.

Reports reaching us from Baghdad indicate that the new regime in Iraq 1) desires friendly relations with the West, 2) will maintain existing international agreements, 3) at least for the time being will

⁸⁵ Baghdad 251 to State, July 19, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.124).

⁸⁶ DoS, Memorandum, Glidden to Cumming, July 16, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.120), pp.322-323.

⁸⁷ FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.124, pp.327-328.

⁸⁸ FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.126, p.329.

retain membership in the Baghdad Pact, 4) will not nationalize the production of oil, and 5) recognizes the UAR but is not joining.⁸⁹

With these assurances, the Iraqis had met all of the traditional requirements for diplomatic recognition: *de facto* control of the country, the consent of the people, and a willingness to fulfill its international obligations under treaties. Later in the day, Foster Dulles agreed in principle to extend diplomatic recognition to the new regime in Iraq, but wanted to consult with the other members of the Baghdad Pact first. Fortunately, a pre-arranged meeting of the pact was scheduled later that month.⁹⁰

When the Baghdad Pact members met in London during July 28-29, talks focused on three questions: 1) the formation of a new alliance, 2) whether the U.S. would join it, and 3) diplomatic recognition of Iraq. As Foster Dulles later reported to Eisenhower, “we canvassed the prospects for ... a new form in which to express the mutual security commitments for which all the Northern Tier countries are eager.” He was pressured to join the new pact, but remained non-committal, stating it was a “very loose” obligation that required consultation and preferring instead that the existing pact members develop a new “formula” built upon the present organization. This would become the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and while the U.S. never joined, it did sign bilateral military agreements with Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey—the key member states—and participated in a consultative role.⁹¹ On the question of recognizing Iraq, the pact members urged the U.S. to do so “without delay” to protect its interests while maintaining the option of exerting constructive influence on the new regime. Right after Foster Dulles reported this news to Washington, Eisenhower directed the State Department to approve diplomatic recognition of Iraq. It was July 30, 1958.⁹²

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this period. Notably, the U.S. believed the Iraq coup was indigenous, though inspired by Nasser. Fearing the crisis would spread throughout the region, the U.S. intervened in Lebanon and did not

⁸⁹ DoS, Memorandum, Cumming to Reinhardt, July 20, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.127), p.330.

⁹⁰ DoS, Memorandum, Rountree to J.F. Dulles, “Recognition of New Iraqi Government,” July 23, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.130), pp.331-33.

⁹¹ FRUS/1958-60/XI/doc.33, pp.111-12.

⁹² FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.131, pp.333-34.

oppose British intervention in Jordan, while supporting it logistically and implementing an emergency airlift of oil. Soon thereafter, the new Iraqi regime made clear that it would abide by international agreements, while protecting U.S. citizens and assets. With the regime in clear control of the country, the Eisenhower administration consulted its allies in the Baghdad Pact and agreed to extend diplomatic recognition to Iraq.

III

During the fall of 1958, a power struggle emerged between three distinct groups: 1) the coup's leader, Brigadier Abd al-Karim Qasim, and his followers; 2) UAR-backed Arab nationalists, led by Colonel Abd al'Salim Arif; and 3) Soviet-backed Iraqi communists. The power struggle went through two distinct phases. The first involved a contest for power between the two Iraqi officers that overthrew the monarchy: Qasim, who masterminded the plot, and Arif, who actually led the operation. The wedge between the two was the question of joining Egypt. For his part, Qasim was suspicious of anything to do with Nasser, while Arif endorsed the idea.⁹³ The second phase emerged in late 1958, after Qasim foiled a Nasserist plot, which led to his increased reliance on the ICP for support. This, of course, would cause great concern among U.S. officials, which incorrectly judged the ICP to be an arm of the Soviets.⁹⁴

Iraq's power struggle was not lost on the Eisenhower administration. Throughout late September and early October, the National Security Council (NSC) met regularly to discuss the situation unfolding in Iraq. The first meeting took place on September 18, where the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, Charles Cabell, informed the NSC that Nasser was concerned "over the factional struggles among the leaders in the new regime in Iraq." A week later, he reported that "internal maneuvering" was ongoing and that despite Qasim's opposition to union, "there was still obvious military cooperation between Egypt and Iraq".⁹⁵

⁹³ DoS, Memorandum, Cumming to J.F. Dulles, "Intelligence Note: The Nature and Consequences of Factional Splits Within the Iraqi Government," August 22, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.134), pp.337-38.

⁹⁴ Franzén (2011), p.92. See also Batatu (1978).

⁹⁵ FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.136, p.341.

Qasim was aware of Arif's ambitions, but he bided his time until early September when Arif went off script during a provincial tour—whipping up nationalist fervor for unification. Afterward, Qasim stripped Arif of his military posts, cutting him off from regular contact with the army. He allowed him to continue as Deputy Premier and Minister of Interior, but not for long. On September 30, Qasim sent Arif into exile as Iraq's ambassador to West Germany. With this, Nasser's designs on Iraq appeared to be slipping away from him.⁹⁶ On October 1, the NSC discussed the implications of Arif's dismissal with General Andrew Goodpaster, noting two other pro-UAR cabinet members had also been cut. The next day, Allen Dulles offered the NSC the CIA's assessment that Qasim was consolidating power while setting himself up as an ideological counterweight to Nasser's brand of Arab nationalism. On the question of Arif, Dulles added, "in all probability ... we have not heard the last of [him]."⁹⁷ He was right.

Following Arif's banishment to Bonn, Nasser sent agents to West Germany to plot his return to power. Essentially, the plan called for pro-Nasser sympathizers to incite uprisings in Iraq's provinces while spiriting Arif into Baghdad, where he would lead pro-UAR elements in the army in a putsch against Qasim. Riots erupted in the countryside and Arif arrived safely in Baghdad on November 4 as planned, but he was soon discovered and arrested. The plot was a failure.⁹⁸ Viewed from Iraq, there was no question to Nasser's direct involvement. According to an INR report, the attempted coup "precipitated the showdown stage in the power struggle within Iraq itself but has also created an open challenge to President Nasir." Indeed, with Arif languishing in an Iraqi prison and his pro-UAR, nationalist allies cut off from power, Qasim had become the "sole leader"—as he preferred to be called—of Iraq. At the same time, in what U.S. analysts described as a "public slap," Qasim had sent a clear signal to Nasser that he had no intention of allowing Iraq to join Egypt, which also suggested he saw himself as an alternative pillar for influence in the Arab

⁹⁶ See Tripp (2007), p.147; Sluglett (2001), pp.59-60; *New York Times*, "Iraq Demotes Arif, Enemy of the West," October 1, 1958, pp.1, 15; and Richard Hunt, "Pro-Nasser Aid in Iraq Eclipsed: Aref, Fiery Deputy Premier, No Longer in Limelight—Premier Seems Firm," *New York Times*, September 23, 1958, p.10.

⁹⁷ FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.136, p.341.

⁹⁸ *New York Times*, "Coups Reported Thwarted in Iraq; Pro-Nasser Rioting is Said to Have Led to Arrest of Arif Tuesday," November 6, 1958, p.2.

world.⁹⁹ This marked the end of the first phase of Iraq's power struggle. Significantly, by alienating the nationalists, Qasim now needed a new political base to rely upon and there was only one alternative: the communists.

IV

In October 1958, the Eisenhower administration completed its review of its regional policy. Since May 1958, the Eisenhower administration's "Basic National Security Policy" set out that in the event of "an imminent or actual communist seizure of control from within," the U.S. should "take all feasible measures to thwart it, including military action if required and appropriate to cope with the situation."¹⁰⁰ Ultimately, the NSC agreed this policy was adequate to manage the crisis and adopted NSC 5820, which identified five secondary considerations: 1) seeking a peaceful resolution to the Arab-Israel dispute; 2) continued availability of peaceful navigation of the region; 3) promotion of stable governments, political evolution, and economic and social development with the aim of resisting communist influence; 4) continued availability of strategic positions, military overflight, and staging bases (i.e. Bahrain); and 5) the expansion of U.S. influence at the Soviet's expense. In each of these instances, the overriding objective of U.S. policy was to deny the Soviet influence in the region and ensure the flow of oil to the West.¹⁰¹

Regarding Iraq, the NSC reaffirmed the existing "wait and see" policy, which consisted of paying very close attention to developments, while preparing for the worst.¹⁰² With specific reference to Iraq, on November 4, the council approved NSC 5820/1 which identified U.S. policy objectives in Iraq as 1) maintaining "friendly relations"; 2) acquiescing to Iraq's eventual withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact; 3) giving sympathetic consideration to the continuance of military assistance in "limited amounts"; and 4) encouraging friendly "elements" in Iraq, while avoiding

⁹⁹ DoS, Memorandum, Cumming to J.F. Dulles, "Intelligence Note: Significance of the Return to Iraq and Arrest of Col. Arif," November 5, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.142), pp.351-52.

¹⁰⁰ NSC, "Statement of Basic National Security Policy," NSC 5810/1, May 5, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/III/doc.139), p.109.

¹⁰¹ FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.46, p.136.

¹⁰² White House, NSC 5820/1, November 4, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.51), pp.196-7.

identification with “specific individuals and political issues.”¹⁰³ What will become evident was that these guidelines were flawed, since they were based on the false assumption that Iraq would remain “relatively stable” and “envisaged various degrees of cooperation with the Arab nationalists”.¹⁰⁴

In the fall of 1958, U.S. officials became concerned about Soviet subversion in Iraq. This analysis was based on three premises: 1) concerns about the return of a Kurdish nationalism leader to Iraq, Mulla Mustafa Barzani, who had been in exile in the Soviet Union since 1946; 2) the establishment of a Soviet-Iraq arms-supply relationship; and 3) Qasim’s increasing reliance on the ICP for support following his fallout with Arif and the Arab nationalists.

After the revolution, in order to secure Kurdish support for his regime Qasim calculated that he needed to win over Barzani. He sent feelers to Prague to promise Barzani and his followers amnesty. He accepted and returned to Iraq after a brief stopover in Cairo, where he met with Nasser. Upon Barzani’s return in October 1958, Qasim apologized on behalf of Iraq, offered financial restitution, provided him with accommodation at Nuri al-Said’s former residence in Baghdad, and promised him a degree of Kurdish autonomy. However, Qasim’s wooing of Barzani would prove to be a grave error, since he would go on to lead a fourteen year long rebellion against the Iraqi state starting in 1961.¹⁰⁵

The U.S. was concerned about Barzani’s return from the Soviet Union. The so-called “Red Mullah”, U.S. officials believed he was a potential Soviet agent with a history of troublemaking inside both Iraq and Iran. He was also popular among Iraq’s large Kurdish population. Given this, the U.S. saw his return from exile as a bad omen for Iraq’s future stability. On October 14, Gallman expressed his concern about Barzani to Washington, indicating his belief that the Soviets would use him to subvert the regime. He also pointed to the impending repatriation of Barzani’s

¹⁰³ FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.51, pp.196-7. See also CIA, “Estimate of the Situation in Iraq,” no date (EPL/White House Office/NSC Staff: Papers, 1953-61/Special Staff File Series/Box 4/A82-18/“CP Iraq (Phillip Halla’s Files)”/folder 4), p.2. Herein, all documents from this source will be identified by the library (EPL), the source (Phillip Halla Files or PHF), the folder number, and the document number, if available.

¹⁰⁴ NSC, “Briefing Note for NSC Mtg, 12-23-58: U.S. Policy Toward Iraq,” December 22, 1958 (EPL/PHF/6, plus attachment), pp.1-7.

¹⁰⁵ Uriel Dann, *Iraq under Qasim: A Political History, 1958-1963* (London: Praeger, 1969), pp.137-8; and Sluglett (2001), p.79.

followers and their families, which had swelled to 850 and included a number of Russian wives, which could be Soviet agents. Barzani's Soviet connections and unrivaled popularity among Iraq's Kurds meant his "ability [to] disrupt [Iraq's] stability [is] almost endless."¹⁰⁶ But what Gallman failed to realize was that Soviet efforts at indoctrinating Barzani in communist ideology were unsuccessful and had left him jaded about socialism and untrusting of Moscow's intentions.¹⁰⁷ Not knowing this, Gallman's instinct was to distrust Barzani and paint him as an enemy. However, in doing so, the U.S. missed an opportunity to learn more about a leader who, despite his exile, did not threaten U.S. interests and could have been a powerful ally.

Throughout the fall, further indicators convinced the Eisenhower administration that the ICP's—and therefore Soviet—influence was growing in Iraq. For instance, on October 16, Allen Dulles informed the NSC that the Iraqi regime had concluded an extensive trade agreement with the Soviet Union. It was also suspected that this deal included a large military component.¹⁰⁸ On November 25, Cumming sent Foster Dulles a memo warning about the growing communist threat in Iraq. According to the memo, "tension between Qasim and the pro-Nasir faction [may] have induced him to lean more heavily on the support of [the left-wing National Democratic Party (NDP) leader Kamil Chadirchi] and the Communists."¹⁰⁹ Complicating matters, on December 2 U.S. officials learned that a Soviet vessel had delivered a shipment of military hardware to Iraq, which was believed to be the first of a larger Soviet supply program. Viewed from Washington, U.S. officials were uncertain whether Iraq had shifted its arms-supply relationship to the Soviets or if it was adopting a "positive neutrality" policy similar to Egypt, which welcomed commercial and military relations with both blocs.¹¹⁰

An historiographical point needs to be emphasized here. The Eisenhower administration was clearly convinced that the ICP was operating on behalf of the

¹⁰⁶ Baghdad 1312 to State, October 14, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.138), pp.345-46.

¹⁰⁷ O'Ballance (1973), pp.63-64.

¹⁰⁸ FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.140, p.348.

¹⁰⁹ FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.144, p.353.

¹¹⁰ Dana Adams Schmidt, "U.S. Affirms Iraq Got Soviet Arms," *New York Times*, December 3, 1958, p.11.

Soviet Union. However, as Johan Franzén explains in his work, *Red Star Over Iraq*, while Moscow was generally supportive of the ICP's actions, there was actually little direct contact with its leaders. While some elements may have looked to Moscow for inspiration, by the time of the revolution the ICP had abandoned the notion of seizing power directly, preferring instead to support the so-called "national bourgeoisie," which Qasim seemed to represent.¹¹¹ This view is supported by Tripp, who argues that the ICP was unlike other Marxist groups around the world:

...to be a communist or communist-sympathiser in Iraq ... did not necessarily mean strict adherence to the doctrines of Marxism-Leninism.... Its focus on the evils of social injustice, economic exploitation and questions of wages and conditions of work won the ICP a wide base of support and made it the leading party of social reform.... [The] ICP believed that in the short term only the army had the power to keep in check the forces of established social and economic privilege prior to their dismantling. Consequently, despite its weak representation in the officer corps, it had backed the Free Officers.¹¹²

But to the U.S., the matter was black and white: any communist-inspired group must be opposed; a view that would cloud the Eisenhower administration's ability to comprehend Iraq's post-revolutionary power struggle.

In December 1958 the struggle between Qasim and the nationalists was decided when the British informed the regime of a UAR plot to overthrow it. The U.S. was also aware of the plot. On December 3, an unnamed representative of the "Free Officers' movement" approached the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad to seek support in overthrowing Qasim.¹¹³ While embassy officers were intrigued and recommended Washington provide "limited support", the plot alarmed the State Department, which urged the embassy to exercise "extreme caution and reserve" and inform the provocateur that the U.S. cannot interfere with Iraq's internal affairs.¹¹⁴ The department's assessment proved correct. According to U.S. documents, the British

¹¹¹ Franzén (2011), pp.95-96, 102; and email correspondence with Johan Franzén, March 27, 2013.

¹¹² Tripp (2007), p.149.

¹¹³ This individual was either Rashid Ali al-Gaylani (who had led a successful coup in 1941) or one of his close associates. See CIA, "The Communist Threat in Iraq," November 25, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc. 144), pp.353-54.

¹¹⁴ State 001505 to Baghdad, December 4, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.145), pp.355-56. See also footnotes 1 and 2. This was done on December 5, 1958, see Ibid., footnote 2.

had also caught wind of the plot and, fearing the coming to power of a pro-Nasser faction in Iraq, informed the Iraqi regime.¹¹⁵ Armed with this knowledge, the regime infiltrated the conspiracy, recorded the plot's details, and moved against it on December 7, arresting Rashid Ali al-Gaylani and two others.¹¹⁶ Before long, the regime broadcasted the recordings which left no doubt Egypt was behind the plot.¹¹⁷

The importance of Britain's role in foiling the Rashid Ali plot cannot be understated. By tipping off Qasim, the British hoped they could cultivate him as an Iraqi alternative to Nasser's influence in the Arab world. This strategy worked in the short term, since the Qasim-Nasser rivalry escalated throughout 1958-59. However, it would eventually backfire in 1961 over the Kuwait Crisis. For the Americans, the Rashid Ali plot proved to be a decisive turning point in their perception of Iraq. This was because Qasim was forced to turn to the communists to protect himself from the nationalists, leading U.S. officials to ponder ways to halt this trend, including working with Nasser, Britain's arch-nemesis.

V

A major shift in U.S.-Egyptian relations occurred in mid-December 1958, leading the Eisenhower administration to work with Nasser throughout 1959 to prevent a communist takeover in Iraq. Given Nasser's disparate motives from the Americans in seeking Qasim's overthrow, it is tempting to conclude that he manipulated U.S. fears about communism in order to receive assistance. However, Qasim's reliance on communist support and his efforts to undermine Nasser created a rift that U.S. policymakers thought could be exploited to achieve their goals in the region. While the Eisenhower administration did not understand the complexity of Iraq's politics, Nasser did. Therefore, the Eisenhower administration opted to work with Nasser against Qasim to advance U.S. interests in Iraq, while simultaneously drawing Cairo away from Moscow. However, in doing so, as Fain observed, U.S.

¹¹⁵ Cairo 1770 to State, December 12, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.148), pp.358-59.

¹¹⁶ Dann (1969), p.131. See also, Walter Waggoner, "Baghdad Reports Foiling New Plot," *New York Times*, December 9, 1958, p.13; Dana Adams Schmidt, "Purge by Iraq Chief Thought to Cripple Pro-Nasser Group," *New York Times*, December 15, 1958, p.D1. See also Little (2004), p.694.

¹¹⁷ CIA, "Likelihood of a Communist Takeover in Iraq," SM 51-58, December 17, 1958 (EPL/PHF/6), p.3.

policy clashed with Britain's policy of supporting Qasim as a bulwark against Egyptian influence, an indication of "very different perceptions of threat to their regional interests."¹¹⁸

In mid-December, Assistant Secretary of State William Rountree took a tour of the region that included stops in Cairo and Baghdad. It was during Rountree's talk with Nasser on December 14 that the possibility of U.S.-Egyptian cooperation against Iraq was first raised. It was Nasser who raised the matter. He told Rountree that while he had indigenous means of dealing with Egypt's "communist problem", doing so in another country was "quite a different matter." He observed the U.S. had greater experience in covert action and asked if Rountree had "any ideas" about what could be done in Iraq. Rountree replied the U.S. was "following [the] matter with interest" but felt that it was best if the Arab states find a solution. Ignoring this, Nasser said the communist threat was a "common problem" which transcended inter-Arab relations and insisted Egypt would oppose any Soviet attempt to assert itself in the Arab world, just as the U.S. would do in the West.¹¹⁹ This conversation was the catalyst for a U.S.-Egyptian rapprochement and led to tactical coordination of operations against Iraq throughout 1959-60.

When Rountree arrived in Baghdad on December 15 hostile crowds greeted him at the airport. When he met Qasim, the Iraqi leader "expressed regret" for the incident and pointed to the implication of a "foreign power" in a recent plot against the regime. Rountree denied any U.S. involvement, saying the U.S. "had every intention of working for good relations" with Iraq, and warning that hostile states "would use every conceivable device to create suspicion and doubt" about America's intentions. While Qasim appeared sincere in wanting to have friendly relations with the U.S., Rountree left Baghdad with a negative impression about the state of U.S.-Iraqi relations, a view that would have a profound impact on the actions that Eisenhower took next.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Fain (2008), p.102.

¹¹⁹ Cairo 1797 to State, December 15, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/ XIII/doc.229), pp.505-9.

¹²⁰ Baghdad 1887 to State, December 16, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.150), pp.361-63.

On December 17, the CIA produced a draft estimate on the likelihood of a communist takeover in Iraq. While the CIA acknowledged that the situation was “confused” and its intelligence was “inadequate for a confident estimate”, the prospect of Iraqi communists seizing power was “a matter for most serious consideration” and therefore the report deserved circulation. Significantly, the CIA concluded Qasim was not a communist, though they worried that his determination to keep Iraq free from Egyptian dominance had led to communists gaining unprecedented influence in the government. The CIA believed that only the army was capable of challenging Qasim but if it did not move in “the next few weeks, its capabilities [were] likely to dwindle rapidly.” Unfortunately, there was “no other significant source of anti-Communist energy and influence among the Arabs at present.” This reality led the CIA to conclude: “a Communist takeover in Iraq would be a threat to basic U.S. interests in the Middle East area and that it would set in train a course of events which would be extremely difficult to reverse.”¹²¹

Given Nasser’s proposal, Rountree’s hostile reception in Baghdad, and the CIA’s concerns about communist influence in Iraq, the mood was grim when the NSC met on December 18. While the CIA had not reached any firm conclusions, its director, Allen Dulles had. He told the council that Qasim was “in the hands of the Communist mob” and questioned whether he could retain power, which prompted Eisenhower to ask whether “it might be good policy to help [Nasser] take over in Iraq.” In response, Allen Dulles explained that overthrowing Qasim was no simple task and even if successful, “there were no important civil political figures in Iraq” to replace him. The only logical substitute would be someone from the military, but not Abd al’Salim Arif, “who was not controllable.” Even so, Eisenhower pointed out, since “the Kremlin [is] our principal enemy” and “Nasser does not want to be dominated by [it],” then cooperating with him to prevent a Soviet takeover in Iraq was a logical solution. Gordon Gray, Eisenhower’s special assistant for national security affairs, recommended the NSC Planning Board review the existing policy toward Iraq since it was based on the premise that the Iraqi government “was one

¹²¹ “Communist Takeover in Iraq,” December 17, 1958, *Op.Cit.*, pp.1-8.

that we could support.” Eisenhower agreed.¹²² This exchange is very significant. Not only does it show that Eisenhower was prepared to work with Nasser against Qasim, but that he saw Iraq’s communists and the Soviets as a single entity, working to seize control of Iraq.

Prior to the next NSC meeting on December 23, Rountree met privately with Eisenhower, Vice President Richard Nixon, and Acting Secretary Christian Herter to discuss Nasser’s secret proposal. After giving his account, Rountree suggested he send Nasser a telegram expressing appreciation for the frank discussion, recounting his trip to Iraq, and indicating the president had been briefed on his proposal “off the record”. Eisenhower approved and a cable was sent to Cairo that evening.¹²³ When the NSC convened later that day, Rountree told the council Nasser understood the danger of communism and was at last prepared to “do something”. He explained that Cairo and Moscow were at odds on the question of Iraq, while American-Egyptian interests were identical, though questions remained about whether the U.S. could trust Nasser.¹²⁴

The next morning Nasser sent the U.S. an unambiguous signal of his intention, when he delivered a speech denouncing communism “as among the enemies of Arab nationalism”.¹²⁵ Over the course of the next few weeks, Nasser initiated a campaign against Egyptian communists and increased his rhetorical attacks against Qasim.¹²⁶ The Eisenhower administration demonstrated its approval by providing emergency food aid to Egypt in late-December, less than 24-hours after the initial request.¹²⁷ The confluence of American-Egyptian interests on the question of curbing communist influence in Iraq led to a rapid improvement in relations in the late 1950s.

¹²² Memorandum of Discussion at the 391st Meeting of the NSC, December 18, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.151), pp.363-4.

¹²³ White House, Memorandum of a Conference with the President, December 23, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/XIII/doc.230), pp.509-11.

¹²⁴ Memorandum of Discussion at the 392nd Meeting of the NSC, December 23, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.155), pp.372-74.

¹²⁵ *New York Times*, “London Weighs Nasser Aim,” December 24, 1958, p.M1.

¹²⁶ *New York Times*, “Round-up of Reds Started in Egypt,” January 2, 1959, p.1.

¹²⁷ FRUS/1958-60/XIII/doc.230, footnote 3, p.510.

There was no debate in the Eisenhower administration over the dire implications of a communist takeover in Iraq. What was discussed was whether a communist takeover was “imminent or actual”. Indeed, the CIA was correct in its assessment: “Communist control of Iraq would establish the USSR in the heart of the Middle East—contiguous to Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Kuwait, and outflanking two U.S. allies, Turkey and Iran.” It believed Soviet control over Iraq posed a threat to Western investments and vital oil supplies and could spark a Middle Eastern crisis.¹²⁸ However, these points were speculative. Qasim was not a communist, the Soviets were not in control of Iraq, and subsequent research has questioned the extent to which the ICP took orders from Moscow.¹²⁹ And yet Eisenhower appeared eager to work with Nasser against Qasim.

The basic national security policy required the Eisenhower administration to “take all feasible measures” to prevent an “imminent or actual” communist takeover in Iraq. But this was a subjective question, dependent on the individual views of analysts. Consequently, the U.S. intelligence community struggled throughout the spring of 1959 with whether the “point of no return” in Iraq had been reached. For instance, on January 7 the CIA circulated a Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) arguing vaguely that Qasim had to take immediate action to curb communist influence or Iraq “will *probably* be transformed into a Communist State.”¹³⁰ However, U.S. officials in Baghdad did not share this view. On January 13 the new U.S. Ambassador, John Jernegan, cabled Washington to argue against the view that the “point of no return has arrived”. He believed anti-communist forces in the government still exist.¹³¹ A few days later, the INR produced a report that concurred. It argued the communists had a “slight but possibly decisive advantage”, but the

¹²⁸ CIA, “The Communist Threat to Iraq,” SNIE 36.2-59, February 17, 1959 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.161), pp.381-88.

¹²⁹ Franzén (2011), pp.95-96.

¹³⁰ NSC, “The Situation in Iraq,” January 7, 1959 (EPL/PHF/6), pp.1-2.

¹³¹ CIA, “Views on Iraq,” p.1, cites Jernegan in Baghdad 2057 from January 13, 1959. On December 11, Jernegan was appointed Ambassador to Iraq, having previously served as deputy under two assistant secretaries of state in charge of Middle Eastern affairs. See Dana Adams Schmidt, “Iraq Envoy Post a Problem to U.S.; Political Pressure Hampers Choice of Mideast Expert for Key Diplomatic Job,” *New York Times*, December 1, 1958, p.12. Jernegan met with Eisenhower on December 18, see DoS, Memorandum, Herter to the President, “Call by Ambassador John D. Jernegan,” December 17, 1958 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.149), p.360.

Arab nationalists were not finished yet.¹³² Clearly, U.S. officials held mixed views about whether communists posed a threat to Iraq.

Views among U.S. officials about the prospect of working with Nasser against Iraq were equally mixed. A NSC document from January 7, 1959, suggests the CIA was not confident Nasser's conspiratorial apparatus in Iraq was "sufficiently organized to enable him to initiate a successful coup," though it acknowledged he "may still have the ability to stimulate senior officers of the Iraqi army to attempt a coup aimed at establishing a nationalist government free of Communist control."¹³³ The INR's view was closer to that of the CIA. It saw Nasser's opposition to communism as helpful because it inspired anti-communist elements in Iraq, but it also saw risks: an "indecisive coup attempt" by Egypt could trigger a "long-drawn-out civil conflict", while Iraq's neighbours—Iran and Saudi Arabia—were concerned about Nasser gaining influence in Baghdad and could lead to covert action against his efforts.¹³⁴ In Baghdad, Jernegan advised a more cautious approach and warned against becoming too associated with Nasser, lest he push Qasim further into the Soviets' arms.¹³⁵ Jernegan's cautious analysis eventually won out in the debate, even though Eisenhower personally thought working with Nasser to prevent a communist takeover in Iraq was worth the risk.

When the NSC convened again on January 15, Allen Dulles informed the members of a new conspiracy against Qasim, but its success seemed unlikely.¹³⁶ Significantly, Foster Dulles reported the British were "somewhat less pessimistic" about the situation in Iraq. He opined it was "essential to keep our hands off Iraq" since the U.S. was not "sufficiently sophisticated to mix into this complicated situation". Regardless, Eisenhower was interested in the Nasser option and ordered the NSC to determine how far it was willing to go. To this, Secretary Dulles cautioned against giving "carte blanche approval to everything that Nasser does". The council

¹³² DoS, INR, "Iraq: The Crisis in Leadership and the Communist Advance," IR 7921, January 16, 1959 (EPL/PHF/6), pp.1-7.

¹³³ "The Situation in Iraq," January 7, 1959, *Op.Cit.*, pp.1-2.

¹³⁴ DoS, INR, "Iraq: The Crisis in Leadership and the Communist Advance," Intelligence Report No. 7921, January 16, 1959 (EPL/PHF/6), pp.1-7.

¹³⁵ NSC, "Views on Iraq," January 14, 1959 (EPL/PHF/6), p.1, cites Jernegan in Baghdad 2057, January 13, 1959.

¹³⁶ FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.159, footnote 1, p.378.

agreed the U.S. had to examine all possible options to prevent a communist takeover in Iraq. No decision was taken.¹³⁷

The Iraqi crisis took a negative turn on February 7 when six prominent nationalists, including Foreign Minister al-Jumrad, resigned in protest after Qasim signed what was described as a “vast” technical aid program with the Soviets. According to U.S. officials, the ministers believed their resignations would force Qasim to alter his pro-Soviet policies, but the opposite happened. Instead of weakening communist influence in Iraq, the resignations allowed Qasim to appoint leftist or pro-communist ministers, an act that prompted the CIA to reassess its estimate on Iraq.¹³⁸

On February 17, the CIA circulated a new SNIE that highlighted the differences between the analysis of Iraq by America and that of its allies titled “The Communist Threat to Iraq.” The document makes clear America’s allies did not see Iraq with the same lens but in terms of its own national interests. For instance, while Britain was “far from oblivious” to the dangers of communism, its hostility toward Nasser led it to the conclusion that Qasim was a viable alternative. The CIA evidenced Britain’s decision to tip Qasim off about the Nasser-backed Rashid Ali plot. Another important ally, Israel, was very concerned about the communist threat but only insofar as it brought Nasser and the West closer together or if he made a successful move in Iraq which confirmed him as undisputed leader of the Arab world. The SNIE’s title itself underscores that the U.S. viewed Iraq in terms of its Cold War competition with the Soviet Union, believing that Iraq’s communists were a Soviet proxy, whereas its allies were concerned with advancing or protecting their national interests. These differences would persist until the mid-1960s.¹³⁹

The next day the NSC Operations Coordinating Board issued guidance for U.S. personnel. In many ways it built upon NSC 5820/1, advising the U.S. to seek to dispel any suspicions that it was plotting against Iraq; counsel regional allies against

¹³⁷ “393d Meeting of the NSC,” January 15, 1959, *Op.Cit.*, pp.375-78.

¹³⁸ DoS, Memorandum, Director of the NEA (Rockwell) to Rountree, “Iraqi Cabinet Reorganization,” February 9, 1959 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.159), pp.378-80. See also See FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.160, pp. 380-1.

¹³⁹ CIA, “The Communist Threat to Iraq,” SNIE 36.2-59, February 17, 1959 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.161), pp.381-8.

provocative measures; and maintain enough U.S. officials in Iraq to meet any requests made by the government. At the same time, the U.S. needed to show a “correct” attitude toward Iraq and its desire for friendly relations; seek to develop contacts within the regime; take advantage of any opportunities presented; “cultivate discreetly individual and group friendships with the objective of creating a more favorable climate for U.S.-Iraqi relations”; and “use every appropriate opportunity” to warn Iraqi leaders of the communist threat.¹⁴⁰ Together, the operational guidance suggests the overriding goal of U.S. policy was to build friendly relations with the Qasim regime, while avoiding provocative action. It is, however, evident that elements of the Eisenhower administration were not following its own policy.

According to the *Church Report*, within days of the NSC guidance, the CIA’s Near East Division sought approval from the “Health Alteration Committee”—a euphemism for the CIA’s assassination unit—for a proposed “special operation” to “incapacitate” an Iraqi colonel believed to be “promoting Soviet bloc political interests in Iraq.” Though CIA officials, testifying fifteen years later, could not recall exactly who the Iraqi colonel in question was,¹⁴¹ it is widely held that Qasim was the target.¹⁴² However, this seemed unlikely for three reasons: 1) Qasim was a Brigadier General, not a colonel; 2) he did not promote Soviet interests overtly; and 3) it seems unlikely that the CIA officials would not recall trying to kill a head of state fifteen years on, whereas Colonel Fadhil al-Mahdawi fit the description perfectly. After all, al-Mahdawi was a known communist sympathizer and was key to the regime’s repression of local anti-communist forces due to his role as the President of the so-called People’s Court.¹⁴³ In addition, the *Church Report* made clear that the division chief was not actually seeking the assassination of this individual, as has

¹⁴⁰ NSC, “Operational Guidance Concerning Iraq,” February 18, 1959 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.162), pp. 389-94.

¹⁴¹ United States Congress, Senate Select Committee to Study Government Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, December 18, 1975, fn. 1, p.181. Herein the *Church Report*.

¹⁴² David Wise, “Another CIA Disaster,” *New York Times*, September 14, 1996, p.A35; and Morris (2003), p.A29.

¹⁴³ For more information on al-Mahdawi, see DoS, Division of Biographic Intelligence, “Al-Mahdawi, Fadhil Abbas (Col.),” March 1959. Available online: http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_doc.s/decclassified/fy_2011/1959_03.pdf

been suggested,¹⁴⁴ but rather “to prevent the target from pursuing his usual activities for a minimum of three months.” Finally, the CIA added, “we do not consciously seek subject’s permanent removal from the scene,” though “we also do not object should this complication develop.”¹⁴⁵ These points raise questions as to whether the CIA actually sought Qasim’s assassination. Even so, this episode suggests U.S. officials sought approval for covert action within days of the NSC issuing guidance advising the exact opposite.

On March 6, the Iraq crisis escalated when a protest organized by the communist-backed “Peace Partisans” in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul drew in as many as 250,000 people. Before long, tensions flared and a group of disgruntled Arab nationalist Free Officers seized control of the city. Eventually, on March 9, Qasim ordered the Iraqi Air Force (IAF) to bomb the city and the People’s Resistance Force (PRF)—the regime’s militia—began a campaign to retake control of the city with Barzani’s support.¹⁴⁶ Between 200 and 2,500 civilians were killed.¹⁴⁷ U.S. officials in Baghdad were stunned by the nationalist’s defeat at Mosul. They believed the failed uprising had increased Qasim’s strength and his pro-communist allies at the expense of the pro-UAR nationalists. “It appear[ed] that the Mosul attempt was almost a last gasp of nationalist, anti-Communist forces in Iraq,” and provided ample justification to purge all pan-Arab nationalists from positions of authority. On March 26, the embassy reported Iraqi security forces had rounded up approximately 15,000 of the regime’s opponents and nationalists had been purged from all government ministries, except the Foreign Ministry.¹⁴⁸ In their place Qasim appointed his own protégés, thereby “extending his own patronage networks.” As Tripp observed:

[The] ICP gained the impression that, by rallying ‘the people’, it could effectively check any attempted coup d’état, reinforcing its belief that it could now play an active part in the direction of the Iraqi state.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ Morris (2003), p.A29; and Little (2004), p.694.

¹⁴⁵ *Church Report*, fn. 1, p.181.

¹⁴⁶ Dann (1969), pp.168-73; and Tripp (2007), p.151.

¹⁴⁷ McDowell (2004), p.304.

¹⁴⁸ Baghdad 2758 to State, March 26, 1959 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.166), pp.395-8.

¹⁴⁹ Tripp (2007), p.151.

It was in this context that Iraq announced its withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact on March 24, leading U.S. officials to conclude the “Iron Curtain [is] descending” over Iraq.¹⁵⁰

When the NSC convened on April 2 to discuss Mosul, Eisenhower reiterated his interest in working with Nasser to save Iraq—an indication he had not yet decided on the matter. Allen Dulles was not certain this was a good idea, pointing out, “not all our friends and allies seem to have the same view on Iraq as we did.” The new Under Secretary of State, C. Douglas Dillon, rightly warned that if it became known that the U.S. was plotting with Nasser against Qasim it could drive Iraq further toward the communists.¹⁵¹ At this point, Gordon Gray reminded the council U.S. policy required them to “take all feasible measures ... including military action” to thwart a communist takeover. Everyone agreed, but there were no new ideas of how to prevent this.¹⁵² As such, Eisenhower ordered State to produce an analysis of the Iraqi situation for the next NSC meeting and asked Herter to organize an interagency committee composed of the heads of relevant departments and agencies (i.e., the Department of Defense, CIA, Joint Chiefs of Staff, etc.) to review the matter and devise an action plan.¹⁵³

When the NSC next met on April 17, Vice President Nixon was in the chair. The meeting arrived at pessimistic conclusions. Having read State’s briefing paper, Nixon was concerned that little could be done to prevent a communist takeover and was reluctant about working with Nasser, believing it “unlikely that we could find any middle ground between Communistic control of Iraq and control by Nasser”. Likewise, General Nathan Twining, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), was concerned about the state of contingency planning, reminding the council that military action was sanctioned under the existing policy guidelines. While major decisions had to be deferred until Eisenhower’s return, the NSC approved the

¹⁵⁰ Baghdad 2758, March 26, 1959, *Op.Cit.*, p.398.

¹⁵¹ Christian Herter became Acting Secretary of State due to John Foster Dulles’ battle with cancer. He became Secretary of State on April 22, 1959.

¹⁵² Memorandum of Discussion of the 401st Meeting of the NSC, April 2, 1959 (EPL/Whitman File/NSC Records/Box 11), pp.1-5.

¹⁵³ Memorandum of Discussion of the 402nd Meeting of the NSC, April 17, 1959 (EPL/Whitman File/NSC Records/Box 11), p.17.

president's earlier instruction to form an interagency committee for Iraq, directing it:

... to develop integrated views, keeping their principals fully informed, and to report to the [NSC] each week unless otherwise directed. The group would be concerned with further consideration of the above-mentioned State Department report, current developments, and feasible courses of action; taking into account the discussion at this meeting, particularly the urgency required to prevent a Communist take-over in Iraq.¹⁵⁴

With this, the SCI was formed.

By the time the Eisenhower administration formed the SCI in April 1959, concerns about communist influence in Iraq dominated its thinking. By this point, the CIA had pointed out that U.S. policy diverged with its allies, Britain and Israel, on the question of Iraq. In both instances, they feared Nasser's control of Iraq far more than the communists. And yet, the administration's concern about the communists trumped any other consideration. By April no firm decision on working with Nasser had been reached, though Eisenhower favoured the option, while most of his advisors were opposed. This disagreement led to contradictions between official policy and American actions, like the CIA's application for covert action as the NSC issued its guidance on Iraq aimed at improving relations. What this shows is that the Eisenhower administration's fear of communism in Iraq put it at odds with not just its allies but with itself.¹⁵⁵

VI

Throughout the spring of 1959 the SCI and NSC met regularly to discuss the Iraq crisis. Clear divisions over how to respond to Iraq were evident. On the one side, State urged a "hands-off policy" and felt the U.S. "should not act precipitously in Iraq, since the consequences might be worse from the point of view of [their] overall interests than not acting at [that] time". On the other side, CIA and Defense felt this

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., pp.1-17.

¹⁵⁵ For a detailed discussion of Washington's ally's views on the communist threat, see CIA, "Implications of the Communist Threat in Iraq," SNIE 36.2-2-59, April 17, 1959 (EPL/PHF/5), pp.1-15. For its executive summary, see FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.181, pp.442-3. For Britain's differing views, see FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.180, p.441.

was a mistake, believing the crisis had reached a “now or never” point and called for immediate action or at least contingency planning should the communists seize power. Rountree agreed and ordered CIA and Defense to prepare contingency plans.¹⁵⁶ Ultimately, these divisions made it difficult for the U.S. to achieve consensus about what to do about Iraq.

In late-April, the SCI identified the wide variety of options the U.S. could adopt to prevent a communist takeover in Iraq. The CIA identified a number of ways to help Nasser against Qasim, including collecting, collating, and evaluating intelligence; offering financial assurances and arms to groups plotting against Qasim; and assisting Radio Cairo in propaganda efforts. Taken together, the CIA felt these options fit the requirement of “doing something” to help stem the communist tide in Iraq.¹⁵⁷ Similarly, the JCS identified a long list of actions against Iraq, including: 1) encouraging Arab countries to bring pressure on Iraq to curb the communists; 2) ceasing all economic and military aid to Iraq; 3) stopping all oil purchases from Iraq to cripple the regime’s finances; and 4) helping pro-Western Iraqis escape the country, whereupon they could serve as a rallying point for opposition. Other options were promoting revolts inside Iraq and causing Qasim’s overthrow by encouraging a military coup, but both risked reinforcing the communists, as had happened after the Mosul rising. More broadly, the JCS suggested reinforcing the militaries of Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and Jordan, and encouraging the British bolster its forces in Kuwait; increasing the deployment of U.S. forces in the region; possibly establishing a U.S. Middle East Command; imposing a naval blockade of the Iraqi coast to prevent Soviet arms deliveries; denying Iraq’s ability to export oil; and encouraging Turkey and Jordan to intervene militarily. Regardless, the option the JCS preferred most was working with Nasser, either overtly or covertly, against Iraq, which it recommended be explored “in detail and on an urgent basis.” Finally, as a last resort, “national policy [required] that the [U.S.] develop plans for military intervention in Iraq.” Though, because this required consultation with Baghdad Pact members and key North Atlantic Treaty

¹⁵⁶ NSC, “Meeting of Special Committee on Iraq,” April 21, 1959 (EPL/PHF/5), p.1.

¹⁵⁷ NSC, “Meeting of Special Committee on Iraq,” April 27, 1959 (EPL/PHF/5), pp.1-4.

Organization (NATO) allies, the risk of a leak increased.¹⁵⁸ Consequently, the SCI decided it would review the existing military plans for Iraq “without consultation with any other nation.” This meant the British and Israelis would be cut out of the loop.¹⁵⁹ Taken together, Defense’s options were much more aggressive than those raised by CIA and were bound to upset State officials. The SCI reported these options to the NSC on April 30.¹⁶⁰

When word of the CIA/Defense options for Iraq reached Ambassador Jernegan he was “horrified” and was recalled to Washington for consultations.¹⁶¹ During that time he was called before the NSC to offer his assessment, where he presented a five-point explanation of Iraq’s leftward trend.

The first ... was a reaction against the pro-West attitudes and policies of the former Nuri regime. Secondly, Qasim himself and many other Iraqi leaders distrust the West and feared that we were working to destroy the new regime. The third reason was widespread fear that the regime would be brought down by Nasser and the UAR.... [Fourth] the Communists themselves in Iraq had worked very hard and were extremely well organized. The fifth reason was that Qasim may really want events to take the course they have been taking. He might be a Communist or a pro-Communist. [But Jernegan felt] ... that Qasim was scared and that [was why] he was tolerating the Communist activity....

On contingency planning, Jernegan warned that “overt hostility” would drive Qasim “into the hands of the Soviets”. As a case in point, it had been Egypt’s involvement in the Rashid Ali plot and the Mosul rising that pushed Qasim toward the communists and Soviets in the first place. And even if he was overthrown, “there was no one in sight who could replace Qasim”. Given this, Jernegen suggested the best step to take was urging Nasser to cease his direct attacks against Qasim and focus instead on Iraq’s communists, the real enemy. This was approved.¹⁶²

When SCI met on May 19 it was reported that Nasser had agreed to shift the focus of his propaganda away from Qasim and toward the communists.¹⁶³ When this

¹⁵⁸ Department of Defense, “Estimate of the Situation in Iraq,” April 22, 1959 (EPL/PHF/4), pp.7-12.

¹⁵⁹ NSC, “Outline of Planning for Iraq Situation,” Interagency Draft II, no date (EPL/PHF/4), pp.1-5.

¹⁶⁰ Memorandum of Discussion of the 404th Meeting of the NSC, April 30, 1959 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc. 182), pp.443-5.

¹⁶¹ NSC, “Meeting of Special Committee on Iraq,” May 8, 1959 (EPL/PHF/3), pp.1-2.

¹⁶² Memorandum of Discussion of the 405th Meeting of the NSC, April 17, 1959 (EPL/Whitman File/NSC Records/Box 11), pp.1-5.

¹⁶³ NSC, “Meeting of Special Committee on Iraq,” May 20, 1959 (EPL/PHF/3), pp.1-4.

development was reported to the NSC the following day, there was agreement that “some progress” had been made in Iraq.¹⁶⁴ By the end of May, Nasser’s easing of pressure on Qasim, when coupled with the ICP’s demands for the legalization of political parties,¹⁶⁵ was beginning to have an effect. For instance, in late May just before Qasim was to meet with Jernegan, he delivered a speech emphasizing Iraq’s neutrality in the Cold War, an act that led Jernegan to take a friendly tone when they met on May 26.¹⁶⁶

Despite State’s victory, its differences with CIA/Defense persisted. In early June, Philip Halla, the SCI’s secretary and a member of the NSC staff, sent Gordon Gray a memo summarizing a conversation he had with a senior CIA official. According to the memo, the CIA felt State was being “excessively cautious” on Iraq, disagreed over the scale of communist entrenchment, and were not fooled by Qasim’s recent efforts at limiting communist power.¹⁶⁷ Even so, during an NSC meeting on June 4, Allen Dulles reflected Jernegan’s sense of cautious optimism observing that while Iraq was “far from out of danger,” the “drift toward Communism in Iraq had at least slowed down”. This was because Moscow had apparently cautioned Qasim to “go a little slow” with his relationship with the ICP and his declaration of “positive neutrality” was a “tactical” move aimed at quelling Western fears of communist encroachment.¹⁶⁸

By mid-June 1959, the Iraqi crisis appeared to stabilize, leading some U.S. officials to question the need for a weekly SCI meeting since there was general agreement on continuing the “wait and see” policy presently in place.¹⁶⁹ Rountree agreed and recommended that the NSC release the SCI “from the obligation to make

¹⁶⁴ Memorandum of Discussion of the 407th Meeting of the NSC, May 21, 1959 (EPL/Whitman File/NSC Records/Box 11).

¹⁶⁵ Dann (1969), p.208.

¹⁶⁶ State 2891 to Baghdad, May 15, 1959 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.185), pp.451-2. Not long after this meeting, however, Qasim announced that Iraq would stop accepting U.S. military and economic aid. See *New York Times*, “Iraq Said to Call For End of U.S. Aid,” May 30, 1959, p.5; and DoS, Memorandum, Rountree to Herter, “Statement to the NSC on the Situation in Iraq,” June 3, 1959 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc. 192), pp.464-6.

¹⁶⁷ CIA, Memorandum for Mr. Gray, “CIA Views on Iraq,” June 3, 1959 (EPL/PHF/3), pp.1-2.

¹⁶⁸ Memorandum of Discussion of the 409th Meeting of the NSC, June 4, 1959 (EPL/Whitman File/NSC Records/Box 11).

¹⁶⁹ NSC, “Meeting of Special Committee on Iraq,” June 8, 1959 (EPL/PHF/3), p.1.

weekly reports” on the condition that any significant developments be raised. The NSC approved this suggestion when it next met on June 18.¹⁷⁰ Soon thereafter, the CIA acknowledged its earlier estimates on Iraq had “been too gloomy” and there were “signs of growing resolve on Qassim’s part to move with increasing determination against the Iraqi Communists.” However, the CIA cautioned, “this [did] not mean that the tide has turned finally and irrevocably against the Communists.” Indeed, Qasim’s recent crackdown could lead the ICP to “strike back to protect themselves and their position against the reprisals that would be likely if the nationalists gained dominance.”¹⁷¹ This assessment would prove to be accurate.

On July 10, a communist-inspired riot broke out in southern Iraq, which led to a physical clash between the communists and security forces. The U.S. also learned from a “number of high [Iraqi] Army officers ... that Communist officials in government will be purged soon after the 14 July celebrations and conservative officials will be called to serve.”¹⁷² On July 13, Qasim made two significant announcements. First, he pledged elections would be held and a new parliament would be formed within a year.¹⁷³ Second, he announced he was expanding his cabinet by four members, one of whom was a known, female communist, Naziha Duleimi. While it was significant that both a woman and a communist had been named to the cabinet, her ministerial portfolio was insignificant.¹⁷⁴ Interpreting Qasim’s move as an affront to their access to power, the next day the communists instigated a major crisis in the northern city of Kirkuk.

The Kirkuk uprising was a crucial turning point in the history of post-revolutionary Iraq. By July 1959, tension between the Kirkuk’s large Kurdish and Turkmen populations had escalated because of an influx of impoverished Kurds moving into the city to avoid deteriorating economic conditions in the countryside.¹⁷⁵ Since the Mosul rising, the Kurds had aligned themselves with the

¹⁷⁰ Memorandum of Discussion of the 410th Meeting of the NSC, June 18, 1959 (EPL/Whitman File/NSC Records/Box 11).

¹⁷¹ CIA, “Short-Term Outlook in Iraq,” SNIE 36.2/2-59, June 30, 1959 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.195), p. 471.

¹⁷² FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.196, p.472.

¹⁷³ Richard Hunt, “Iraqi Elections Promised in 1960,” *New York Times*, July 15, 1959, p.1.

¹⁷⁴ *New York Times*, “Kassim Expands His Iraqi Cabinet,” July 13, 1959, p.4. See also, Dann (1969), p.221.

¹⁷⁵ Sluglett (2001), p.71.

communists against the Turkmen, creating a situation that was described as “explosive”.¹⁷⁶ The catalyst for the crisis was the appointment of a Kurdish mayor in early July 1959, the first of its kind.¹⁷⁷ On July 14, fighting broke out when a communist-organized rally crossed paths with a Turkmen protest—uncertainty remains over who attacked first.¹⁷⁸ Regardless, the Kurds backed by the PRF, went “berserk” and attacked shops and their owners.¹⁷⁹ It took two days for the Iraqi army to bring an end to the violence, leaving between thirty-one and a hundred people dead and scores more injured.¹⁸⁰ On July 19, Qasim “strongly condemned” the violence, while making vague references to “anarchists”.¹⁸¹ Before long, images of mutilated bodies were broadcast on Iraqi television with editorials saying, this was what “Communists are really like”.¹⁸²

After some initial confusion, U.S. policymakers realized the Kirkuk massacre was a watershed for the ICP’s standing. When Allen Dulles briefed the NSC on the clashes on July 23 it was clear the CIA had limited resources inside Iraq: “Apparently the Kirkuk outbreak had been put down more rapidly than our own or the Egyptian press had indicated. Still, however, no one knows much about why the outbreak began or how it began.” What was important, however, was that Qasim had singled out the communists for condemnation. This, of course, appeared to worry the Soviets, which extended Qasim an invitation for a state visit, which could be interpreted as confirmation of ICP-Soviet links.¹⁸³ At the end of July, Qasim accused the communists directly for the massacres, which led the ICP to issue a public

¹⁷⁶ Penrose (1978), p.232; McDowell (2004), p.305; and Dann (1969), p.224, describes the situation as “charged with dynamite.”

¹⁷⁷ Liam Anderson and Gareth Stansfield, *Crisis in Kirkuk: The Ethnopolitics of Conflict and Compromise* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), p.34. Also Sluglett (2001), p.71, ascribes it to “a number of sensitive appointments in the city”.

¹⁷⁸ Tripp (2007), p.152; Dann (1969), p.223; and Sluglett (2001), p.71.

¹⁷⁹ Dann (1969), p.223; and McDowell (2004), p.305.

¹⁸⁰ For the length of time, see Tripp (2007), p.152. On Arif, see Dann (1969), p.223. On the number of people killed, Dann (1969), p.223 puts the figure at “about one hundred”; Sluglett (2001), p.71, puts the figure at “between thirty-one and seventy-nine people”; *New York Times*, August 4, 1959, p.11, puts it at seventy-nine.

¹⁸¹ Dann (1969), p.224.

¹⁸² Sluglett (2001), p.71.

¹⁸³ FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.198, p.474.

apology in early August.¹⁸⁴ Meanwhile, Qasim began to purge communists and their sympathizers from the military and to rein in the PRF.¹⁸⁵

All of this led Jernegan to cable an optimistic assessment to Washington on August 9, stating the “tide [was] running against Communism”, the ICP had “gone too far”, and Qasim “will now not only ... check any [communist] attempts to increase power but will also take concrete steps to reduce its present power.” The regime had also moved against the communist’s key sources of support: the PRF, trade and student unions, and pro-communist army officers.¹⁸⁶ With these positive developments accumulating in late-summer 1959 U.S. officials believed the high tide of communism in Iraq was passing, a conclusion which proved to be too optimistic in the short-term.

VII

In the aftermath of the Kirkuk massacre, Qasim’s actions were both contradictory and confusing, which made it difficult for U.S. policymakers to assess the situation in Iraq. For instance, a CIA estimate from December 1959 described Qasim as an “enigmatic figure” who “considers himself uncommitted to any faction, and capable of playing a role above the struggle.” Nevertheless, the CIA believed he was “central to the short-run outlook in Iraq”.¹⁸⁷ U.S. policymakers were pleased with the communist crackdown, but before long Qasim became convinced his policy of seeking to maintain a balance between the communists and nationalists was in danger.

Throughout August a drama played out between Qasim and the nationalists when a group of Free Officers involved in the Mosul rising were brought before Colonel al-Mahdawi’s court,¹⁸⁸ leading to the execution of five military officers and a

¹⁸⁴ *New York Times*, “Kassim Accuses Reds; Iraqi Premier Says Party Plotted Uprisings,” July 30, 1959, p. 6; and *New York Times*, “Iraq Communists Condemn Party,” August 4, 1959, p.11.

¹⁸⁵ Sluglett (2001), pp.71-2.

¹⁸⁶ Baghdad 355 to State, August 9, 1959 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.199), pp.474-7.

¹⁸⁷ CIA, “Short-Term Prospects for Iraq,” SNIE 36.2-5-59, December 15, 1959 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc. 210), pp.496-9.

¹⁸⁸ NSC, “Meeting of Special Committee on Iraq,” March 25, 1960 (EPL/PHF/1), p.2.

civilian on August 25.¹⁸⁹ Both Nasser and the Iraqi nationalists were outraged and the CIA learned in early September that Egypt had recommenced plotting Qasim's overthrow.¹⁹⁰ The real tipping point came on September 20, when Qasim approved the executions of a senior Free Officer and twelve other nationalist officers involved in Mosul, in addition to four civilian members of Nuri as-Said's last government to balance criticism.¹⁹¹

Iraq's renewed instability prompted by the executions led the U.S. to once again reevaluate its views on Iraq. On September 24, a new SNIE was circulated that concluded Iraq had grown "even more unstable and uncertain" than ever. It also noted that while ICP activities had been limited in recent weeks, Qasim had "continued and even expanded" his ties with Moscow. Meanwhile, "reports of coup plots, including the assassination of Qasim, [had] increased in recent weeks," though no organization "capable of bringing off a successful coup [was] known to exist."¹⁹²

The instability also prompted the SCI to convene to assess the situation, its first meeting since June. Chairing the meeting was G. Lewis Jones, who had replaced William Rountree as Under Secretary of State for the Near East. Significantly, the group was warned that "an assassination effort [was] likely" and "could set off violence". However, because the "U.S. had abandoned intervention as a policy" there were few options available should a coup occur. One was to convince Egypt and Jordan to work together on Iraq, another was to work through the Arab League, which would be supported by Saudi Arabia and Lebanon. However, because the U.S. policy was non-intervention, all the CIA could do was prepare "all [they could] operationally in the area." The CIA's representative explained there was a "small stockpile [of weapons] in the area" and that it was supporting "elements in Jordan and the UAR to help Iraqis filter back to Iraq." Ultimately, the SCI agreed that non-

¹⁸⁹ DoS, Memorandum, Jones to Herter, Tab A, "Summary of Events in Iraq Since Late June," September 28, 1959 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.203), pp.486-8. See also Sluglett (2001), p.73.

¹⁹⁰ On September 10, Allen Dulles informed the NSC that Nasser had resumed "a more active role in Iraq, including the dispatch of arms and money to bolster pro-UAR elements in the country." One fear, however, was that if Qasim were killed, it "could mean civil war." See FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.200, p.478.

¹⁹¹ DoS, Memorandum, Jones to Herter, "Statement to the NSC re: the Situation in Iraq," September 28, 1959 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.203), p.487.

¹⁹² CIA, "Possible Developments in Iraq," SNIE 36.2-4-59, September 24, 1959 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.202), pp.481-4.

intervention was the best policy and decided to seek Jernegan's assessment.¹⁹³ This document was significant for two reasons. First, it confirmed that the Eisenhower administration had adopted a policy of non-intervention toward Iraq. Second, that the CIA had been moving forward with some elements of Defense's proposed contingency plan.

When Jernegan responded on September 28, it was clear the Iraqi situation had gotten worse and warned of a potential coup. He said the short-range prospect for internal stability in Iraq was worse; the anti-communist trend was slowing; U.S. capabilities were "extremely limited"; and that intervention "would only make matters worse."¹⁹⁴ More importantly, he warned of a coup attempt "within a week" that would "start with the assassination of Qasim". Jernegan's warning was confirmed two days later, when the U.S. learned "Nasser [was] counseling conspirators involved in [a] plan for [a] coup in Iraq within a week, including [the] assassination of Qasim. Nasser [was] ready to send UAR troops to oppose any counter-move thereafter."¹⁹⁵

Considering these developments, the NSC invited both Jones and Armin Meyer, the NEA's director, to brief the council on October 1. They explained the NEA had reached three main conclusions:

- (1) dramatic action by the U.S. in Iraq was not desirable; (2) restraint by the Arab countries [was] the best means of restraining Iraq; (3) Kassem should be encouraged through third parties to maintain an independent Iraq which would resist the Communist threat.

Jones reported numerous indications of an impending assassination attempt on Qasim, but suggested these could be "Communist provocations." However, should it happen, the U.S. should urge restraint upon its allies. Commenting, Allen Dulles told the council that Nasser had "urged the assassination plotters not to move too fast" and might "be laying plans to intervene in the event chaos ensues." Reflecting a lack of concrete intelligence, he predicted the assassination attempt could occur "in the

¹⁹³ NSC, "Meeting of Special Committee on Iraq," September 24, 1959 (EPL/PHF/2), pp.1-5. Jones reported these findings to the NSC on October 1. See Memorandum of Discussion of the 420th Meeting of the NSC, October 1, 1959 (EPL/Whitman File/NSC Records/Box 11).

¹⁹⁴ Memorandum of Discussion of the 438th Meeting of the NSC, October 1, 1959 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc. 204), p.489

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., footnote 6, p.489.

next two months.”¹⁹⁶ America’s spy chief was wrong. On October 7, the Ba’th Party thrust itself into Iraqi politics for the first time, when an assassination team including a young Saddam Hussein attempted to kill Qasim, striking him in the shoulder but not killing him. He spent the next six weeks in the hospital recovering.¹⁹⁷

Despite claims to the contrary,¹⁹⁸ the body of evidence available does not suggest the U.S. was complicit in the attempted assassination. First, days before the attack Allen Dulles predicted it would occur within the “next two months”, not a week. Second, the SCI and NSC had just reaffirmed the non-intervention policy. Third, the SCI had raised concerns that Qasim’s assassination could lead to a communist takeover.¹⁹⁹ Fourth, while the CIA was preparing for the contingency of a communists takeover, it had previously indicated it had few assets who could influence a post-Qasim Iraq.²⁰⁰ Finally, the CIA was not confident pro-Nasser elements could even carry off a coup, which proved accurate.²⁰¹ This raises the question as to why the U.S. would back a plot that was likely to fail? In addition, the Eisenhower administration’s public and private actions do not suggest involvement. On October 10, Eisenhower sent Qasim a “friendly message” to express relief that he had “escaped serious harm” and wished him a “speedy recovery.”²⁰² When Jernegan visited him in hospital the next day, Qasim “gave no indication that he thought the U.S. had been involved”. Privately, the U.S. took steps to discourage its regional allies, Jordan and Iran, from “taking military action” against Iraq.²⁰³ Taken together, these actions do not suggest the U.S. was behind the assassination attempt on Qasim in 1959.

On October 13, the SCI’s CIA representative sent Jones a memo outlining the agency’s contingency plans for Iraq. The CIA anticipated a troubling scenario. While

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., pp.488-90.

¹⁹⁷ FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.205, p.491.

¹⁹⁸ Morris (2003), p.A29; Little (2004), p.695; Citano (2006), pp.255-60; and Sale (2003).

¹⁹⁹ “Meeting of Special Committee on Iraq,” September 24, 1959, *Op.Cit.*, p.3.

²⁰⁰ “The Situation in Iraq,” January 7, 1959, *Op.Cit.*, pp.1-2.

²⁰¹ FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.202, p.482

²⁰² FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.205, p.491.

²⁰³ NSC, “Meeting of Special Committee on Iraq,” October 22, 1959 (EPL/PHF/2), p.2.

Qasim was “applying a measure of control over Communist activities”, the September 20 executions “caused an irreparable breach between Qasim and Nationalist elements within the country”. There was a “strong possibility” the regime would begin a harsh crackdown on the nationalists, potentially leading to another desperate attempt to remove Qasim, which the CIA felt could push him back toward the communists. If that happened, the nationalists could request Nasser’s help. The CIA knew that nationalist elements inside Iraq were in touch with Nasser at this point and that he was “seriously considering intervention under certain circumstances.” In terms of contingencies, the CIA was vague: “There [were] any number of possibilities, but most of those which would demand prompt policy decisions ... [were] permutations and combinations based on a single central fact—the removal of Qasim.”²⁰⁴ When the SCI met on October 22 there was again disagreement. Barring Qasim’s removal, the group saw three scenarios: 1) Qasim becoming increasingly dependent on the communists for support; 2) reconciliation with the nationalists; or 3) continuing to counter-balance the opposing forces. While the majority of the group felt the last scenario was most likely, a minority still felt Qasim would again embrace the communists.²⁰⁵ Even so, following the attempted assassination, scores of nationalists were arrested and dragged before al-Mahdawi’s court.²⁰⁶ This appeared to confirm the SCI’s worst fears.

The regime’s crushing of the nationalists was cause for concern in Washington, since it left only two viable groups that could bolster the regime or overthrow it: the army or the communists. When Qasim was released from the hospital on December 2, he held a six-hour news conference where he reversed many of his earlier positions and absolved the communists of blame for the Kirkuk massacres. This prompted the CIA to call a meeting of the SCI to review the situation. When the group met on December 4, there was no clear consensus about what direction Iraq would take, but all believed the situation was dire. Qasim’s speech had led Jernegan to conclude he had finally sided with the communists,

²⁰⁴ CIA, Memorandum for Jones, “Contingency Planning Regarding Iraq,” October 13, 1959 (EPL/PHF/2), pp.1-6.

²⁰⁵ “Meeting of Special Committee on Iraq,” October 22, 1959, *Op.Cit.*, p.4.

²⁰⁶ Sluglett (2001), p.73.

which led the CIA and JCS representatives to fear for their own careers, lest they “lose” Iraq. As usual, State officials were skeptical, with Meyer reminding everyone that Qasim was “a man who [could] change his attitude tomorrow.” This dispute prompted Jones to ask the CIA to draw up a new assessment.²⁰⁷ When the CIA circulated its analysis on December 15, it was more inclined toward Meyer’s view. “[We] believe that Qassim will continue his attempts to maintain himself in power by relying on the support of the armed forces while maneuvering between the various political factions.” Importantly, while the CIA could not discount a rapprochement with the nationalists or communists, it believed only the army’s support for Qasim could ensure his survival.²⁰⁸

The CIA assessment proved to be correct and throughout the spring of 1960 Qasim took a series of measures that reduced communist influence in Iraq, while becoming more reliant on the military for support. This shift began during Qasim’s time in the hospital when two moderate generals, Saleh al-Abdi, the military chief of staff, and Najib al-Rubayi, the President of the Sovereign Council and Iraq’s *de jure* head of state, ran the country while he recovered.²⁰⁹ Indeed, a CIA analysis later observed, “Qassem has made no move to punish [these] two generals or to take back the functions [they] arrogated during his hospitalization, and he now appears content to allow the army to play a strong behind-the-scenes role.” This in turn created an unprecedented period of stability in Iraq, which led U.S. officials to conclude the Iraqi crisis had finally come to an end.²¹⁰

In January 1960, Qasim’s finally moved against the communists when he fulfilled his pledge to license political parties. When the ICP’s applied for a license he rejected it and instead approved a “fictitious Communist Party” that had “no organisation or members”.²¹¹ When word of this development reached Washington in late March, the SCI was upbeat about its implications. However, there were other

²⁰⁷ NSC, “Meeting of Special Committee on Iraq,” December 8, 1959 (EPL/PHF/2), pp.1-4.

²⁰⁸ CIA, “Short-Term Prospects for Iraq,” SNIE 36.2-5-59, December 15, 1959 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc. 210), pp.496-9.

²⁰⁹ Dann (1969), p.254-55,

²¹⁰ CIA, “The Iraqi Situation,” SM 28-60, May 24, 1960 (EPL/PHF/1), pp.1-9.

²¹¹ Sluglett (2001), p.74. Barzani’s Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the National Democratic Party (NDP) were also issued licenses.

favourable developments as well: the military had reasserted its influence and was in firm control; a number of pro-communist officers had been dismissed; measures had been taken to restore confidence in the economy; and the Iraqis had begun to show interest in establishing cultural and business agreements with America. On the negative side, Qasim continued his support for al-Mahdawi. Taken together, these developments help confirm State's view that a "policy of friendship, non-involvement and being ready to help if asked was beginning to pay off."²¹² On March 24, Gordon Gray informed the NSC of the SCI's encouraging conclusions.²¹³ Indicative that the Iraqi crisis had passed, this was the last time the SCI would convene.

Throughout April the U.S. continued to see encouraging signs that Iraq had stabilized. On April 7, Deputy Director of Central Intelligence Charles Cabell informed the NSC that the Iraqi army had crushed a number of communist instigated strikes with Qasim's support and Iraqi officials informed the U.S. embassy of Iraq's interest in bids by Western firms on its development program.²¹⁴ These developments led to the CIA to revise its SNIE in May to conclude that while it "seems unlikely that Qasim's tightrope act can go on indefinitely," the "surface calm" in Iraq "belies some short-term predictions of impending crises that were plausible on occasion last year." Certainly Qasim's continued reliance on the army was an encouraging sign and seemed to be "primarily responsible for this tenuous stability." Should this arrangement prevail, the CIA concluded, it was unlikely any spectacular developments would take place in Iraq in the next six months. The only uncertainty was Qasim's assassination.²¹⁵ When the CIA reassessed the situation again in July it reached the same conclusions.²¹⁶ In short, by the summer of 1960, the U.S. had

²¹² NSC, "Meeting of Special Committee on Iraq," March 25, 1960 (EPL/PHF/1), pp.1-4. The SCI also held meetings on January 4 and 12, but the records are heavily redacted. For details, see *ibid.*, January 4, 1960 and January 12, 1960.

²¹³ Memorandum of Discussion of the 438th Meeting of the NSC, March 24, 1960 (EPL/Whitman File/NSC Records/Box 11).

²¹⁴ FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.218, p.510.

²¹⁵ "The Iraqi Situation," May 24, 1960, *Op.Cit.*, pp.1-9.

²¹⁶ CIA, "Current Prospects for Iraq," SM 42-60, July 12, 1960 (EPL/PHF/1), p.1.

concluded the communist crisis that had gripped Iraq following the revolution had finally passed.²¹⁷

At this point, the Eisenhower administration turned its attention toward preparing the transition to the new administration of John F. Kennedy, who defeated Richard Nixon on November 8, 1960. As part of the transition, the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB) drew up plans for the region and Iraq for the new administration in mid-December. Regionally, the plans reflected the Eisenhower administration's traditional policy of denying Soviet penetration into the area and securing continued cheap oil. With respect to Iraq, the OCB recommended the U.S. "continue efforts to develop firm but friendly relations with the Iraq Government." Next, because Iraq appeared to have stabilized, the OCB believed Iraq's suspicions of U.S. intentions could "continue to diminish" and the new administration should "make every effort to develop contacts, both official and unofficial, with personalities of the regime and other individuals of potential political importance." Third, if Iraq requested U.S. cooperation, the OCB advised giving "prompt and friendly consideration," though depending on the prevailing situation. Fourth, since restoring the Iraqi confidence in the U.S. was crucial, the OCB recommended the United States Information Service (USIS) establish personal contacts and develop cultural programs, including language programs and exchanges, in a "discreet and unostentatious" manner. Finally, if the internal power structure shifts in a manner that brings a pro-Western regime, "the U.S. should be prepared promptly to support it and to take advantage of this opportunity to strengthen its position in the area."²¹⁸ With transitional guidance in place for U.S. policy toward Iraq, the Eisenhower administration was confident the incoming administration would be on the right track.

²¹⁷ See CIA, "The Outlook for Iraq," SM 60-60, September 22, 1960 (EPL/PHF/1), pp.1-15, which concluded, "On balance we believe that the Qasim regime will continue in power during the coming year."

²¹⁸ NSC, "Operations Plan for Iraq," December 14, 1960 (FRUS/1958-60/XII/doc.223), pp.524-6.

Conclusion

Prior to Iraq's revolution, U.S. policy towards the region was premised on two objectives, maintaining access to oil and denying Soviet influence. At the time, the U.S. viewed Arab nationalism as an ideological force that, if harnessed, could be used to advance both these goals. The Iraqi coup created exacerbated ongoing challenges to U.S. interests, forcing it to intervene in Lebanon and support a similar British military operation in Jordan to shore up the West's remaining allies. However, the U.S. stopped short of intervening in Iraq due to concerns that military action might spark a regional war and push the Iraqi regime toward the Soviet Union. Soon thereafter, the U.S. recognized the new regime and adopted a policy of maintaining friendly relations, acquiescing to Iraq's withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact, considering limited military sales, and encouraging friendly elements within the country in November 1958. So long as nationalists were in power, the U.S. could accept the Qasim regime.

The power struggle that emerged in the fall of 1958, which pitted Qasim and his communist allies against Nasser-inspired nationalists, raised concerns among U.S. officials that the Soviets could leapfrog over America's containment shield to establish a presence simultaneously in three key regions: the Levant, Gulf, and Indian Ocean. The basis of these concerns was the return of the troublesome Kurdish nationalist from exile in the Soviet Union, Mulla Mustafa Barzani; the establishment of a Soviet-Iraqi arms-supply relationship; and Qasim's increasing reliance on the ICP for support against the nationalists. While the first two factors are reasons for concern, it seems the U.S. overestimated the ICP's relationship with Moscow. This was because by this point in the Cold War the Soviets had actively worked through local communist groups to manipulate and shape events (i.e., Eastern Europe and East Asia).²¹⁹ This was not the case in Iraq, where the ICP appeared to be influenced but not controlled by Moscow.

²¹⁹ See Leffler and Westad, *Cambridge History of the Cold War: Volume I* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

The Eisenhower administration's fear of Soviet encroachment in Iraq led it to engage Nasser to avert a communist takeover. The U.S. government was split on this question. Eisenhower favoured working with Nasser, while Foster Dulles advised caution, arguing the U.S. was not knowledgeable enough in Iraqi affairs to entrust a foreigner—let alone Nasser—with advancing U.S. policy.

Another problem was that the American perception of the situation in Iraq differed significantly from that of its allies, Britain and Israel. While the U.S. assessed events in terms of the Cold War, the British and Israelis were still angry about the Suez Crisis and wanted to check Nasser's rising influence in the region. Because both opposed its flirtation with Nasser, the Eisenhower administration opted to cut them off from their internal deliberations. This disputes Blackwell's argument that Britain and the U.S. held a "common perception" of the communist threat to Iraq during this period.²²⁰

The Eisenhower administration's fear of communism in Iraq peaked in the spring of 1959 following the crushing of the nationalists after the Mosul rising. At this point, the Eisenhower administration was split on how to respond. Like before, Eisenhower wanted to work with Nasser, Allen Dulles was uncertain this would work, and the State Department worried that Nasser's actions could push Qasim further toward the Soviets. This uncertainty led the NSC to establish the SCI to assess America's options and prevent a communist takeover. But it was evident that the SCI was just as split over how to act as the NSC was, with State preferring a cautious approach, while CIA and Defense wanted to take aggressive action. Even so, the SCI devised a wide range of options, including covert and military action, which "horrified" the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq. He persuaded the administration successfully to press Nasser into modifying his propaganda campaign against Iraq to focus not on Qasim but the communists and to continue engaging in contingency planning against the possibility of a communist takeover. Ultimately, the cautious approach won out and proved successful in the long-term, especially after the ICP contributed to a coup attempt and massacre at Kirkuk in July, which led Qasim to

²²⁰ Blackwell (1999), p.2.

move against it. With the communist threat apparently checked by 1960, Iraq endured a period of relative stability, leading U.S. officials to conclude the crisis was over.

It is clear from the evidence presented here that America's decisions and actions throughout 1958-59 were driven by its perception of the Soviet Union's influence inside Iraq.²²¹ As the Soviets appeared to gain influence over the Qasim regime, the U.S. took clear steps to counter it, as dictated by America's established containment strategy. This chapter makes clear that beginning in late-1958 Washington viewed Baghdad as part of its Cold War competition with Moscow and was determined to block any further Soviet advances. It has also shown that Britain and the U.S. did not share a "common perception" of the communist threat and that claims that the U.S. was involved in the Ba'th Party's assassination attempt on Qasim in October 1959 cannot be substantiated from the primary evidence.²²²

²²¹ Ashton (1993), pp.59-89; Fain (2008), pp.96, 101-5; and Hahn (2012), pp.40-44.

²²² Citano (2006), pp.255-60; Morris (2003), p.A29; and Sale (2003).

Chapter 2: Kennedy and the Qasim Regime

January 1961—February 1963

The following chapter examines the John F. Kennedy administration's policy toward Iraq during the second half of the Abd al'Karim Qasim regime. Even though Iraq had stabilized during 1960, throughout 1961-62 it became embroiled in a series of crises, which eventually led to Qasim's overthrow by the Ba'th Party in February 1963. It will be argued that unlike other contemporary Cold War battlegrounds, like Berlin, Cuba, and Vietnam, the Kennedy administration did not view Iraq as a significant Cold War contest. Consequently, it disestablished an interagency committee monitoring Iraq despite a series of crises, and did not allocate adequate resources to assess the ongoing situation, and downplayed a series of indicators suggesting Iraq threatened U.S. interests in the region. In the end, it was not until Iraq downgraded diplomatic relations with the U.S. unilaterally in June 1962 that the Kennedy administration realized its importance. At this point, the administration accepted the State Department's warnings retroactively and adopted an aggressive multi-prong response, including both diplomatic pressure and covert action.

Overall, the historiography of the Kennedy administration's policy toward the Qasim regime is limited to works detailing specific aspects of U.S. policy, like the Kuwait crisis, Kurdish War, and the CIA's efforts to overthrow Qasim. Unfortunately, none of these works examine this period in depth. In terms of U.S.-Iraqi relations, Hahn argued the Kennedy administration's policy toward Iraq was "low key" before the February 1963 coup and aimed at maintaining friendly relations.²²³ This fits with Ashton and Fain's works on the Kuwait Crisis, which both argue the American role was minimal.²²⁴ Next, Little's analysis of the U.S. policy toward the Kurds claims

²²³ Hahn (2012), pp.44-48.

²²⁴ Nigel Ashton, "Britain and the Kuwaiti Crisis, 1961," *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 9/1 (1998), pp.163-81; W. Taylor Fain, "John F. Kennedy and Harold Macmillan: Managing the 'Special Relationship' in the Persian Gulf Region, 1961-63," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 38/4 (2002), pp.95-122.

the Kennedy administration encouraged the outbreak of the Kurdish War as part of a Cold War strategy to tie up the Qasim regime.²²⁵ However, evidence unearthed from the Soviet archives by Vladislav Zubok challenges Little's claim, suggesting the outbreak of the Kurdish War was part of a Soviet plan.²²⁶ Finally, scholars, former U.S. officials, and journalists have claimed the CIA was behind the Ba'th Party's February 1963 coup that overthrew the Qasim regime,²²⁷ but Hahn disputes this notion, pointing out that it is not supported by U.S. documents.²²⁸ As a result of recently declassified documents and interviews with former U.S. officials, many of the discrepancies about the Kennedy administration's policy toward Iraq can be clarified.

I

The source of the Kennedy administration's problem with Iraq stems from the decision to disestablish the SCI within days of John F. Kennedy's presidential inauguration. On January 23, 1961, Phillip Halla, the NSC staff member who served as the SCI's secretary, sent James Lay, the NSC's executive secretary, a memo outlining the debate surrounding the question. Key arguments for disestablishment were that no meeting had been held since March 1960, Iraq appeared to have stabilized, and the communist threat was not as menacing as Cuba, Laos, or Vietnam, and therefore did not necessitate a special committee. However, the SCI's principal members held mixed views. While Defense had no firm opinion, State and CIA favoured continuing since it allowed U.S. officials to monitor events in a troublesome country. Another reason for the SCI's continuation, according to a CIA official, was that it provided a forum where ideas could be advanced with a better chance of acceptance than in bilateral talks with State alone. Furthermore, because of Iraq's instability the CIA felt it was important to have an interagency mechanism in place to respond rapidly in the event of renewed crisis. And just because the communist threat had subsided, the CIA was not convinced it was gone altogether. Halla then

²²⁵ Little (2010), p.68.

²²⁶ Zubok (1994), pp.28-29.

²²⁷ Coughlin (2004), pp.38-39; Little (2004), pp.694-96; Morris (2003), p.A29; and Sale (2003).

²²⁸ Hahn (2012), p.48.

noted a recent SNIE that concluded that Qasim still faced threats from nationalists and the military, which meant a successful coup could provide communists elements an opportunity to seize power. Despite these valid arguments, the committee was doomed because Kennedy's national security advisor, McGeorge Bundy, did not see the relevance of keeping the committee in existence.²²⁹ In hindsight, the disestablishment of the SCI was a clear mistake and it would take three successive crises in 1961—the Kuwait Crisis in June, the outbreak of the Kurdish War in September, and the expropriation of the IPC's concessionary holding in December—for the Kennedy administration to finally grasp that Iraq necessitated much more attention than it was receiving.

The first crisis began on June 25, 1961 when Qasim declared Kuwait was “an indivisible part of Iraq” and mobilized troops along the border. The catalyst for this action was that Britain had granted Kuwait independence on June 19 and withdrew its military forces. State Department officials noted Iraq was “advancing an old Iraqi claim, but one that has not in the past received much support from other Arab states and has had no recognition from the world at large.”²³⁰ While U.S. oil companies owned a 50% stake in the Kuwait Oil Company, Britain's interests in Kuwait were more significant, since its economy was dependent on Kuwaiti oil.²³¹ Even so, the U.S. response to the Kuwait Crisis was muted by comparison to Britain's. Indeed, Hahn was correct when describing the U.S. response was “low-key”.²³² As Fain observed, the Kennedy administration was hesitant about “identification with British action in Kuwait” because it could jeopardize the image “of a progressive anti-colonial power trying to work productively with Arab nationalism.”²³³ While Britain responded by sending 5,000 troops to Kuwait on July 1, in what was known as Operation Vantage, Kennedy dispatched a U.S. Navy task force toward Bahrain only to recall it when the situation stabilized.²³⁴ Diplomatically, the U.S. preferred to

²²⁹ NSC, Halla to Lay, “Future of Special Committee on Iraq,” January 23, 1961 (EPL/PHF/1), pp.1-2.

²³⁰ Department of State (DoS), Memorandum, Elwood to Strong, “Iraqi Claim to Kuwait,” June 26, 1961 (FRUS/1961-63/XVII/doc.66), pp.159-62.

²³¹ Fain (2008), p.58.

²³² Hahn (2012), p.47.

²³³ Fain (2002), pp.105.

²³⁴ Hahn (2012), p.47.

take the matter to the United Nations, believing a multilateral framework would allow the Arab states to support efforts to counter Qasim without feeling coerced.²³⁵ The British agreed and took the matter to the Security Council on July 1 but the resolution was vetoed by the Soviet Union.²³⁶

The crisis was not resolved until October when the British withdrew and were replaced by an Arab League force.²³⁷ In addition, a former CIA official claims Qasim was paid a \$50-60 million bribe in exchange for allowing Britain to withdraw.²³⁸ Where this money came from is unknown, but in December 1961 Robert Komer, who was a senior NSC staff member and Kennedy's advisor on Middle Eastern affairs, and Ambassador Jernegan had concluded "Kuwait's independence can only be assured if [the] Ruler uses his fantastic oil revenues to buy support from other Arab leaders, particularly Nasser and Jordanians." In other words, Kuwait would need to buy its safety.²³⁹ Ultimately, the Kennedy administration's preference to defer to Britain on regional matters, like the Kuwait Crisis, underscores the low priority the Gulf region was for the United States.

However, just as the Kuwait crisis was unfolding in the south of Iraq, a second crisis was brewing in the Kurdish region of northern Iraq. After returning from exile in 1958, Qasim had promised Mulla Mustafa Barzani that he would implement Kurdish autonomy in northern Iraq. But by 1961 the government had taken no steps toward implementing this program, leading Barzani to leave Baghdad earlier in the year to return to his family's stronghold in the north. Before long, age-old rivalries and blood-feuds led to skirmishes with rival tribes. On April 13, the U.S. Intelligence Board warned Allen Dulles—who Kennedy maintained in his position as Director of Central Intelligence until November 1961—"the laxity of the Qasim regime had permitted long-standing tribal feuds to rise to the surface, and that the chances of rioting in the towns and some intertribal fighting on a modest scale were

²³⁵ Fain (2002), pp.105-6.

²³⁶ See Editorial Note, FRUS/1961-63/XVII/doc.80, p.179.

²³⁷ Fain (2002), p.106.

²³⁸ Email correspondence with CIA official, December 24, 2011.

²³⁹ NSC, Memorandum, Komer to Bundy, December 29, 1961 (FRUS/1961-63/XVII/doc.156), p.380.

better than even.” This warning went unheeded and, as the CIA later acknowledged, was far “too optimistic”.²⁴⁰

Throughout the summer of 1961, tensions in Kurdistan escalated and by late June, one U.S. official described northern Iraq as, “bordering on Ottoman Empire anarchy.”²⁴¹ Starting in mid-July, Barzani began to settle old scores with neighbouring tribes,²⁴² while the government remained passive to the violence.²⁴³ Due to the regime’s inaction, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP)²⁴⁴ sent Qasim a “sharply-worded” letter in mid-August demanding the removal of “unfriendly Arab officials” and government troops from the region; the transfer of Kurdish officials back to the north; that Kurdish be used as the official language in the Kurdish areas; political freedom; and the reinstatement of Kurdish newspapers.²⁴⁵ As a CIA official later recalled, this declaration marked the point when war between Iraq and the Kurds was inevitable.²⁴⁶

Throughout August, U.S. officials in Iran and Iraq warned the State Department a rebellion was about to break out in Iraqi Kurdistan that could destabilize the entire region. Few in Washington took any notice. On August 5, the U.S. Consulate in Tabriz warned that Iran and Turkey had begun arming Barzani’s rivals and were encouraging them to attack.²⁴⁷ When this occurred, it was Barzani that emerged victorious, making him the dominant military power in the north.²⁴⁸ Within days, the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad reported that senior Iraqi officials were pondering whether an “effective deterrent” would be to bomb Kurdish villages.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁰ CIA, “Unrest in Iraqi Kurdistan,” SM 52-61, September 13, 1961 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq.Kurds-1961-63), p.1.

²⁴¹ Ibid., p.1.

²⁴² Ibid., p.1. See also Tabriz A-12 to State, “A Current Assessment of Kurdish Tribal Strength in Northeast Iraq,” August 5, 1961 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/Iraq 1960-January 1963/Internal & Foreign Affairs/Microfilm/Reel 2 of 13/ 787.00/8-561), pp.1-2. Herein referred to by location (NARA), record group, microfilm roll number (i.e., Reel 2 = R-2), and the alpha numeric reference code (i.e. 787.00/8-561).

²⁴³ Baghdad 67 to State, July 28, 1961 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/7-2861), p.1.

²⁴⁴ The KDP was a Kurdish nationalist organization founded in 1946 during the Mahabad Republic.

²⁴⁵ Baghdad A-124 to State, August 12, 1961 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/8-1261), pp.1-2.

²⁴⁶ Email correspondence with CIA official, November 3, 2011.

²⁴⁷ Tabriz 2 to State, August 5, 1961 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/8-561), p.1.

²⁴⁸ Tabriz A-19 to State, “Information from Rashid Beg Herki Re: developments in Northern Iraq,” August 17, 1961 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/8-1761-CS), pp.1-3.

²⁴⁹ Baghdad 88 to State, August 11, 1961 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/8-1161), p.1. See also Tabriz A-25 to State, “Information from Mahabad and Bukan Regarding Developments in Iraqi Kurdistan,” August 26, 1961 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/8-2661), p.2.

Then, on August 31, the embassy sent Washington a detailed report warning that some Kurds were planning actions aimed at provoking a military response from the Iraqi regime, which could then be used to justify warfare in self-defense and to internationalize their plight. As the embassy pointed out:

[The] Kurds may have realized that the United Nations and the great powers are more likely to respond to dramatic situations where there is evidence that trouble, dissatisfaction, or potential crisis exist than they are to take an interest in an affair before it reaches the stage of trouble.²⁵⁰

At the start of September 1961, U.S. officials in Tabriz reported a group of Kurds, not affiliated with Barzani, had seized control of a key road. This development presented the Iraqi regime with two options: 1) granting the Kurds autonomy or 2) dealing with them by force.²⁵¹ But Washington ignored these actions throughout August and early September. A CIA official stationed in Tabriz recalled sending CIA headquarters a warning about an imminent insurrection in northern Iraq. When he heard nothing back, he made some inquiries only to find his warning had not been disseminated because “analysts in Washington thought it improbable that a band of ill-armed tribesmen could challenge a modern army”.²⁵² Unsatisfied with this conclusion, he pressed senior CIA officials to circulate a staff memorandum on September 13, but by then the insurrection had already begun.²⁵³

On September 10, a group of non-Barzani Kurds ambushed and massacred an Iraqi army column.²⁵⁴ Fighting was so intense the Iraqi Air Force (IAF) was called in to save the beleaguered troops.²⁵⁵ Another ambush occurred two days later, killing twenty-three,²⁵⁶ and when faced with the loss of the north, Qasim ordered the

²⁵⁰ Baghdad A-191 to State, “Qassem’s Kurdish Problem,” August 31, 1961 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/8-3161), pp.1-3.

²⁵¹ Tabriz A-26 to State, “The Kurdish Movement in Iraq as Seen from Mahabad,” September 3, 1961 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/9-361), pp.1-4.

²⁵² Email correspondence with CIA official, November 29, 2011.

²⁵³ “Unrest in Iraqi Kurdistan,” September 13, 1961, *Op.Cit.*, p.3.

²⁵⁴ Baghdad 145 to State, September 11, 1961 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/9-1161), p.1; and McDowell, p. 310.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.1.

²⁵⁶ Baghdad A-245 to State, “Qassim Accuses British and Americans of Complicity in Kurdish Revolt; Exonerates USSR; Dissolves Kurdish Democratic Party,” September 27, 1961 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/9-2761), p.2.

mobilization of ground and air forces. On September 14 the IAF commenced the systematic bombing of the north, targeting Kurdish villages.²⁵⁷ Up to this point Barzani had managed to stay out of the conflict, but this changed on September 19 when Qasim ordered the bombing of Barzan.²⁵⁸ In response, Barzani joined the fight, bringing with him his knowledge of guerrilla warfare and a cadre of Soviet-trained, seasoned warriors.²⁵⁹

Just as the revolt began, the Kennedy administration was preoccupied with events in Europe. The Soviets had just sparked the Berlin Crisis with the construction of the Berlin Wall. At the time, officials in Washington had little reason to suspect the outbreak of the Kurdish War and the Berlin Crisis were connected, when in fact they were. According to Vladislav Zubok, the Kurdish uprising, while indigenous, fit with a Soviet strategy devised in July 1961 aimed at distracting the U.S. and its allies from its maneuvering in Berlin. In an article published in 1994, Zubok cites a memo from KGB chief Alexander Shelepin to Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev on July 29, 1961, that recommended creating crises “in various areas of the world which would favor dispersion of attention and forces by the USA and their satellites, and would tie them down during the settlement of the question of a German peace treaty and West Berlin.”²⁶⁰

After listing the options for causing trouble in the rest of the world, Shelepin turned to the Middle East. He planned “to cause uncertainty in government circles of the USA, England, Turkey, and Iran about the stability of their positions in the Middle and Near East” by using the KGB’s old connections to Barzani “to activate the movement of the Kurdish population of Iraq, Iran, and Turkey for creation of an independent Kurdistan that would include the provinces of aforementioned

²⁵⁷ “Unrest in Iraqi Kurdistan,” September 13, 1961, *Op.Cit.*, p.3; Tabriz 5 to State, September 15, 1961 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/9-1561), p.1; and Basra A-26 to State, “American assistance to Kurdish separatist movement in Iraq,” September 16, 1961 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/9-1661), p.1. For a more detailed discussion on the start of the revolt, see Tabriz A-30 to State, “The Iraqi Kurdish Situation as Seen From Kermanshah, Sanandaj, and Mahabad,” September 16, 1961 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/9-1661), p.3.

²⁵⁸ Baghdad 162 to State, September 19, 1961 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/9-1961), p.1. Eagleton confirmed that Iraqi forces had attacked Barzan in Tabriz 7 to State, September 24 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/9-2461), p.1.

²⁵⁹ DoS, INR, “The Kurdish Revolt: A Critical Challenge to Qasim,” RNA-21, April 11, R 1962 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq.Kurds-1961-63),

²⁶⁰ Zubok (1994), pp.28-29.

countries.” Just as in 1946, Shelepin believed a push for an independent Kurdistan would “evoke serious concern among Western powers and first of all in England regarding [their access to] oil in Iraq and Iran, and also in the United States regarding its military bases in Turkey” and create difficulties for Qasim, “who [had] begun to conduct a pro-Western policy, especially in recent time.” To this end, Shelepin proposed providing Barzani with arms and money.²⁶¹

While this account fits with the narrative that followed, the Soviet scheme failed to anticipate the Kennedy administration would not be interested in Iraq or its Kurdish population or to realize Barzani neither trusted the Soviets nor intended to act as their agent. Nevertheless, Zubok’s assertion that the Soviets intended to use Barzani as a pawn to distract the U.S. from the crisis in Europe and the Kennedy administration’s ignoring of repeated warnings of an imminent Kurdish insurrection, challenges Douglas Little’s claim that the U.S. played a role in encouraging the outbreak of the Kurdish War.²⁶²

Throughout the fall of 1961, both the Qasim regime and the Kurds tried to portray the conflict in Cold War terms. For instance, at a press conference on September 23 Qasim sought to implicate the U.S. in the revolt, describing the Kurds of being “American stooges,” while exonerating the Soviet Union of any wrongdoing.²⁶³ Meanwhile, in early October a group of Kurds approached the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad to seek assistance in fighting the regime. This was the first instance of such a request. The Kurds argued the U.S. had a moral obligation to help the Kurds since it “supports causes of liberty and justice” and suggested that Kurdistan would join CENTO and be a “bulwark against the Soviet Union” if it were to become independent. To this, the embassy officer, James Atkins, discouraged the Kurds from revolting and said as a matter of policy the U.S. could not involve itself in Iraq’s internal affairs, a policy that would be applied to the Kurdish War until 1972.²⁶⁴ Nevertheless, these two examples show how at an early stage both Qasim

²⁶¹ Ibid., pp.28-29.

²⁶² Little (2010), p.68.

²⁶³ Baghdad A-245, September 27, 1961, *Op.Cit.*, pp.1-3.

²⁶⁴ Baghdad 177 to State, September 29, 1961 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/9-2961), pp.1-2. For a more detailed account of the discussion see Baghdad A-258 to State, “Kurdish Nationalists Approach Embassy,” October 4, 1961 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/10-461), attachment, pp.1-3.

and the Kurds sought to portray the conflict in Cold War terms in order to win external support for their position.

The fighting season in Kurdistan ended with the onset of winter. The harsh wintery conditions high up in the Zagros Mountains made them unsuited for conventional warfare, but ideal for the guerrilla, alpine warfare operations, of which the Kurds were masters. So when Iraq's offensive ground to a halt, the Kurds began to extract their revenge,²⁶⁵ and by late-November, Barzani had cut off the remaining Iraqi forces, inflicting heavy losses, and capturing the equipment of at least two Iraqi regiments.²⁶⁶ Fighting continued into 1962, and by the end of March, Barzani was in firm control of all of Kurdistan, though barring the major city centers, such as Sulaimaniya, out of fear of government retaliation against civilians.²⁶⁷

Throughout this period a clear U.S. policy toward the conflict was absent. While Hahn explains the Kennedy administration's muted response to the Kurdish War stemmed from a "desire to maintain sound relations with Baghdad,"²⁶⁸ the reality was that the U.S. did not perceive Iraq as relevant in the Cold War at a time when crises in Berlin, Cuba, Vietnam, or even Kuwait took precedence.

The third, and perhaps most significant crisis from an American perspective, occurred in December 1961, when the Iraqi regime passed Public Law 80, which restricted the IPC's concessionary areas (i.e., the area in which the company could pump oil) to areas where oil was actually being produced. In effect, Iraq expropriated 99.5% of the IPC's concession.²⁶⁹ The catalyst for Iraq's action related to the Kuwaiti question. On November 30, Egypt sponsored a Security Council resolution requesting Kuwait's admittance to the UN as a member state. At the time, Iraq warned it would downgrade diplomatic relations with any state recognizing Kuwait. Few took notice, including the U.S., which had already done so. At the UN, the U.S. supported the resolution, but it came to nothing as the Soviets vetoed it in

²⁶⁵ Tabriz 14 to State, November 1, 1961 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/11-161), pp.1-2.

²⁶⁶ Tabriz 18 to State, January 12, 1962 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/1-1262), p.1.

²⁶⁷ Baghdad D-635 to State, "Kurdish Revolt Reportedly Increases in Intensity; Qassim Offers Kurds "Last Chance"; Kurdish Propaganda Attacks Qasim," April 3, 1962 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/4-362), pp.1-3.

²⁶⁸ Hahn (2012), p.48.

²⁶⁹ *New York Times*, "Iraq Restricting Oil Concession," December 12, 1961, p.70.

order to gain favour with Baghdad.²⁷⁰ Because of Western support for the Kuwait resolution at the UN, the Iraqi regime retaliated by passing Public Law 80, which resolved an ongoing dispute it had had with the ICP after talks broke down in mid-October. Since then, the regime had been threatening “legal action” and Kuwait’s bid at the UN gave a perfect reason to act.²⁷¹

U.S. officials were alarmed by Iraq’s expropriation of the IPC concessionary area and the Soviet veto, since these moves suggested a degree of coordination. This prompted Assistant Secretary of State for NEA Phillips Talbot to send Under Secretary of State George Ball a memo on December 18 calling attention to the situation. While noting Iraq had been drifting away from the Soviets since early 1960, Talbot suggested this trend had reversed and “a new phase” in the Soviet-Iraqi relations “may have been opened.” He warned, “Iraq has moved increasingly toward the Soviet Bloc in the conduct of Iraqi political and economic affairs and in its propaganda position.” Another troubling sign was that the Iraqi regime had “taken several steps” to strengthen the communists’ internal position. This led Talbot to conclude, “the situation in Iraq ... appears to be returning to something like the post-revolutionary period in 1958 and 1959, during which there was great alarm that Iraq was going communist.” Even so, Talbot was convinced maintaining a policy of engagement with the regime was vital and U.S. oil firms, which held a 23.75% stake in the company,²⁷² could “retaliate against and place other pressures on Iraq.” To this, Talbot warned:

[The U.S.] must resist firmly all efforts to force us to undertake intervention of any type in the internal affairs of Iraq unless and until it is clear that the domestic communists stand to gain control of Iraq in absence of such intervention.

This was because, “short of direct military action, whether by U.S. forces alone or in conjunction with others or by Iraq’s neighbors to the West (Turkey, Iran, Jordan and Saudi Arabia), [they lacked] effective means of achieving a reversal in Iraqi policy.”

²⁷⁰ Kathleen Teltsch, “Soviet Vetoes Seat In U.N. for Kuwait,” *New York Times*, December 1, 1961, p.1.

²⁷¹ *New York Times*, “Oil Negotiations Collapse in Iraq,” October 12, 1961, p.49.

²⁷² See CIA, “Some Implications of Iraq’s Oil Nationalization,” IM 72-92, June 1972 (FRUS/1969-76/E-4/doc.311), p.2.

In short, Talbot's memo represented a clear warning to his superiors that they needed to start paying attention to the situation in Iraq.²⁷³

The Kennedy administration's approach to the three crises of 1961 is puzzling. While U.S. officials recognized the growing Soviet threat to Iraq and had pressed their superiors to take notice, little came of this. The fact that Talbot compared the situation in Iraq at the end of 1961 to the 1958-59 crisis was significant, and yet his message went unnoticed for another two months. At a time when the Kennedy administration was taking a hard line on Soviet subversion elsewhere, the low-key response to the Kuwait Crisis, the Kurdish War, and the IPC's nationalization seems perplexing. There are three plausible explanations for this. First, at the time of the Iraqi crises, the Kennedy administration was intensely focused on what it perceived as the more important Cold War contests in Europe, East Asia, and Latin America. Second, the U.S. viewed Iraq as part of the British sphere of influence and was therefore hesitant about involving itself more closely. Finally, by the time Iraq again became relevant in terms of the Cold War, the Kennedy administration was already in the process of developing an interagency group focusing on problems just of this kind, known as the Special Group (Counter-Insurgency or CI).

II

From early 1962 onward, the Kennedy administration's policy toward Iraq shifted away from the Eisenhower administration's "wait and see" policy to one of engagement and covert action. This was driven by two factors. First, a recognition among senior Kennedy administration officials of the need to adopt a more aggressive policy to counter Soviet moves in Europe, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Second, Iraq's expropriation of the IPC's concessionary holding convinced the Kennedy administration the Qasim regime posed a threat to U.S. interests. These conclusions led to the adoption of a dual track approach (i.e., overt and covert) to Iraq, where the State Department reassessed its policy toward Iraq,

²⁷³ DoS, Memorandum, Talbot to Ball, "Situation Developing in Iraq," December 18, 1961 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/12-1861), pp.1-3.

focusing on engagement, fostering friendly relations and keeping open the possibility of improving relations with the troublesome regime, while the CIA sought Qasim's overthrow and his replacement with a regime more friendly to U.S. interests. This argument challenges Hahn's assertion that the Kennedy administration "resist[ed] any temptation to intervene covertly against Qasim."²⁷⁴

On January 18, 1962 the National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 124 established the Special Group (CI). Of its four functions, two are particularly relevant. The first was to insure "proper recognition [throughout] the U.S. Government that subversive insurgency ... [was] a major form of politico-military conflict equal in importance to conventional warfare." The second was:

To insure the development of adequate interdepartmental programs aimed at preventing or defeating subversive insurgency and indirect aggression in countries and regions specifically assigned to the Special Group (CI) by the President, and to resolve any interdepartmental problems which might impede their implementation.

This meant the Kennedy administration intended to use the Special Group (CI) as a central interagency group, discussing, agreeing upon, and directing all covert actions. NSAM 124 specifically identified South Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand as areas to focus on,²⁷⁵ but a number of former CIA officials have suggested Iraq was added to the list.²⁷⁶

It was not until early 1962 that the White House began to recognize Iraq's significance in the Cold War. For instance, despite the IPC's expropriation in December 1961, it was not until mid-February 1962 that the White House asked State to bring it up to speed on Iraq. The request, put forward by Komer, seemed abrupt, since no new developments had taken place inside Iraq since late 1961. There are two possible explanations for this. First, the White House had finally recognized Soviet encroachment on Iraq, or secondly, Talbot's fear about pressure

²⁷⁴ Hahn (2012), p.47.

²⁷⁵ White House, "National Security Action Memorandum No. 124," January 18, 1962 (FRUS/1961-63/II/doc.26), pp.48-50.

²⁷⁶ See Harry Rositzke, *The CIA's Secret Operations: Espionage, Counterespionage, and Covert Action* (New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1977), pp.108-10; and Interview with James Critchfield, Public Broadcasting Service. Available online: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/saddam/interviews/critchfield.html>.

from U.S. oil companies had become reality. Either way, State forwarded Talbot's memo to the White House on February 15.²⁷⁷

In April 1962, after months of review, the Department of State issued policy guidelines for Iraq. The policy objectives consisted of preserving Iraq's position outside the Soviet bloc; continuing the availability of Iraq's oil to non-communist consumers; and maintaining correct relations with the Iraqi government. In the short-term, the U.S. wanted to 1) expand private and commercial ties with Iraq, including the provision of competent design and construction contractors, and become a purchaser of Iraqi exports; 2) serve as Iraq's primary source of "modern and progressive technical, cultural, and social principles and techniques"; and 3) convince Iraq to help "protect friendly nations from covert or overt aggression from external sources without impingements on national sovereignty." In the long-term, the U.S. wished to see a "progressive government devoting itself to peaceful domestic and regional development and relations, mindful of, and helpful in, achieving the basic Western aims in international affairs."²⁷⁸

To achieve these objectives, the State Department outlined political, psychological, economic, and military lines of action. Politically, the U.S. had to convince Iraq its policy was based on friendship and mutual interests and was capable of helping to improve Iraq's economic and social development under conditions that would maintain its sovereignty. The U.S. also needed to encourage Iraq to seek a mutually acceptable solution to its dispute with Iran over the Shatt al-Arab waterway—an issue that would be a major source of friction in Iran-Iraq relations. On the question of Kuwait, the U.S. would maintain its policy of recognition and encourage Arab states to "make clear to Iraq the risks of any aggression aimed at seizing Kuwait's territory." Psychologically, the U.S. needed to take steps to restore Iraq's confidence in America by increasing personal contacts, cultural activities (particularly English-language and exchange programs), and expanding the United States Information Service (USIS) library in Baghdad.

²⁷⁷ DoS, Memorandum, Battle to Bundy, "Situation in Iraq," February 15, 1962 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/2-1562), p.1.

²⁷⁸ DoS, "Guidelines for Policy and Operations: Iraq," April 1962 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117/Iraq. 1961-62), pp.8-14.

Economically, the U.S. would respond favourably to any Iraqi requests for Western assistance, with an emphasis on promoting “economic growth and the welfare of the populace and not exclusively toward the security of the regime.” Finally, on military measures, the U.S. should consider, “on its merits, each request by Iraq for the purchase of military equipment, including spare parts and replacement items” and respond “affirmatively when possible if the Iraqis request or exhibit serious interest in expanded training of Iraqi military personnel in the United States.” In sum, the new policy was focused on improving relations, convincing Iraq the U.S. was not hostile to its interests, expanding cultural contacts to develop a basis for mutual understanding, and providing military assistance should Iraq wish to do so. Through these cautious steps, the State Department believed U.S. interests in Iraq would be maintained, while leaving open the possibility for improvement if desired.²⁷⁹

But just as State was issuing its guidelines, the Kennedy administration was pivoting toward a second track in its approach toward Iraq: covert action. The CIA’s attention focused on the two elements: the Ba’th Party and Iraq’s military. While U.S. officials believed the Ba’th was anti-communist and anti-imperialist, it was not necessarily opposed to the West.²⁸⁰ The CIA first developed an interest in the Ba’th Party around 1961. According to James Critchfield, a former chief of the CIA’s Near East Division:

In 1961 and 1962, [the CIA] increased [its] interest in the Ba'ath—not to actively support it—but politically and intellectually, we found the Ba'ath interesting. We found it particularly active in Iraq. Our analysis of the Ba’ath was that it was comparatively moderate at that time, and that the United States could easily adjust to and support its policies. So we watched the Ba’ath’s long, slow preparation to take control. They planned to do it several times, and postponed it.²⁸¹

This is supported by Henry Rositzke, a twenty-five year veteran of the CIA’s Directorate of Operation, who claimed the CIA had developed assets within the Ba’th Party in the early 1960s:

²⁷⁹ Ibid., pp.8-14.

²⁸⁰ Critchfield, *Op.Cit.*

²⁸¹ Ibid.

CIA sources were in a perfect position to follow each step of Ba'ath preparations for the Iraqi coup, which focused on making contacts with military and civilian leaders in Baghdad. The CIA's major source, in an ideal catbird seat, reported the exact time of the coup and provided a list of the new cabinet members.

More recently, Jack O'Connell, the CIA station chief in Amman from 1963 to 1971, claimed the CIA had penetrated the Iraqi wing of the Ba'th Party in the early-1960s.²⁸² He also claimed to have been a case officer for an agent with close ties to the Iraqi Ba'th.²⁸³ Therefore, by at least 1961 the CIA was interested in the Ba'th Party and had cultivated at least one high-level asset providing it with intelligence on its plans.

The CIA also targeted Iraq's military for intelligence on its Soviet-made weapons systems and to find a suitable replacement for Qasim. In the early 1960s, the CIA managed to penetrate a top-secret Iraqi-Soviet surface-to-air missile project, which offered valuable insight to the Soviet Union's ballistic missile program.²⁸⁴ According to a CIA operations officer stationed in Iran during the early 1960s, in the spring of 1962 the White House ordered the CIA to commence planning for Qasim's overthrow. The Agency entrusted Archie Roosevelt, Jr. with the operation.²⁸⁵ Roosevelt's role in the operation has been confirmed by Roger Morris, a former NSC staffer from the Johnson and Nixon administrations, who wrote in 2003 that he had "often heard CIA officers—including Archibald Roosevelt, a ranking CIA official for the Near East and Africa at the time—openly speak about their close relations with

²⁸² Jack O'Connell, *King's Counsel: A Memoir of War, Espionage, and Diplomacy in the Middle East* (London: W. W. Norton, 2012), p.20.

²⁸³ Ibid., p.48.

²⁸⁴ See CIA, "Status of the Iraq-Soviet Missile Project," TDCS-3/513,210, June 7, 1962 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117/Iraq.1961-62/doc.30), pp.1-3. The project had been ordered in October 1961 and was canceled by the new regime on May 27, 1963. See CIA, "Iraq Cancels Qasim Regime's Order for Soviet SAMs," *Central Intelligence Digest* (CID), May 27, 1963 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq-1961-63), p.4; and CIA, "Iraq Said to Be Seeking Cancellation of Soviet Missile Project," *CID*, May 7, 1963 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq-1961-63), p.2. In October 1963, Iraq entered into negotiations with the Soviets to substitute the cost of the SAM program with an equivalent value in advanced weaponry, including MIG-21s, Mig-19s, tanks, and armoured personnel carriers. See CIA, "Iraqi Negotiations to Substitute Soviet Military Equipment for Surface-to-air Missiles," TDCS-3/550,090, June 12, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box17a/Iraq-6/63-8/63/doc.6), pp.1-3.

²⁸⁵ Email correspondence with CIA official, December 24, 2011.

the Iraqi Baathists.”²⁸⁶ While the CIA was interested in the Ba’th Party, the military was its primary focus.²⁸⁷

Given the issuing of State Department’s policy guidelines in April and the testimony of a wide range of CIA officials, it is clear that in the spring of 1962 the U.S. was employing a dual track policy toward Iraq, consisting of both diplomatic engagement and covert action. This conclusion stands in contrast to Hahn’s assertion.

III

In early May 1962, U.S. officials became concerned the situation in Iraq was destabilizing and began contingency planning for Qasim’s eventual overthrow. While there is no question the NEA was monitoring Iraq closely, the numerous warnings sent up the line were not receiving the necessary attention. As a consequence, the Kennedy administration was caught completely off guard when Iraq expelled the U.S. ambassador and downgraded its relations in June.

On May 3, the NEA circulated a report concluding there had “never been a period” since the 1958 coup that Qasim’s “overthrow has not been plotted by dissident elements.” At this point, the NEA observed, Qasim was “disliked, hated and privately ridiculed by almost all sections of the Iraqi public, including apparently, growing segments of the Army.” The NEA identified five contingencies. First, should Qasim be overthrown by nationalists judged to be in control of the country with support from the public, the U.S. should consider prompt recognition. Second, should the Ba’th Party seized power, the U.S. would delay recognition until it was satisfied it was in control of the country. Third, should the Kurds withhold support for a nationalist or Ba’thist government and demand autonomy within Iraq, the U.S. should recognize the new government on the basis of the same criteria to avoid any appearance of support for Kurdish claims. Fourth, should a protracted internal conflict between communist and non-communist elements occur, the U.S. should consider covert support to anti-communist elements in consultation with the

²⁸⁶ See Morris (2003), p.A29.

²⁸⁷ Email correspondence with CIA official, December 24, 2011.

British, while avoiding intervention by the U.S. or any other Western power including Turkey and Iran. The NEA also recognized the need to keep Nasser apprised of any moves. Finally, if communists seized power, the U.S. had to determine “how best to channel or encourage what would in all probability be a reaction of deep alarm by Iraq’s neighbors.” This would include taking the matter to the UN. This report underscores how serious the NEA’s concerns were, and yet remarkably, this report, like previous warnings on Iraq, took nearly two months to reach the White House and, like before, it was only in response to a direct request for information.²⁸⁸

The situation took a precarious turn toward the end of May when the U.S. learned that Iran was reconsidering its policy toward the Kurds. This led the State Department to warn its embassy in Tehran on May 24 of “indications that important elements in the Government of Iran ... may be considering a change in basic Iranian policy from the past and present line of half-hearted opposition to the Kurdish rebellion to one of covert cooperation with the rebels.” It ordered the embassy to “approach the Iranian Government at any appropriate level (including the Foreign Office, SAVAK, or the military) and convey informally” that the U.S. was “unable to visualize any possible Iranian interests to be served by taking sides in a dispute between [the] Government [of] Iraq and Iraqi Kurds.” While recognizing Iran’s “almost uncontrollable ... impulse to join the winning side of any conflict,” State believed “interference on either side ... portends more of danger than of advantage to the basic interests of Iran or the U.S.” Helping the Kurds, the department felt, would arouse unnecessary antagonism with Iraq, which might be considered unwelcome by both belligerents, and was not in Iran’s interests given its sizable Kurdish minority. The department concluded:

Under the circumstances, it would appear that a policy of strict neutrality and watchful waiting would be more advantageous to Iran than would a commitment, overt or covert, to interference. A policy of

²⁸⁸ DoS, Memorandum, Grant to McGhee, “Contingencies in Iraq,” May 3, 1962 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq-1961-63), pp.1-3. See also “Guidelines for Policy and Operations: Iraq,” April 1962, *Op.Cit.*, pp.15-16, which also discusses contingencies for Iraq.

calculated inaction would have the positive advantage of leaving Iran a maximum freedom of maneuver in a rapidly changing situation.²⁸⁹

Two days later, the embassy reported it had raised the matter with the foreign ministry, which “was in complete agreement” with the U.S. position. Later, Iran’s monarch, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, known commonly as the Shah, told the British that Iran’s “Kurdish policy [had] been re-assessed and non-intervention re-affirmed,” an indication that he had accepted U.S. advice.²⁹⁰

This development raises a number of questions about both Iranian and U.S. policy. What brought about Iran’s sudden interest in the Kurds? Why, after years of viewing Barzani as a threat and supporting anti-Barzani forces,²⁹¹ did the Shah decide to change his mind? Equally so, in light of the deteriorating situation in Iraq and the NEA’s concern that the Qasim regime was in danger, why did the Kennedy administration respond so negatively to the idea of Iran supporting the Kurds? Viewed from Iran, helping the Kurds was a useful means of destabilizing Iraq, a country that had historically been its only local challenger for regional hegemony. But viewed from Washington, the Kurds maintained links with Moscow—albeit tenuous—and held nationalist ambitions that threatened Iran and Turkey, two of America’s closest regional allies. Therefore, the U.S. believed any support for the Kurds, even from an ally like Iran, would advance Moscow’s regional designs, which was anathema to its interests.

Just as Iran was considering helping the Kurds, a crisis occurred in U.S.-Iraqi relations. On June 2, Iraq’s Foreign Minister Hashim Jawad called on Ambassador Jernegan to inform him Iraq was recalling its ambassador from Washington and he was required to leave. It is important to note that while relations were downgraded, the Iraqi move stopped short of severing diplomatic relations.²⁹² The catalyst for the decision was Kennedy’s acceptance of the new Kuwaiti ambassador’s credentials the

²⁸⁹ State CA-2865 to U.S. Embassy Tehran, May 24, 1962 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/5-2462), p.1.

²⁹⁰ Tehran A-296 to State, June 4, 1962 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/6-462), p.1.

²⁹¹ Tabriz A-14 to State, August 5, 1961 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/8-561), p.4.

²⁹² Baghdad 551 to State, June 2, 1962 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117/Iraq.1961-62), p.1. See also Baghdad 552 to State, June 2, 1962 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117/Iraq.1961-62), p.1.

previous day, against which the Iraqis had long warned the U.S. government.²⁹³ Iraq's downgrading of diplomatic relations caught the Kennedy administration by surprise. In a letter to Kennedy explaining the break, Komer stressed his embarrassment.

My face is exceedingly red over failing to let you know that receiving the Kuwait Ambassador would trigger the recall of the Iraqi Ambassador and Jernegan from Baghdad. Of course no break in relations is involved. This has been a standard Iraqi gambit with every country (Japan, Lebanon, Jordan) which has exchanged ambassadors with Kuwait after an Iraqi warning, and we had long been on notice that it was likely in our case too. Indeed we took the basic risk sometime ago when we, along with the UK and other Arab states, recognized Kuwait's independence. Your staff was fully in accord with this decision. I can only say that next time the White House signs off on something, we'll make sure that the President knows about it too.²⁹⁴

In the aftermath of the downgrade Komer set about correcting the mistake. After a quick review, he sent State a memo on June 4 outlining three concerns about Iraq: 1) Iraq was slowly but progressively swinging toward the Soviet Union; 2) Qasim's popularity was at an all time low; and 3) "his overthrow [was] sooner or later inevitable, with unpredictable results." Komer questioned the State Department's "wait and see" policy, but acknowledged there were few diplomatic alternatives. He then requested a review of the U.S. policy toward Iraq, focusing on how the U.S. could best react to an abrupt change in power, and ways to counter Iraq's accelerated shift toward the Soviets.²⁹⁵ These two memos were indicative of the lack of attention Iraq had received at the highest levels of the U.S. government, which contrasted sharply to the close scrutiny Iraq had received under Eisenhower. Furthermore, Komer's call for a review underscored the gap between White House officials and the State Department, since State had completed a review of its Iraq policy just two months earlier.

²⁹³ DoS, Memorandum for Bundy, "Request for Interview with President for Ambassador Jernegan," July 4, 1962 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117/Iraq.1961-62), p.1.

²⁹⁴ FRUS/1961-63/XVII/doc.286/fn.5, p.704.

²⁹⁵ White House, Memorandum, Komer to Talbot, June 4, 1962 (FRUS/1961-63/XVII/doc.287), p.705.

The downgrade of relations led to increased scrutiny by the White House on Iraq. On June 20, William Brubeck, the State Department's executive secretary, sent Bundy a memo outlining its Iraq policy along with a series of recent studies, which suggested the situation was not as bad as it seemed. Brubeck explained the department's view that Iraq's hostile approach to the West appeared to be "deliberately designed to frighten the West by appearing to tack progressively closer to the Soviet Bloc."

We believe, however, that the Iraqi leadership probably can go on playing this kind of brinkmanship without losing control to the Communists and that eventually anti-Qasim nationalist pressures will become strong enough to force a change which will most likely produce another strongly nationalistic government but one with a more balanced foreign policy.

Given this, the U.S. "should continue to adhere to our policy of maintaining, insofar as possible and under the handicaps imposed upon us, normal relations with the Iraqi government." On the question of a review, Brubeck attached the department's recent policy review and contingency plans for a post-Qasim Iraq and explained its belief that they were satisfactory.²⁹⁶

The downgrade of diplomatic relations at the start of June 1962 was a watershed moment in U.S.-Iraqi relations. In the period prior to this, Iraq had hardly figured in the Kennedy administration's foreign policy, which faced much greater challenges elsewhere. Nevertheless, the failure of the NSC staff to warn the President that accepting Kuwait's ambassador would lead Iraq to a downgrade of diplomatic relations highlighted a communication breakdown between the State Department and the White House that had been apparent since 1961. Nevertheless, the downgrade finally forced the Kennedy administration to take the situation in Iraq seriously.

²⁹⁶ DoS, Memorandum, Brubeck to Bundy, "United States Policy on Iraq," June 20, 1962 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq-1961-63), pp.1-2.

IV

The period between the downgrade of diplomatic relations in June 1962 through to the Ba’thist coup in February 1963 was a transition period for the U.S. policy toward Iraq. Following the downgrade, the Qasim regime grew unstable as widespread plotting by numerous groups escalated, culminating in Qasim’s eventual overthrow. While the downgrade was troubling from an American perspective, it was to be expected given Iraq’s warnings. Significantly, during this time the ongoing Kurdish War took on increasing relevance in terms of U.S. policy toward Iraq. The reasons for this are twofold. First, Iran had decided the Kurds were a useful tool to destabilize Iraq, while tying down its military—a clear boon to Israel. Second, because of the hostile U.S.-Iraqi relations, U.S. diplomats began considering hostile actions to undermine the regime, including sending of Western journalists into Iraqi Kurdistan. Though the depth of official involvement is uncertain, during the summer of 1962 a number of intrepid journalists, such as the *New York Times*’ Dana Adams Schmidt, visited Kurdistan and learned first-hand about the year-long Kurdish War, which had gone virtually unnoticed in the West. But as front-page articles on the Kurds began appearing in the fall of 1962, the Kennedy administration was forced to acknowledge the revolt and articulate a set policy toward it. Furthermore, these articles helped dispel the perception among U.S. officials that Barzani was a communist by portraying him as a freedom fighter, seeking to prevent a communist takeover in Iraq.

Not long after the downgrade, British diplomats informed the embassy in Baghdad a “group of officers” planned to overthrow Qasim and install a nationalist, anti-communist regime. These officers sought assurances of quick recognition and the opening of military supply lines, which would allow the army to cut its ties with the Soviets. At this point, the embassy reported widespread plotting against the regime from:

- (1) pro-Hashemite groupings, including tribal shaiks, old regime politicians, and some army officers favoring close Jordan-Iraq ties[;]
- (2) [a] group of high ranking officers, some in command position, who fear Qassim’s decision making progressively forcing Iraq into [the] position [of a] Soviet satellite and feel early coup essential if Iraq’s

independence [is] to be preserved.... (3) [an] Anti-Communist group seeking [to] remove Qassim and reestablish closer ties with [the] British and West.²⁹⁷

In mid-July 1962, the CIA's source in the Ba'th reported a coup was scheduled for the next day, but was cancelled at the last moment.²⁹⁸ Three days later, Roger Davies, the American Deputy Chief of Mission in Baghdad, met with British Ambassador Sir Roger Allen to discuss the situation. Like the CIA, the British had cultivated sources within the Ba'th, since Sir Roger revealed specific details of the aborted coup, stating anti-Qasim officers had planned to assassinate Qasim during his recent trip to Karbala and seize Baghdad with armoured and air units, though he did not explain why it had been called off.²⁹⁹

Nevertheless, Sir Roger was discouraged by the present situation and agreed little could be done besides maintaining "correct" relations. Even so, Davies indicated he was tempted to "explore jointly possibilities of developing some leverage to be used to counter pressures against us." He also suggested encouraging covertly news reports of "terror attacks against Kurdish villages in the North to further denigrate Qassim's image abroad" and raised the possibility of boycotting Iraqi oil. To this, Allen said it might be worthwhile to take an inventory of what resources both parties had available to put pressure on Qasim. The problem, however, was that officials in London felt there was no alternative to Qasim in Iraq, but he was trying to sell the idea of Qasim's removal to "certain circles in the Foreign Office."³⁰⁰ Though details of London and Washington's deliberations are not available, the *New York Times'* dispatch of its Beirut bureau chief, Dana Adams Schmidt, to Iraqi Kurdistan that July hardly seems coincidental.

On July 21, the embassy in Baghdad drafted a lengthy analysis on the status of the Kurdish War. After almost a year of fighting, the embassy believed the revolt was a genuine nationalist movement, "free from foreign domination." This was important because it dispelled the notion that the Kurds were Soviet puppets.

²⁹⁷ Baghdad 592 to State, June 25, 1962 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117/Iraq.1961-62), pp.1-2.

²⁹⁸ CIA, "Cancellation of Coup Plan by Ba'th Party of Iraq," July 15, 1962 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117/Iraq.1961-62), p.1.

²⁹⁹ Baghdad 40 to State, July 18, 1962 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117/Iraq.1961-62), pp.1-2.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., pp.1-2.

Despite Kurdish talk of “autonomy”, the embassy believed Barzani’s end-goal “unification and independence of Kurdistan,” though he would likely “settle for much less.” The embassy continued to be baffled by regime’s response to the revolt, describing Qasim as “dilatory and baffling”. His only hope was that his scorched earth policies would starve the Kurds into submission during the winter, but it seemed that Barzani had already turned to the Shah for help.³⁰¹

In late July, Iranian Prime Minister Assadollah Alam told the U.S. Ambassador to Iran, Julius Holmes, the Shah was reconsidering his policy toward the Kurds again. According to Holmes:

[Alam] said that up to the present Iran had adopted a hands off policy only taking necessary steps to protect the Iran-Iraq border by the deployment of forces last summer when there was some possibility that Barzani wards might spill over into Iran.

Alam said Barzani had approached the Shah on a number of occasions to seek assistance against Iraq. He made grand promises of incorporating Iraqi Kurdistan into Iran in return. While the Shah had rejected the offers, elements of Iran’s military believed helping the Kurds might be a viable means of undermining Qasim, who they saw as a Soviet puppet. This argument struck a chord with the Shah, who was again considering “more positive position with regard to Iraqi Kurds.”³⁰²

Alam’s approach alarmed U.S. policymakers and set off a flurry of consultations with U.S. embassies in Tehran, Ankara, and London. In Tehran, diplomats opposed the shift, arguing the U.S. should encourage an “enlightened Iranian policy” toward the Kurds. Officials in Baghdad felt Tehran’s suggestion was “fully consistent” with its views and agreed the Kurdish problem “cannot be solved by military means alone.”³⁰³ Though Ankara’s response is unavailable, a cable from State to Ankara suggests its policies were not “in harmony” with Tehran’s. Because of Iran and Turkey’s importance to CENTO, State instructed its ambassadors to urge

³⁰¹ Baghdad A-21 to State, “Status of Kurdish Revolt as Seen from Baghdad,” July 21, 1962 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/7-2162), pp.1-9.

³⁰² Tehran 136 to State, August 2, 1962 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/8-162), pp.1-2.

³⁰³ Baghdad 80 to State, August 9, 1962 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/8-962), p.1.

both to coordinate on this issue better.³⁰⁴ The British agreed and indicated they had adopted a “hands-off” policy and continued to reject Kurdish requests for aid.³⁰⁵ This suggests there was general agreement among America’s allies that Iran should avoid helping the Kurds.

The embassy in Baghdad learned in early-August that Qasim had called his Defense Council into session, was drawing up plans for an offensive against Barzani, and had transferred the “bulk of the First Division” to the north.³⁰⁶ When the offensive opened on August 17 Barzani initiated a sabotage campaign targeting crucial Iraqi infrastructure, like degassing stations and oil and gas pipelines.³⁰⁷ A major escalation in the war, U.S. officials in Baghdad believed the revolt had turned into a “full-fledged storm-cloud for Qasim.” Popular frustration against Qasim and his “pampered” generals was growing and their inability to crush the Kurds led to questioning of their high salaries, subsidized housing, and the purchase of expensive Soviet military equipment.³⁰⁸ According to a CIA official, it was this point that the CIA made “limited progress” convincing “influential Iraqis to consider the possibility of an overthrow.”³⁰⁹

Starting on September 10 the *New York Times* published Dana Adams Schmidt’s three part, award-winning series on the Kurdish War. The articles portrayed Barzani as a freedom fighter desperately seeking U.S. aid to protect his people from a war imposed by a Soviet-backed military dictator. Dispelling the moniker “Red Mullah,” Schmidt was certain Barzani was not a communist but a Kurdish nationalist wishing Iraq to was the West’s “strongest ally in the Middle East.” Barzani told Schmidt, “we could be useful to the United States. As the Communist party serves the interests of the Soviet Union, we could serve the United States.” He accused the Kennedy administration of indifference and warned he would turn to the Soviets to protect his people unless the U.S. provided him with aid.

³⁰⁴ State CA-1651 to Ankara and Tehran, “Iranian and Turkish Policies Toward the Kurdish Problem,” August 13, 1962 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/8-1362), p.1.

³⁰⁵ London A-352 to State, August 18, 1962 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/8-1862), p.1.

³⁰⁶ Baghdad 76 to State, August 7, 1962 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/8-762), p.1.

³⁰⁷ Baghdad A-210 to State, August 27, 1962 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/8-2762), p.1; and Baghdad 114 to State, August 31, 1962 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/8-3162), pp.1-2.

³⁰⁸ Baghdad 127 to State, September 7, 1962 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117/Iraq.1961-62), pp.1-2.

³⁰⁹ Email correspondence with CIA official, December 24, 2011.

Barzani argued the U.S. needed the Kurds in the event of a war with the Soviet Union. "Look at our strategic location on the flank of any possible Soviet advance into the Middle East through the Caucasus and remember that, whether as guerrillas or as regulars, we are the best soldiers in the Middle East."³¹⁰

The Kennedy administration was not pleased with Schmidt's articles and took steps to distance itself from the Kurds. The articles had generated considerable sympathy for the Kurds among the American public and led to pressure on the Kennedy administration to make known its stance. On September 11, the State Department issued its first public position on the Kurdish War.

The United States considers the Kurdish problem in Iraq an internal matter which should be resolved internally. Our Government does not support Kurdish activities against the Government of Iraq in any way and hopes an early peaceful solution will be possible.... We believe the future well-being of Kurds in Iraq, as well as those in Iran and Turkey, is inseparably tied to the well-being of the countries in which they reside. We know Turkey and Iran share this view, and believe the Iraq Government feels the same way.³¹¹

This would be the U.S. policy toward the revolt from this point onward. If the articles were because of Davies' scheme, it seemed to have backfired. The Qasim regime seized upon the articles as "proof" of U.S. support for the Kurds and led to a series of rhetorical tirades.³¹² For instance, on September 30, Qasim warned of America's "criminal activities" to divide the Iraqi people. Faced with these allegations, the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad requested the department reiterate its policy position on the revolt, but there is no indication the U.S. took any action.³¹³

On September 20, a Kurdish representative approached the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and made a strong plea for U.S. support against Qasim. While the U.S.

³¹⁰ Dana Adams Schmidt, "Kurdish Rebels Confident of Victory in Iraq: Warn U.S. to Aid Them or Soviets Will," in *New York Times*, September 10, 1962, pp.1, 14. Schmidt's other articles in the *New York Times* are: "Kurdish Rebel Chief Says Force Is Only Way to Win Autonomy," September 11, 1962, pp.1, 14; "Kurds' Guerrilla Tradition Aids Rebels in War on Iraqi Army," September 12, 1962, pp.1, 14; and "Kurdish Villages Chief the Targets of Iraqis," September 13, 1962, p.1. For a more detailed description of his trip into Iraqi Kurdistan, see Dana Adams Schmidt, *Journey Among Brave Men* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1964).

³¹¹ DoS, Memorandum, Strong to Talbot, "United States Public Position on Kurdish Problem in Iraq," September 11, 1962 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/9-1162), p.1.

³¹² Baghdad A-330 to State, "Iraqi Press Reaction to New York Times articles on Kurdish Rebellion," September 27, 1962 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/9-2762), p.1.

³¹³ Baghdad 174 to State, October 1, 1962 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117/Iraq.1961-62), p.1.

refused politely, the conversation provided considerable intelligence on Kurdish relations with other regional actors. For instance, the Kurd reported Barzani maintained “close and friendly” relations with the Shah, who allowed goods to flow freely across the border; received a monthly stipend of a thousand Iraqi dinars (approximately \$2,800 in 1962) from the Soviets; and maintained regular contact with the Egyptians, who were “friendly but unhelpful.” Efforts at obtaining assistance from Kuwait were similarly fruitless. Conversely, the Israelis had shown an interest in helping, but Barzani had refused because he feared “Israel might purposely reveal [this] information and [the] ‘movement’ would be harmed throughout Arab countries.” The Kurdish plea, when coupled with Schmidt’s articles, suggests Barzani had begun a diplomatic offensive aimed at building international support for their cause.³¹⁴

Throughout October, the Kurdish War continued to go poorly for the Qasim regime, leading it to lash out against vulnerable Kurdish civilians. On the night of October 10-11, the Kurds attacked an oil installation, killing and capturing several people and in late-October carried out an additional attack on IPC facilities, including a refinery and a pipeline leading toward Baghdad. The regime retaliated by attacking Kurdish civilians. For instance, in mid-November U.S. officials in Baghdad received reports of women and children being used as human shields,³¹⁵ systematic bombing and pillaging of Kurdish villages, and that the regime had “deliberately remov[ed] food and clothing from Kurdistan in [an] attempt to starve [the] Kurds into submission.”³¹⁶ But instead of breaking the Kurds, the atrocities served to unify them against the government, leading the embassy to conclude “almost all Kurds in the cities as well as the mountains support the revolt.”³¹⁷

The regime’s inability to defeat the Kurds led it use the U.S. as a scapegoat for its problems. When Qasim accused the U.S. of supporting the Kurds on November 21, the embassy in Baghdad pressed Washington to respond, but the Kennedy

³¹⁴ Baghdad 150 to State, September 20, 1962 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/9-2062), pp.1-2.

³¹⁵ Baghdad A-503 to State, November 13, 1962 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/11-1362), pp.2-3.

³¹⁶ Baghdad 256 to State, November 21, 1962 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/11-2162), p.1.

³¹⁷ Baghdad A-503, November 13, 1962, *Op.Cit.*, p.4.

administration was divided.³¹⁸ For instance, the State Department's initial guidance was to authorize the embassy to send a note of protest and seek a personal meeting with Qasim to dispel the claims.³¹⁹ But two days later it backtracked, arguing that any response would dignify Qasim's attacks.³²⁰ Regardless, the new U.S. Chargé d'Affairs in Baghdad, Roy Melbourne, had already arranged a meeting with Foreign Minister Jawad where he agreed to schedule a meeting with Qasim for early December, leading the department to recommend that Melbourne reiterate the non-intervention policy, tell Qasim the U.S. was "mystified" about his hostile attitude, and to warn him about false intelligence alleging U.S. hostility. Melbourne was also to emphasize America's desire for friendly relations, despite differences over Kuwait.³²¹ This meeting would never take place.

At the end of 1962, the Kurds inflicted a series of major defeats, leaving the Iraqi army's morale at an all time low.³²² Qasim's micromanagement of the war and distrust of his commanders created widespread resentment. Commanders were not given a free hand, restrictions had been placed on ammunition for troops, and the regime's insistence that there was no war meant troops had been denied combat pay.³²³ Inevitably, these actions provided conspiratorial groups, like the Ba'th Party, opportunities to build support for a coup among the military's ranks.

In early 1963, the Ba'th Party and the Kurds agreed to work together to overthrow the Qasim regime. The Ba'th knew if they were to ever seize power they needed to secure the support of the military, which was increasingly anxious to end the war, and only the Kurds could deliver on the military's wish. Meanwhile, Barzani and his people needed a respite in the spring months so they could re-plant crops devastated by Qasim's scorched earth tactics. This convergence of interests led to secret talks in early January, where in return for Kurdish cooperation in

³¹⁸ Baghdad 244 to State, November 21, 1962 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117/Iraq.1961-62), p.1.

³¹⁹ State 04721 to U.S. Embassy Baghdad, November 21, 1962 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117/Iraq.1961-62), p.1.

³²⁰ State 05396 to U.S. Embassy Baghdad, November 23, 1962 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/11-2162), p.1.

³²¹ State 00591 to U.S. Embassy Baghdad, December 3, 1962 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117/Iraq.1961-62), pp.1-2.

³²² Baghdad 309 to State, December 23, 1962 (NARA/RG59/R2/787.00/12-2362), p.1.

³²³ Baghdad 348 to State, January 17, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq-1/63-2/63), p.1.

overthrowing Qasim, the Ba'th was willing to concede a large degree of autonomy.³²⁴ With the Kurds neutralized and the army's morale at an all-time low, the stage was set for a Ba'thist coup.

On January 22, the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad concluded Qasim was "weaker in all sectors than at any time since [the] Shawwaf Revolt in 1959." Domestic discontent was widespread and "rising to the point where [the] armed forces might not [be able to] effectively intervene to save [Qasim]." Because of Qasim's attitude toward the U.S., the embassy felt any "successor regime would ... be an improvement from [the] standpoint [of] U.S. and Western interests." The embassy also complained once again about the Kennedy administration's refusal to respond to Qasim's anti-American rhetoric: "U.S. silence in the face of attacks from Qasim can now begin [to] affect adversely U.S. prestige here and in [the] Arab area." The net result was to "discourage rather than give hope to [the] bulk of Iraqis who [were] fed up with Qasim but [felt] individually helpless before [the] power he wields through [the] control of [the] security apparatus." In light of this, Melbourne proposed the administration "give subtle but unmistakable public indications that [they] consider Qasim having internal difficulties and distorting facts." He also suggested these statements be broadcast widely "in order to penetrate local censorship."³²⁵ But once again Washington dithered, leading Melbourne to take matters into his own hands and lodge a complaint with Jawad directly.³²⁶ When word of Melbourne's actions reached the State Department on January 19 it was passed immediately to McGeorge Bundy, who informed President Kennedy.³²⁷

Melbourne's initiative was significant for two reasons. First, it underscored just how frustrated the embassy was with Washington's dithering on Iraq. Second, this was the first time since the downgrading of relations in June 1962 that the subject of Iraq had crossed President Kennedy's desk, which was unusual. But despite word of his approach making its way to the highest levels of the U.S.

³²⁴ Ibid., p.1.

³²⁵ Baghdad 362 to State, January 22, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq-1/63-2/63), pp.1-3.

³²⁶ Baghdad 353 to State, January 19, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq-1/63-2/63), p.1.

³²⁷ DoS, Memorandum for Bundy, "United States Relations with Iraq," January 21, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq-1/63-2/63/doc.6-6a), pp.1-2.

government, nothing was done. On February 2, Melbourne complained to State again about the complete lack of guidance on this matter, pointing out Qasim had lashed out at the U.S. once again. "Qasim's latest outburst against us ... reinforces [the] policy conclusions and recommendations" of the previous analysis, but since Qasim continued to attack the U.S. the official "silence" from Washington was not a "desirable alternative." Worse yet, it was becoming an embarrassment. For instance, a "usually cautious" British official questioned the silence by asking, "don't you ever deny these things?" This led Melbourne to conclude, the "point ha[d] been reached where continued silence [was] simply incompatible with national dignity and damaging [their] local and regional interests."³²⁸

Melbourne's final plea caught the administration's attention. On February 5, Secretary Rusk cabled him to advise that the department was "considering carefully whether on balance U.S. interests would be served [at] this particular juncture by abandoning [its] policy of avoiding public reaction to Qasim's charges while objecting through normal diplomatic channels." The rationale for this stemmed from the Kennedy administration's desire to maintain a U.S. presence in Iraq because the CIA was engaged in "significant intelligence collecting operations."³²⁹ According to a memo sent to Bundy on February 7, Iraq had become "one of the more useful spots for acquiring technical information on Soviet military and industrial equipment and on Soviet methods of operations in nonaligned areas."³³⁰ On February 5, the State Department sent Iraq's embassy a strong note of protest, demanding Iraq provide proof for the basis of Qasim's allegations.³³¹ Apparently when Qasim learned of the note, he interpreted the U.S. note "as [a] military threat."³³² This led the department to revert back to its policy of "not seek[ing] to engage in a public exchange with [Qasim]."³³³ Given his excessive response, the department felt this approach

³²⁸ Baghdad 380 to State, February 2, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq-1/63-2/63), p.1.

³²⁹ State 02088 to U.S. Embassy Baghdad, February 5, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq-1/63-2/63), pp.1-2.

³³⁰ DoS, Memorandum, Brubeck to Bundy, "Embassy Baghdad's Proposal for New Approach in Dealing with Qasim Regime," February 7, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq-1/63-2/63), pp.1-3.

³³¹ State 02090 to U.S. Embassy Baghdad, February 5, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq-1/63-2/63), p.1.

³³² Baghdad 391 to State, February 7, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq-1/63-2/63), p.1.

³³³ "Embassy Baghdad's Proposal...", February 7, 1963, *Op.Cit.*, pp.1-3.

maximized its room to maneuver, while not jeopardizing the CIA's operations. But ultimately, this entire debate was irrelevant.

Just after midnight (Baghdad time) on February 8, a coalition of the Ba'th Party and military launched a coup that overthrew Qasim. By noon the next day, the U.S. military attaché reported the rebels had "finally seized control" of the city, predicting "conditions[could] be chaotic for some time" as the Ba'th unleashed its militia to "even old scores with the Communists."³³⁴ But the CIA's prediction was more direct: "a blood bath is likely."³³⁵

It has been suggested that the CIA "masterminded" the Ba'thist coup,³³⁶ but other sources, like Hahn, observe that no declassified U.S. documents support this claim.³³⁷ To resolve this debate a number of factors need to be considered. First, the CIA later identified a multitude of possible triggers for the coup: Qasim's efforts to crush the Ba'th Party; his pro-communist policies; the failed twenty-month old military campaign against the Kurds; his bitter feud with Egyptian President Nasser; and Iraq's loss of face internationally, especially among the Arabs, due to his "insane antics" over Kuwait.³³⁸ Second, U.S. documents show significant confusion over which of the many groups plotting against the regime had actually struck first; only later did it emerge that a coalition of the Ba'th Party and military was responsible.³³⁹ It appears that unlike in July 1962, the CIA's source in the Ba'th had not warned the U.S. about the February coup. Finally, while it has been established that the CIA was plotting against Qasim, the former CIA officer who claims to have been orchestrating a coup denied involvement. He explained, "when Qassem was assassinated in early February 1963, I was still engaged in contacting people who could play a role in a coup attempt against [him and whatever] progress we had made [in recent months]

³³⁴ U.S. Military Attaché Iraq to Department of the Army, February 9, 1963 (NARA/RG/59/Records Relating to Iraq/1963-64/Box 2/POL 26), p.1.

³³⁵ CIA, "Background on 8 February Revolt in Iraq," OCI No. 0487/63, February 8, 1963 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq.1961-63), pp.1-2.

³³⁶ Coughlin (2004), pp.38-39; Morris (2003), p.A29; and Sale (2003).

³³⁷ Hahn (2012), p.48.

³³⁸ CIA, "Background on 8 February Revolt in Iraq," OCI No. 0487/63, February 8, 1963 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq.1961-63), pp.1-2.

³³⁹ Department of Defense, Memorandum, Fuqua to Sloan, February 8, 1963 (FRUS/1961-63/XVIII/doc. 153), p.1.

went for naught when Qassem was assassinated.”³⁴⁰ Therefore, the balance of evidence suggests that while the U.S. was actively plotting the overthrow of the Qasim regime, it was not directly involved in the February 1963 coup. Either way, there is little question the Kennedy administration was pleasantly surprised by its outcome.

Conclusion

The disestablishment of the SCI at the start of the Kennedy administration was a clear mistake. While stable during 1960, throughout Kennedy’s term in office Iraq experienced numerous crises, all of which justified greater scrutiny. The debate surrounding the SCI’s disestablishment made clear that both CIA and State were concerned about Iraq and wanted to continue monitoring its progress. The 1961 Kuwait Crisis alone should have raised enough concern in the White House to validate the SCI’s reestablishment. But the Kennedy administration’s low-key response to the Kuwait Crisis reflects an understanding that the Gulf was a British problem and so Washington focused its energy on containing Moscow’s aggressive moves in Europe, East Asia, and Latin America.

The outbreak of the Kurdish War in September 1961 also reflects this reality. While it has been suggested that the U.S. instigated the revolt in order to undermine the Qasim regime,³⁴¹ evidence shows the opposite. The Shelepin memo clearly indicates the Soviets intended to use Iraq’s Kurdish minority to distract the U.S. from the Berlin Crisis and threaten America’s regional allies, Iran and Turkey, which both had large Kurdish minorities. In reality, the origins of the revolt were largely indigenous, relating mostly to Qasim’s failed land reforms and his divide-and-rule tactics.³⁴² Reflecting America’s disinterest in the region, during the weeks prior to the revolt, mid-level U.S. officials in Baghdad and Tehran had warned their superiors in Washington that the revolt could lend the Soviets an opportunity to bypass

³⁴⁰ Email correspondence with CIA officer, December 29, 2011; and December 24, 2011.

³⁴¹ Little (2010), p.68.

³⁴² Dann (1969), p.343.

CENTO and establish an independent Kurdish republic. Given the Shelepin memo, it seems these warnings were valid, yet the Kennedy administration still did nothing, underscoring its deferral of responsibility to the British.

It was not until the Qasim regime expropriated the IPC's concessionary holding in December 1961 that U.S. officials began to recognize Iraq's threat to its interests. However, for reasons unknown, these concerns were not passed to the White House for another two months. When the Kennedy administration realized the importance of Iraq's move in early 1962, it adopted a dual track approach to Iraq which consisted of diplomatic efforts to engage the regime and convince it that U.S. policy was aimed at maintaining friendly relations, while having the CIA seek ways to overthrow the Qasim regime and replace it with one more amicable to U.S. interests. It seems evident that the diplomatic approach was given priority over the covert one, largely because the CIA lacked viable assets inside Iraq capable of seizing and maintaining power. It was also engaged in an operation to obtain valuable intelligence on Soviet weapons systems. But the diplomatic track suffered a major setback in June 1962 when the Qasim regime abruptly—though not unexpectedly—downgraded diplomatic relations. In the aftermath, Robert Komer's embarrassment for not warning President Kennedy about the downgrade in advance led to a renewed interest in Iraq at the highest levels of the U.S. government, which continued through to the February 1963 coup. Even so, the White House's response to the downgrade underscored a communication breakdown with the State Department, which had consistently raised concerns about Iraq and had acted unilaterally to review U.S. policy and prepare contingencies should Qasim be overthrown.

Starting in early 1962, the Kurdish question took on greater importance due to Iran's sudden interest in supporting them against Baghdad. While the Kennedy administration sought to dissuade the Shah from helping Barzani, its efforts were in vain. Even after the downgrade, the U.S. continued to advise Iran against assisting the Kurds. However, it seems likely that British and American diplomats in Baghdad during this time conspired on ways to undermine the Qasim regime, including sending Western journalists into Iraqi Kurdistan to interview Barzani. While the

evidence is circumstantial, it is possible that Dana Adams Schmidt's trip to Kurdistan in July and August and subsequent articles in the *New York Times* were the product of this scheme. While Schmidt's articles proved beneficial in dispelling the view that Barzani was a communist, it also forced the Kennedy administration to acknowledge the revolt and issue a policy statement. Unfortunately, Qasim seized upon the articles as proof of a U.S.-led conspiracy aimed at destabilizing Iraq and initiated an aggressive anti-American campaign. Once again, there was a deep disconnect between U.S. diplomats in Baghdad and officials in Washington over how to respond to Qasim's rhetoric, with the embassy advocating engagement, while the White House maintained official silence out of fear of Iraq severing relations altogether, which could jeopardize the CIA's intelligence gathering. Understandably, the Kennedy administration prioritized obtaining intelligence over countering Qasim's rhetoric, much to the embassy's frustration.

This chapter leads to a number of conclusions. The Kennedy administration's low-key approach toward Iraq during 1961-62 was driven by the belief that it no longer faced a communist threat. Given the Kennedy administration's more pressing Cold War challenges at the time in Berlin, Cuba, and Vietnam, the Qasim regime hardly took precedence. This chapter therefore dispels the notion that the U.S. played a role in the outbreak of the Kurdish War. Furthermore, while this thesis substantiates claims that the CIA had been plotting to overthrow Qasim during the 1962-63 period, a CIA official involved in plotting against Qasim denied the CIA was behind the Ba'thist coup, explaining instead that his plan to overthrow Qasim had not yet been finalized when the Ba'th Party seized power. In short, the claim that the CIA was behind the Ba'thist coup remains open to debate.

Chapter 3: Kennedy and the First Ba'thist Regime

February—November 1963

The following chapter examines the Kennedy administration's policy toward Iraq during the nine-month rule of the Ba'th Party after its successful overthrow of the Qasim regime on February 8, 1963. It will elucidate and examine the effectiveness of American decision-making processes. Coming on top of America's triumph over the Soviet Union in the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Ba'thist coup in early 1963 was a significant victory for America's Middle Eastern containment strategy. The subsequent outbreak of the Kurdish War in June 1963 further increased Iraq's importance in terms of the Cold War. With the U.S. backing the Ba'thist regime and the Soviet Union supporting the Kurds, U.S. officials were convinced by mid-1963 that Iraq had become a "Cold War battleground."³⁴³

In terms of power structures in Iraq, the National Council of the Revolutionary Command (NCRC), which consisted of twelve Ba'thists and four Arab nationalist officers, exercised supreme power.³⁴⁴ Qasim's former deputy, Abd al-Salim Arif was named President and General Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr Prime Minister. But it was Ali Salih al-Sa'di's roles as Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of the Interior, and Secretary of the Regional (Iraq) Ba'th Party and his control over the militant National Guard, that made him the most powerful.³⁴⁵ Under Al-Sa'di's direction the National Guard targeted the regime's opponents, especially communists. Claims vary on how many people were killed during the first Ba'th regime, with Little indicating "hundreds," Tripp suggesting up to 3,000, and Batutu between 1,500 and 5,000.³⁴⁶

³⁴³ Baghdad 933 to State, June 27, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.6/63-8/63/doc.17), pp.1-2.

³⁴⁴ Tripp (2007), pp.164-65.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., pp.164-65.

³⁴⁶ Little (2010), p.69; Tripp (2007), p.165; and Batatu (1978), p.685.

Iraq's dramatic rejection of the Soviet Union was, as Kennedy's top Middle East advisor, observed, "almost certainly a net gain" for the U.S. in the Cold War.³⁴⁷

Despite Iraq's clear importance in terms of the Cold War, the historiography of U.S. policy toward the first Ba'th regime is limited to a single paragraph in both Hahn's study of U.S.-Iraqi relations and Douglas Little's examination of CIA covert action in the Middle East.³⁴⁸ The scholarship on the U.S. policy toward the Kurdish War is slightly more extensive, with Little arguing that U.S.-Iraqi relations were mired by the renewal of the Kurdish War and the Kennedy administration's effort to bring about a ceasefire.³⁴⁹ Building on Little's valuable contribution, this chapter will show that the Kennedy administration actually took an active interest in Iraq and the Kurdish War because of Iraq's perceived importance in the Cold War.

I

The U.S. viewed the Ba'thist coup as a welcome surprise and believed it would lead to an improvement in U.S.-Iraqi relations. After all, the pro-Soviet Qasim regime was replaced by an anti-communist, Arab nationalist Ba'thist regime which initiated a brutal campaign against Iraq's communists. While the CIA has been accused of providing the Ba'th Party with lists of communists, who were then arrested and in many cases killed,³⁵⁰ it will be shown below that the available evidence does not support this claim. Nevertheless, with Qasim overthrown, and the Ba'th Party crushing the communists as the Soviets decried the coup, the Kennedy administration was very satisfied with the coup's outcome.

Even though the Ba'thist coup on February 8, 1963 came as a surprise to the Kennedy administration, it was not unwelcome. While Komer made this clear in his message to Kennedy that day, there was also uncertainty about who would emerge after the inevitable power struggle within the new regime. Either way, Komer wrote, the new regime "[would] be preferable to Qasim's" and "relations between the U.S.

³⁴⁷ White House, Memorandum, Komer to the President, February 8, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq-1/63-2/63/doc.18), p.1.

³⁴⁸ Hahn (2012), p.49; and Little (2004), p.696.

³⁴⁹ Pelletiere (1984), pp.132-38; and Little (2010), pp.69-71.

³⁵⁰ See Morris (2003, p.A29; and Sale (2003).

and Iraq [would] be considerably improved.”³⁵¹ A key reason for Komer’s sense of optimism was the U.S. view that the Ba’th Party was anti-communist. Indeed, after seizing power the Ba’th Party’s militia, known as the National Guard, went house-to-house rounding up hundreds—if not thousands—of suspected communists and their sympathizers. According to the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, on February 12 “reliable sources” indicated 2,400 communists had been rounded up and were under detention. The embassy also reported as many as a thousand people had been killed in the four days since the coup.³⁵² By February 20 the embassy reported 14,000 people were in custody, 10,000 of them believed to be communists.³⁵³ Many of these people perished.

On February 13, William Brubeck, the State Department’s executive secretary, sent McGeorge Bundy a memo outlining the steps the U.S. had taken in the days since the coup, including instructions provided to U.S. diplomats in Baghdad. The consensus was relations with Iraq were set to improve, but the U.S. needed to take a cautious approach. He warned, “any indication of interference in Iraqi internal affairs must be avoided” and the U.S. needed to “avoid creating the impression that [it] sired the regime or [was] trying to father it.” After outlining programs being considered, including new arms and economic assistance policies, Brubeck indicated the department was prepared to offer counter-insurgency and policy training to Iraq, but only if the Kurdish problem was resolved. He concluded even though the “new regime appear[ed] to be a vast improvement over Qasim, [they could not] consider that it [would] be pro-American or that it [would] be free from internal pressures of an extremist nature. It remain[ed] to be seen how cohesive it remain[ed], and how responsibly it act[ed].” This warning would prove prophetic, as it would be only a matter of months before the regime imploded.³⁵⁴

³⁵¹ White House, Memorandum, Komer to the President, February 8, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq-1/63-2/63/doc.18), p.1.

³⁵² Baghdad 593 to State, March 27, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.3/63-5/63/doc.15a), p.1.

³⁵³ Baghdad 472 (part 2) to State, February 20, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.1/63-2/63/doc.59), p.4.

³⁵⁴ DoS, Memorandum, Brubeck to Bundy, “United States Relations with Iraq,” February 13, 1963 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq-1961-63), pp.1-2.

Like the claim that the CIA had masterminded the 1963 coup, it has also been suggested that the CIA provided the Ba'th with "lists of suspected Communists and other leftists" that were used to murder "untold numbers of Iraq's educated elite."³⁵⁵ This claim is supported by Richard Sale, an investigative journalist who interviewed former U.S. intelligence officials "with intimate knowledge" of the operation. These officials alleged the "CIA provided the submachine gun-toting Iraqi National Guardsmen with lists of suspected communists who were then jailed, interrogated, and summarily gunned down."³⁵⁶ The source of this allegation, as Batatu observed, was King Hussein of Jordan, who, in the early 1960s told an interviewer:

Permit me to tell you that I know for a certainty that what happened in Iraq on 8 February had the support of American Intelligence.... Do you know that ... on 8 February a secret radio beamed to Iraq was supplying the men who pulled the coup with names and addresses of the Communists there so that they could be arrested and executed?³⁵⁷

While much of the historiography has focused on whether the U.S. provided the Ba'th with lists, few have latched on to Batatu's explanation that the Ba'th had "ample opportunity to gather such particulars in 1958-59, when the Communists came wholly into the open."³⁵⁸ The existence of these lists is supported by documents, but the evidence supports Batatu's conclusion that the Ba'th had created them on their own. For instance, an INR analysis from February 15 stated "[Communist] party members [are being] rounded up on the basis of lists prepared by the now-dominant Ba'th Party."³⁵⁹ A separate INR analysis from February 21 pointed out that during the 1958-59 period, the communists had "exposed virtually all its assets" whom the Ba'th had "carefully spotted and listed."³⁶⁰ Therefore, the existence of lists is not in dispute but it is questionable whether the Ba'th would need the CIA's help, since they already knew who their enemies were.

³⁵⁵ Morris (2003), p.A29.

³⁵⁶ Sale (2003).

³⁵⁷ Batatu (1978), pp.985-86.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., p.986.

³⁵⁹ DoS, INR, "Implications of Iraqi Coup for Soviet Policy," BSB-25, February 15, 1963 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq-1961-63), pp.1-2.

³⁶⁰ DoS, INR, "The Outlook for the Iraqi Coup Regime of February 8, 1963," RNA-10, February 21, 1963 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq-1961-63), p.8.

In terms of the Cold War, U.S. officials viewed the Ba’thist coup as a major setback for the Soviet Union’s regional policy. As the INR point out, “all the available evidence indicate[d] that the Soviets [had] suffered a setback in Iraq and in their general Middle Eastern policies as a result of the Iraqi coup.”³⁶¹ This was because the new regime seemed determined to crush the local Iraqi communists for good, which the CIA felt would undermine Moscow’s influence.³⁶² But this sense of optimism was not unanimous. The INR pointed out that because Iraq was so reliant on Soviet military assistance both sides had much to lose from a complete disengagement.³⁶³

Given the potential for an Iraqi shift in the Cold War, on February 18 President Kennedy sent Secretary of State Dean Rusk a note asking, what was being done. In particular, Kennedy wanted to know the status of the Soviet-Iraqi arms relationship and whether the U.S. could potentially meet its needs. He inquired, “if the Russians cut off their aid [to Iraq], are we planning to make any offers to them?”³⁶⁴ Four days later, Rusk wrote to Kennedy:

We seek quiet friendship with Iraq, avoiding efforts to press favors on the new regime but standing ready to be helpful where we can without materially increasing the current aid level.... We have privately assured the new regime that we won’t interfere in its internal affairs.

Rusk explained he had instructed the U.S. Chargé d’Affairs in Baghdad, Roy Melbourne, to assure senior Iraqi officials of America’s friendship; to expound the administration’s impartiality in regional matters, particularly with regard to Nasser; and to spell out America’s global, Cold War concerns and policies.³⁶⁵ On the question of arms, Rusk advised caution since Iraq was likely to continue obtaining arms from

³⁶¹ “Implications of Iraqi Coup...,” February 15, 1963, *Op.Cit.*, pp.1-2.

³⁶² CIA, “Background on 8 February Revolt in Iraq,” OCI No. 0487/63, February 8, 1963 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq.1961-63), pp.1-2.

³⁶³ “Implications of Iraqi Coup...,” February 15, 1963, *Op.Cit.*, pp.1-2.

³⁶⁴ White House, Memorandum, the President to Rusk, February 18, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq-1/63-2/63/doc. 51), p.1.

³⁶⁵ DoS, Memorandum, Rusk to the President, “United States Posture Toward Iraq,” February 22, 1963 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq-1961-63), pp.1-3. Melbourne conveyed these points to the new Iraqi Foreign Minister Talib Husayn al-Shabib on February 20, see Baghdad 472, February 20, 1963, *Op.Cit.*, p.1.

the Soviet Bloc.³⁶⁶ However, should Iraq turn to the U.S. for arms, Rusk argued the U.S. should “limit the categories and quantities” of what could be made available, since a major arms package would complicate matters with other regional states, like Israel. He also said State wanted to send a new ambassador to Iraq as soon as possible. In short, the State Department wanted to once again adopt a “wait and see” policy toward Iraq for the time being.³⁶⁷

In late February, two NEA officials, Robert Strong and Andrew Kilgore, drafted interim policy guidelines for Iraq. Distributed on March 2, the NEA believed the new regime would “emphasize pan-Arabism in the context of Iraqi national interests, and [would] be neutralist, reformist, and socialist (Scandinavian type).” Even so, the U.S. could “live with” the new Iraqi regime and identified four challenges: the Kurdish War, the IPC conflict, constitutional development, and economic development. In each of these instances, the U.S. would urge Iraq to make reasonable concessions, especially the dangerous Kurdish question, which will be discussed in detail below. On the IPC, the U.S. would “continue to consult with the UK, encourage U.S. shareholders to be flexible, and “express pleasure” at any Iraqi initiatives on unsettled issues. The U.S. would encourage the Iraqi regime to move toward constitutional reform and the establishment of a legislative democracy. Similarly, it would promote economic development and “demonstrate willingness to assist Iraq in feasible ways without materially increasing the aid level.” On regional relations, the U.S. would encourage friendly Iraqi relations with Turkey and Iran, in particular, and would not oppose federation with Egypt, Syria, or Kuwait, so long as the decision was not coerced. Finally, on the Arab-Israeli conflict, the U.S. needed to maintain its “stance of even-handed impartiality between Israel and the Arab countries.”³⁶⁸

The Kennedy administration’s response to the Ba’thist coup suggested it was pleased with the outcome. Given the zero-sum nature of the Cold War, U.S. officials

³⁶⁶ See White House, Memorandum, Komer to the President, February 20, 1963 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq.1961-63-White House Memorandum), p.1.

³⁶⁷ “United States Posture Toward Iraq,” February 22, 1963, *Op.Cit.*, p.3.

³⁶⁸ State CA-9411 to Certain Posts, “Interim Policy Guidelines for Dealing With Iraq and With the Implications for the Middle East of the Recent Iraqi Coup,” March 2, 1963 (FRUS/1961-63/XVIII/doc. 174), pp.382-389.

clearly believed the replacement of the pro-Soviet Qasim regime with the Ba'th Party had altered Middle Eastern Cold War calculus in America's favour. In short, after years of setbacks, the Ba'thist coup was a much-needed American victory in the Cold War. Even so, with an anti-communist regime back in power in Baghdad, the policy adopted thereafter suggested the need to secure it against Soviet machinations, especially with regard to the dangerous Kurdish question.

II

Soon after the coup, U.S. officials became concerned about how the Ba'thist regime would approach the Kurdish question. Officially, the U.S. viewed the Kurdish problem "as strictly an internal Iraqi matter in which there is no role for the United States either directly or indirectly" and diplomats were advised to "limit themselves to expressions of hope that the GOI and the Kurds will be able to come promptly to a mutually satisfactory agreement".³⁶⁹ But the U.S. found itself in a difficult position when the Soviets initiated clandestine radio broadcasts that called on the Kurds to join the communists in resisting the new regime and backed Kurdish demands for "complete regional autonomy and a large share of the income from oil that [was] produced in Kurdish territory."³⁷⁰ The conundrum was that a "failure to find a political solution to the Kurdish problem would benefit only the Soviets and the Iraqi communists,"³⁷¹ but the Ba'thist regime was determined to take a hard line with the Kurds. While the U.S. sympathized with the Kurds' nationalist aspirations, the Soviet move meant the Kennedy administration had to increase its support for the Iraqi regime.

The Kurdish question was also tied to another important issue: Arab unity. The Ba'th wished to bring Iraq into a union with either Egypt or Syria, or both. The regime's selection of Abd al'Salim Arif, who had long-supported unification with Egypt, as Iraq's new president suggested the Ba'th was seeking to placate pro-Nasser, Arab nationalist elements in the military. But the Kurdish question would be

³⁶⁹ Ibid., pp.382-89.

³⁷⁰ "The Outlook for the Iraqi Coup Regime...", February 21, 1963, *Op.Cit.*, pp.2-3.

³⁷¹ Ibid., pp.382-89.

a major obstacle to the achievement of unification. On February 22 Iraq sent a delegation to Cairo for talks with Nasser on the prospect of bringing Iraq into union with Egypt and Syria. Accompanying the delegation to Cairo were two Kurds, who met with Nasser in private. The Kurds argued if Iraq was to join two predominantly ethnic Arab states, Egypt's large Arab population would water down Iraq's large Kurdish demographic. Given this, the Kurds argued for guarantees of autonomy within Iraq or even full independence, to which Nasser "gave his full backing to Kurdish demands for autonomy within Iraq and hoped that [a] rapid agreement could be reached." Nasser was, however, pessimistic about whether the Ba'athist regime could achieve this—an assessment that would prove accurate.³⁷²

By early March, U.S. officials became concerned that the regime's initial efforts at resolving tensions with the Kurds were failing. While Barzani had taken steps to show good faith, like releasing around 1,500 Arab prisoners, the government never followed through with its promises to release Kurdish prisoners, lift the economic blockade, and accept the principle of Kurdish autonomy within a unified Iraq. This prompted the Kurds to approach the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad to ask the Kennedy administration to urge the regime to settle the Kurdish question peacefully.³⁷³

When word of the approach reached Washington, Komer sent Bundy a memo warning of trouble in Iraq.

Some of our spies are beginning to get quite worried about [the] risk that [the] Kurdish problem [might] flair up to bedevil [the] new Iraqi regime. It's hard to tell whether talks in Baghdad are going well or badly, but there are many—Turks, Iranians, Nasser, and above all Soviets—who might see a stake in egging Kurds on.

In particular, Komer reported the Shah wanted to use the Kurds to undermine the Iraqi regime, which he believed was "too cozy with Nasser," who he distrusted. Komer indicated State had warned him to "keep [his] hands off" Iraq but acknowledged the Shah was unlikely to "take [their] advice." Significantly, Komer had directed the CIA to prepare contingency plans for a renewed Kurdish War and

³⁷² Baghdad 501 to State, March 1, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.3/63-5/63/doc.2), pp.1-2.

³⁷³ Baghdad 500 to State, March 1, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.3/63-5/63/doc.1), pp.1-3.

asked that Bundy support these measures at the next Special Group (CI) meeting, held in a few days' time. Ultimately, Komer recommended the U.S. engage in preventative diplomacy to stave off a renewed conflict, which he felt would threaten the regime's survival. In addition, he recommended the embassy in Baghdad raise these concerns with the regime.³⁷⁴ While the details of the Special Group (CI)'s discussion remain classified, Komer's memo suggests the U.S. was only concerned with the Kurdish issue insofar as it threatened the Ba'thist regime's survival.³⁷⁵

On March 3, Melbourne met with Iraq's Foreign Minister Talib Shabib to raise the Kennedy administration's concerns about the Kurds. Shabib said his government was "prepared to concede" cultural autonomy to the Kurds, but was unwilling to go any further. Should fighting resume, Shabib said, the regime planned to "conduct [a] campaign on different lines from Qasim," suggesting it would co-opt anti-Barzani Kurds and Arab tribes from the north to turn the Kurds' guerrilla tactics against them. Melbourne said he was skeptical a military solution was possible, pointing out Kurdish "guerrillas were led by competent, former army officers fully trained in tactics." The cavalier nature of Shabib's comments reinforced Melbourne's concern of a resumption of hostilities, leading him to warn Washington that war was "likely to erupt at any time."³⁷⁶

Melbourne's warning immediately caught the CIA's attention. On March 5, Ray Cline, the head of the CIA's Directorate of Intelligence, sent Bundy a memo warning of the dangers of the renewed Kurdish War. He argued, "[the] emergence of an anti-Communist regime in Baghdad [had] removed the main inhibition on Soviet support of Kurdish dissidence, and this problem may have important implications beyond the borders of Iraq." He identified a number of important conclusions. First, should fighting resume, the new regime would be no more effective at defeating the Kurds than Qasim. Second, despite his long exile in the Soviet Union, Barzani was not a communist but would accept Soviet support if scorned by the West. Third, due to Iran and Turkey's large Kurdish minorities, both were concerned about the

³⁷⁴ White House, Memorandum, Komer to Bundy, March 1, 1963 (FRUS/1961-63/XVIII/doc.173), p.1.

³⁷⁵ See Weldon Matthews, "The Kennedy Administration, Counterinsurgency, and Iraq's First Ba'thist Regime, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 43/4 (2011), pp.635-53.

³⁷⁶ Baghdad 511 to State, March 4, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.3/63-5/63/doc.5), pp.1-3.

spread of Kurdish nationalism across their borders, especially if Barzani adopted a pro-Soviet attitude. Finally, Barzani's military success had made him overconfident, which explained why he was demanding a greater degree of autonomy than the regime was prepared to concede. Cline concluded that if the regime did not make viable concessions to the Kurds soon, a resumption of fighting was inevitable.³⁷⁷

Clearly by early-March 1963, U.S. officials were concerned about resumption of the Kurdish War. The consensus was that war would only serve to advance Moscow's interests and could threaten the survival of the Ba'thist regime. Given this, the U.S. had urged Iraq to seek accommodation with the Kurds.

III

In April 1963, a major shift occurred in U.S.-Iraqi relations, prompted by Iraq's request to purchase American arms. According to Melbourne, the Qasim regime had ordered a dozen helicopters from the Soviet Union, but the "present Soviet attitude on [the] Kurdish question" had led Iraq to conclude it "had no expectation of obtaining them." As such, Shabib inquired whether the U.S. had "comparable helicopters available for sale to Iraq within reasonable time limits for delivery."³⁷⁸ Soon thereafter, Iraqi diplomats in Washington queried the State Department about purchasing forty light tanks and twelve tank transporters.³⁷⁹ Understandably, Iraq's request seemed to convince U.S. policymakers that Iraq had indeed switched camps in the Cold War.

The request prompted an interagency review of the U.S. arms policy toward Iraq. There was a clear consensus within the U.S. government that this was a positive development in terms of both U.S.-Iraqi relations and in the Cold War, but the heightened possibility of a renewal of the Kurdish War complicated matters. The JSC was very optimistic about Iraq's request for arms, circulating a position paper on March 9. It believed the new, anti-communist regime in Baghdad provided

³⁷⁷ CIA, Memorandum, Cline to Bundy, "New Dangers in the Kurdish Problem," plus attachment, March 7, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.3/63-5/63/docs.10-10a), pp.1-4.

³⁷⁸ Baghdad 518 to State, March 4, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.3/63-5/63/doc.8), p.1.

³⁷⁹ State 04507 to U.S. Embassy Baghdad, March 9, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.3/63-5/63/doc.11), p.1.

“opportunities favorable to the Free World, particularly the United States, to increase its influence in the area” and advised that U.S. policy should focus on “solidifying the position of the new Government of Iraq, strengthening its anticommunist posture and its confidence to deal with communist threats or blandishments, and fostering favorable relations between Iraq and the U.S. allies in the area.” Significantly, the JCS believed that arms sales could help shift Iraq’s military-supply relationship away from the Soviets and toward Western suppliers and recommended any military assistance be assessed on a case-by-case basis and be balanced against America’s other commitments in the region (i.e., Israel, Iran, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, UK, and Egypt).³⁸⁰ The State Department agreed with these recommendations and sent a more detailed draft of the proposal to the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. On the question of the helicopter sales, the department did not raise objections and identified two models the embassy could propose, but the tank sales were much more problematic due to concerns that Iraq would use them against either the Kurds or Israel. This created a conundrum. Refusing the sale could affect U.S.-Iraqi relations adversely and potentially force Iraq to turn back to the Soviets for arms. As such, the department asked the embassy to consider these problems before it would approve the sale.³⁸¹ At the end of March, Komer sent Bundy a memo, where he observed State was willing to sell both the helicopters and tanks, but had reservations. He then asked, “are we being sufficiently imaginative to hit this target of opportunity?”³⁸² Clearly, Iraq’s request had elicited an enthusiastic response from U.S. policymakers, although it also heightened the chances of a renewal of the Kurdish War.

On April 2, after weeks of discussion, Hal Saunders, a Middle East analyst on the NSC staff, informed Bundy that State had agreed to sell twelve helicopters to Iraq for between \$4-15 million. Saunders recommended taking a cautious approach toward Iraq, consisting of “being as helpful as possible [to Iraq] without getting into

³⁸⁰ Department of Defense, Memorandum, Reynolds to McNamara, “US Policy for Iraq,” JCSM-197-63, March 9, 1963 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq-1961-63), pp.1-2.

³⁸¹ State 04507 to U.S. Embassy Baghdad, March 9, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.3/63-5/63/doc.11), pp.1-2.

³⁸² White House, Memorandum, Komer to Bundy, March 28, 1963 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq-1961-63-White House Memoranda/doc.74), p.1.

an unwarranted big new aid program.” He noted Iraq’s requests were vague and that they had not responded to the administration’s initial proposal. Nevertheless, he saw “no serious problem in selling light tanks, small arms and [ammunition], [communication] equipment, or even transport aircraft if requested.”³⁸³ With this endorsement, the U.S. agreed “in principle” to sell the tanks to Iraq, which the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad conveyed on April 12. From the guidance provided to the embassy, it is clear that the NSC had dismissed the argument that Iraq posed a military threat to Israel, Turkey, and Iran. The Kennedy administration argued the tanks fulfilled “legitimate Iraqi defensive and internal security needs,” presented the West to Iraq as a viable alternative to the Soviet Union for arms, and suggested Iraq lacked—and would not in the foreseeable future obtain—the logistical capability to threaten Turkey or Iran.³⁸⁴

The reasons for the Kennedy administration’s approval of the weapons sale to Iraq were driven by Cold War considerations. While there were reasons for opposing the sale, like the potential threat Iraq posed to Israel, Iran, and Turkey, as well as the Kurds, it seems these concerns were trumped by the Kennedy administration’s desire to draw Iraq away from the Soviets. Therefore, the force driving U.S. policy toward Ba’thist Iraq had little to do with regional considerations but rather concerns about the Soviet Union and the threat it posed to the region.

IV

Throughout April and May, the Kennedy administration’s desire to wean Iraq away from the Soviets through arms sales led to heightened concern about a resumption of the Kurdish War. This led the U.S. to press its regional allies, Turkey and Iran, not to interfere in the conflict should fighting resume, while urging the Iraqi regime to seek a negotiated settlement with the Kurds. Indeed, as Saunders argued, “[Iraq’s] interests [would] be better served if the government [could] control the Kurds than if the Kurdish rebellion [was] successful enough to invite

³⁸³ See DoS, INR, “The Kurdish Insurgency in the Post-Qasim Period,” RNA-23, May 27, 1963 (KPL/RKF/Kurds, 1961-63), p.3.

³⁸⁴ Baghdad 611 (part I and II) to State, April 1, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.3/63-5/63/doc.16), pp.1-5.

Soviet or Iranian meddling.”³⁸⁵ The fact is, U.S. officials saw a renewal of the Kurdish War as an obstacle to the arms sale and could threaten the survivability of the Ba’thist regime. Consequently, the Kennedy administration had to take steps to prevent war.

On April 2, the State Department cabled its embassies in Ankara and Tehran to raise the Kurdish question with both governments. The cable argued a renewal of the Kurdish War was not in the interests of either state, could only benefit communists or pro-Nasser forces, and increased the possibility of “parallel uprisings” in Turkey and Iran, which the Soviets would be eager to exploit. The department believed Iranian, Turkish, and American interests “would be best served by [an] equitable solution [to the] Kurdish problem ... in [the] context of [the] previously-agreed local government [autonomy] formula.” However, should fighting resume the U.S. felt obliged to warn Iran and Turkey to “stay out of what could become a political and military morass for a foreign state.” It is clear State was particularly concerned about Iranian meddling, since Tehran might be “tempted [to] support [the] Kurdish rebels in [an] effort [to] divert hostile Kurdish action from its own territory.” This temptation, the department argued, would be “short-sighted and inimical to Iran’s overall security interests.”³⁸⁶

In early May, the U.S. began to detect further preparations for war, leading the department to instruct its diplomats in Baghdad to convey to the regime America’s “serious apprehensions at [the] trend of events” and to urge it to present the Kurds with “serious counter-proposals ... [to] lay [the] groundwork for real negotiations.” The embassy was also instructed to say while the U.S. saw the conflict as a strictly internal matter, “in the spirit of full frankness and cordiality ... we have no alternative but to urge avoidance ... of violence from which only GOI’s sworn enemies, the Communists, could profit.”³⁸⁷ This message was conveyed to the

³⁸⁵ State 07021 to U.S. Embassy Baghdad, April 12, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.3/63-5/63/doc.22), p.1.

³⁸⁶ White House, Memorandum, Saunders to Bundy, April 2, 1963 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq-1961-63-White House Memoranda,” p.1.

³⁸⁷ State 02450 to U.S. Embassy Baghdad, May 4, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.3/63-5/63/doc.30), pp.1-3.

foreign minister on May 4 and he was also told the government was in the process of preparing a counter-proposal, but this seemed unlikely.³⁸⁸

On May 22, Melbourne met with Iraqi Prime Minister Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr, a Ba'thist military officer who had played a major role in the February coup, to urge the regime to negotiate in good faith with the Kurds. It was clear the regime showed no interest in doing so, with al-Bakr dismissing the Kurdish proposals as "so outlandish that [he] really could not use them as a basis for discussion." But to Melbourne, al-Bakr's position was just as rigid as the Kurds, with him insisting the Kurds could get "administrative decentralization" but not "political autonomy." Going further, al-Bakr said he "could not permit this Kurdish challenge to Iraqi sovereignty to continue much longer." To this Melbourne reported, "[the] Kurds had told embassy officers and others [that] their proposals [were] fully negotiable" and merely the basis for negotiations, whereupon both sides would give and take until an agreeable compromise could be made. This argument had no effect, with al-Bakr offering "no assurance or indication that [the Iraqi government] would ... resort to force against [the] Kurds."³⁸⁹ Despite al-Bakr's ambiguity, his hardline stance on negotiations suggested a renewal of the Kurdish War was likely.

Melbourne's conversation with al-Bakr prompted the INR to circulate a memo on May 27 highlighting the department's concern about a resumption of the Kurdish War. The report differentiated between the regime, which it blamed for the impasse, and the military, which was "not anxious to renew the fighting" and appeared frustrated with the regime's interference in military matters. For instance, the Ba'th had rejected the army's plan of operations that called for the use of the "least possible force" and replaced it with, what the INR described as, a "plan of virtual extermination." The INR believed a renewal of fighting would take on Cold War dimensions, since it would weaken the anti-communist regime and could lead Moscow to offer the Kurds financial aid and clandestine arms—though this would be challenging given the physical difficulties of infiltrating arms into northern Iraq via Turkey or Iran. However, the INR emphasized, the Kurdish leadership viewed

³⁸⁸ Baghdad 729 to State, May 4, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.3/63-5/63/doc.32), p.1.

³⁸⁹ Baghdad 795 to State, May 24, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.3/63-5/63/doc.39), pp.1-3.

Moscow with “suspicion and bitterness” and would only accept Soviet arms as a last resort. The INR recommended a negotiated settlement, mediated by an impartial, non-Arab, Muslim mediator, like the International Red Crescent. But should fighting break out, the U.S. would be caught in a difficult position of having to balance its desire for a peaceful settlement and its need to support the Iraqi regime.³⁹⁰

In early June 1963, the tension between the regime and the Kurds broke into the open, when the regime arrested members of the Kurds’ negotiating delegation;³⁹¹ declared martial law throughout the north; and issued an ultimatum for the Kurds to lay down their arms within 24 hours and declare allegiance to the government or “suffer [the] consequences.”³⁹² By this point, Iraq had amassed nearly two-thirds of its army—roughly 45,000 troops—in Kurdistan.³⁹³ Fearing war, Melbourne cabled Washington to warn that war was inevitable and that the regime had deluded itself into thinking it would score an easy victory.³⁹⁴

In the period prior to the start of Iraq’s offensive against the Kurds on June 10, the Kennedy administration took active steps to stave off war, including consulting with and urging restraint on the Ba’thist regime. Fearing the worst, the U.S. also urged its allies, Turkey and Iran, to avoid involvement should war resume. Unfortunately, despite American concerns, the Iraqi regime was determined to crush the Kurds militarily.

V

When the Iraqi government attacked the Kurds in June 1963, the Kennedy administration’s concern that the war would become a vehicle for Soviet subversion proved accurate. As soon as the war reopened, the Soviet Union went on a diplomatic offensive, condemning the Ba’thist regime, supporting the Kurdish demands for autonomy, and urging one of its satellites—Outer Mongolia—to level charges of genocide against the Iraqi regime at the United Nations. For its part, the

³⁹⁰ “The Kurdish Insurgency...,” May 27, 1963, *Op. Cit.*, p.1.

³⁹¹ Baghdad 907 to State, June 19, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.6/63-8/63/doc.11), p.2.

³⁹² Baghdad 849 to State, June 10, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.6/63-8/63/doc.2), pp.1-2.

³⁹³ CIA, “Iraq-Kurdish Rebellion,” OCI No. 2024/63, June 13, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.6/63-8/63/doc.7), p.2.

³⁹⁴ Baghdad 854 to State, June 10, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.6/63-8/63/doc.3), pp.1-3.

U.S. tried to maintain the middle ground, urging the Ba'th to seek a negotiated settlement, while also offering limited military aid. However, as Soviet support for the Kurds increased, the U.S. was forced to do the same for Iraq. In short, the Kurdish War appeared to be a new front in the Cold War.

On June 15, an official Soviet news agency, TASS, accused the Ba'thist regime of "Hitlerite" treachery, using "fascist SS detachments," and of genocide. The statement asserted Iraq's Kurdish policy was in direct violation of the UN charter and should be a matter of concern to all nations. Then, on June 20, another official Soviet newspaper, Pravda, repeated the charges but included a threat to suspend Soviet aid to Iraq. These two articles were the opening salvo of an intensive Soviet diplomatic and propaganda campaign against Iraq and resulted in the Iraqi-Kurdish conflict take on relevance in the Cold War.³⁹⁵

Within days of the reopening of the war, U.S. officials in Baghdad received numerous reports of Iraqi atrocities against the Kurds. On June 19, the embassy cabled Washington to report massacres against civilians trying to flee buildings set on fire by Iraqi troops, and the use of women and children as human shields.³⁹⁶ Faced with these ghastly accounts, Bundy convened the Special Group (CI) on June 20. Though accounts of the meeting remain classified, details can be deduced from alternative sources. For instance, on June 19 Komer sent Bundy a memo recommending taking "a strong line" at the meeting and outlining some key points to address. The memo indicated Kennedy had taken a personal interest in the conflict, asking to what extent U.S. aid to Iraq was "motivated by his reading [of] how [the] Soviets have come out directly in support of [the] Kurds; ergo, we should support the Iraqis." This logic suggests Kennedy perceived the Kurdish question in Cold War terms, which Komer said made "good sense on many counts." However, officials at the State Department were very much against this analysis, particularly the head of the NEA, Phillips Talbot, who Komer and the CIA felt was "too waffly."³⁹⁷

³⁹⁵ CIA, "Special Report: Soviet Pressure on Iraq," August 9, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq. 6/63-8/63/doc.39), pp.2-3.

³⁹⁶ Baghdad 907, June 19, 1963, *Op. Cit.*, pp.1-3.

³⁹⁷ White House, Memorandum, Komer to Bundy, June 19, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq. 6/63-8/63/doc.12), p.1.

Komer also raised the problem of the Shah's assistance to the Kurds, arguing "[it did not] do much good for [the U.S.] to help arm [the] Iraqis and for [the] Turks to close the border if [the] Iranians [were] simultaneously peddling stuff to [the] Kurds. So [an] essential part of any policy must be to beat up the Shah on this score."³⁹⁸

Another memo, sent to Kennedy on June 21, suggested the group decided to increase military and economic assistance to Iraq.³⁹⁹ A third memo, sent by Brubeck to Bundy, suggested this included increasing funds from \$800,000 to a million for a participant training program for Iraqi officials, technicians, and educators in their fields of specialization in America; the implementation of a Title IV program for food assistance; \$10,000 in flood assistance; and the sale of 40 light tanks, 12 tanks transporters, 500 heavy trucks, and 15 large helicopters, though details of these sales were under negotiation.⁴⁰⁰ Clearly, the Soviet Union's support for the Kurds had led the Kennedy administration to approve a wide range of assistance for Iraq.

Meanwhile, the Soviet-Iraqi split over the Kurds provided the U.S. with a unique opportunity to obtain intelligence on Soviet military hardware (SOV-MAT) that Iraq had received under Qasim.⁴⁰¹ On June 27, an official identified only as "TAP"—believed to be Thomas A. Parrott, a high-level CIA official on assignment to the White House at the time⁴⁰²—drafted a cryptic, top-secret memo to an undisclosed individual stating:

At Iraqi request, the proposal for the big item of equipment has been suspended indefinitely. This is because they are worried about the security implications for themselves at this particular time.

Hopefully the air delivery will go off the first week of July. This includes tank batteries, rockets, revolvers, ammunition, and the special item.⁴⁰³

³⁹⁸ Ibid., p.1.

³⁹⁹ White House, Memorandum, Keyser to the President, "United States Military and Economic Assistance to Iraq," June 21, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.6/63-8/63/doc.14), p.1.

⁴⁰⁰ DoS, Memorandum, Brubeck to Bundy, "United States Military and Economic Assistance to Iraq," June 19, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.6/63-8/63/doc.22), pp.1-2.

⁴⁰¹ Department of Defense, Memorandum, Sloan to Komer, "Aid to Iraq," July 10, 1963 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq-1961-63), pp.1-2.

⁴⁰² Email correspondence from Kennedy Library, November 21, 2011.

⁴⁰³ White House, Memorandum, TAP to unknown, "Iraq," June 27, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.6/63-8/63/doc.19), p.1.

This suggests the Iraqis were fearful the Soviets would discover their provision of SOV-MAT to the U.S. and lead to further aggression. Further details of this operation are revealed in a cable sent in late-July from the new U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, Robert Strong, to State, where he argued the Iraqi government was “unlikely [to] make deliveries [of SOV-MAT] at any price if there [was a] real risk [that the] Soviets will learn of them.” He indicated the Iraqis were aware of their leverage and were determined to extract a high price. Given this, he advised the U.S. “exert every precaution to avoid showing overeagerness” and use “extreme care to avoid jeopardizing our larger interests.” He also recommended he be put in charge of coordinating the operation to attain these sensitive materials in order to avoid duplication and prevent misunderstandings.⁴⁰⁴ These exchanges make clear the U.S. was trying to capitalize on Iraq’s frustration with the Soviets in order to obtain intelligence on Soviet military capabilities, which could allow it to establish benchmarks on Russia’s technological advancement. Despite Iraq’s reticence, the U.S.-Iraqi relationship suddenly was becoming more important in the eyes of U.S. policymakers.

By the end of June, U.S. officials had concluded the Soviet Union had “abandoned any pretense of non-interference in Iraqi internal affairs” and was intent to “make Iraq [an] open Cold War battleground.”⁴⁰⁵ Beyond its pro-Kurdish propaganda and the small monthly stipend to Barzani, in early July the CIA learned the Soviets had suspended military shipments to Iraq at the end of May.⁴⁰⁶ On June 27 Melbourne warned Washington:

If [the] Soviet Union can help in [the] overthrow [of the government], even for another Nationalist based regime, it [is] hoping for some subsequent environment wherein it can gain tolerance for local Communists and rebuild its influence.

Given the likelihood that any successor regime would come from the military, he recommended the embassy increase its contacts with the officers through the

⁴⁰⁴ Baghdad 129 to State, July 30, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.6/63-8/63/doc.34), pp.1-6.

⁴⁰⁵ Baghdad 933, June 27, 1963, *Op. Cit.*, pp.1-2.

⁴⁰⁶ CIA, “Moscow Turning Against Baathist Regime in Iraq,” *Current Intelligence Weekly Summary*, June 28, 1963 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq-1961-63/doc.23), p.9; and Baghdad 28 to State, July 6, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.6/63-8/63/doc.22), p.1.

“supply of equipment and services of [a] type which would not upset [the] middle east power balance.”⁴⁰⁷ In short, the U.S. saw the building of an arms-supply relationship with Baghdad as a viable means of securing its long-term influence with Iraq.

The Soviet Union’s diplomatic offensive against Iraq peaked in early July when it convinced its ally, Outer Mongolia, to submit an item to the agenda for the upcoming General Assembly charging the Iraqi government with conducting a genocidal war against the Kurds.⁴⁰⁸ The Mongolian claim caused quite a stir, but this was just the beginning. On July 9, Moscow issued a statement accusing “CENTO members and Syria” of undertaking “joint measures” against the Kurds. According to the CIA, this statement was “designed to refute Baghdad’s claim that the Kurdish problem is strictly an internal affair and to establish a basis for an appeal for UN or other international action in the matter.” In short, the Soviets were trying to internationalize the Kurdish War and draw it deeper into the Cold War. The next day, the Soviet delegation at the UN announced it was considering taking the matter to the Security Council.⁴⁰⁹ Then, going further, the Soviets proposed inscribing charges of genocide against Iraq at the UN’s Economic-Social (ECOSOC) committee.⁴¹⁰ Finally, on July 11 the Soviets sent a letter to the Security Council President calling attention to the “serious situation resulting from events in northern Iraq and from interference of states in military operations undertaken against [the] Kurdish people by Iraqi authorities.”⁴¹¹ For the first time, the plight of the Kurds had made its way to the highest level of international diplomacy, but problematically, the U.S., the UN’s most powerful member, was not on their side.

The genocide charge presented the Kennedy administration with a particularly difficult problem. The fact was that an ethnically Arab government was engaging in a ruthless military campaign against a distinct ethnic minority, targeting civilians, and committing atrocities with some regularity. By definition, Iraq was

⁴⁰⁷ Baghdad 933 to State, June 27, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.6/63-8/63/doc.17), pp.1-2.

⁴⁰⁸ USUN 12 to State, July 2, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.6/63-8/63/doc.21), p.1.

⁴⁰⁹ CIA, “USSR Says it May Call for UN Security Council Meeting on Kurdish Issue,” *Central Intelligence Digest*, July 11, 1963 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq.Kurds-1961-63/doc.8), p.1.

⁴¹⁰ Rome 101 to State, July 10, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.6/63-8/63/doc.25), pp.1-2.

⁴¹¹ USUN 96 to State, July 11, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.6/63-8/63/doc.27), p.1.

committing genocide.⁴¹² The problem, however, was the U.S. and its Western allies were hesitant to support the Soviet position.⁴¹³ The Kennedy administration saw the genocide charge as a Soviet maneuver aimed at punishing the Ba'th for its repression against the communists:

[The] Mongolian genocide charge at United Nations presents [a] difficult problem for [the] USG. We very rarely oppose inscription of items, even when we [are] against [its] substance.... However, in view of [the] special circumstances surrounding [the] Kurdish issue, including tendentious nature of [the] wording of [the] item and [the] fact that it represents a Soviet effort to penalize a country for adopting a less sympathetic policy toward [the] Soviet Bloc, Department is considering opposing inscription.⁴¹⁴

This was pure Cold War politics. When faced with an aggressive Soviet diplomatic offensive, the U.S. was forced to back the Iraqi regime, regardless of its atrocious tactics against the Kurds.

It seems that Moscow's diplomatic maneuvers at the UN were only part of its strategy for Iraq. In the early hours of July 3, pro-communist elements attempted a coup, seizing Camp Rashid, an important military base just to the southeast of Baghdad. Fortunately, Iraqi security forces "acted swiftly and evidently according to [a] well planned system" and suppressed the attempt.⁴¹⁵ The CIA was convinced the Soviets were behind the plot. According to an intelligence summary from July 13:

Iraqi security forces have arrested two more members of a Soviet bloc intelligence net in Baghdad. Their confessions have provided direct evidence that the net was organized and directed by [redacted] and have implicated local Soviets with ... staging the 3 July 1963 coup attempt.⁴¹⁶

This appeared to be part of a wider Soviet strategy aimed at regaining control of Iraq:

⁴¹² Genocide is defined as the deliberate killing of a large group of people, especially those of a particular ethnic group or nation.

⁴¹³ Rome 101, July 10, 1963, *Op.Cit.*, pp.1-2.

⁴¹⁴ State 10313 to U.S. Embassy Baghdad, July 18, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.6/63-8/63/doc.27), p.3.

⁴¹⁵ Department of Army, U.S. Army Attaché Baghdad to RUEPDA, CX-131-63, July 3, 1963 (RG59, Records Relating to Iraq, 1963-64, Box 2, POL 26), pp.1-2.

⁴¹⁶ CIA, "1. Evidence of Soviet Bloc Involvement in Abortive Coup of 3 July 1963; 2. General Security Alert by Iraqi Government; 3. Further indications of Explosiveness of Current Situation in Iraq," TDCS – 3/553,524, July 13, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.6/63-8/63/doc.28), pp.1-2.

There is strong evidence to suggest [Soviet] bloc involvement in the 3 July uprising at Camp Rashid, and it is likely that the USSR will work both through propaganda media and covertly to bring about the overthrow of the Ba'ath in Iraq, calculating that any successor regime would be more favorable to Communist interests.⁴¹⁷

The Camp Rashid coup made clear that the Soviet Union viewed Iraq as a geopolitical prize important enough to take the risk of covert action to regain control. Clearly, U.S. and Soviet officials both viewed Iraq as an important battleground in the Cold War.

Just prior to the coup, Ambassador Strong had arrived in Baghdad and had arranged to present his credentials to Prime Minister al-Bakr in early July.⁴¹⁸ When the two met on July 7, the importance of the Cold War was evident. Al-Bakr explained that if Iraq was to avoid communist control, outside support was essential. He described "Iraq's battle against [the] communists" as a "U.S. battle" and explained that he wanted "cordial relations" with the West, particularly the United States, but would maintain a non-aligned foreign policy. Strong explained the U.S. wanted Iraq to remain independent and would accept a non-aligned foreign policy. On the question of Arab unity, Strong reiterated the U.S. policy of accepting whatever decision the regime made so long as it was voluntary. On the Cold War, Strong said the U.S. had a "deep interest" in Iraq's efforts to combat communism and urged the regime to create conditions that would help reduce communism's appeal. Significantly, the conversation touched upon neither the Kurdish War nor the impending arms deal, focusing instead on the Soviet threat. Clearly, both U.S. and Iraqi officials at this juncture viewed the Cold War as more significant.⁴¹⁹

The Soviet Union's aggressive tactics toward Iraq led U.S. officials to press the Kennedy administration to approve a greatly expanded arms deal. On July 10, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Frank Sloan sent Komer a memo outlining the types of military assistance Defense was prepared to provide Iraq. Apparently,

⁴¹⁷ "...Soviet Pressure on Iraq," August 9, 1963, *Op.Cit.*, p.4.

⁴¹⁸ On June 17, Kennedy swore in Robert Strong as the new American ambassador to Iraq. After a brief meeting with Kennedy, Strong departed Washington, arriving in Baghdad on June 27. On the presentation of credentials, see Baghdad 953 to State, June 29, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.6/63-8/63/doc.20), p.1.

⁴¹⁹ Baghdad 33 to State, July 8, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.6/63-8/63/doc.23), pp.1-2.

Defense had sent a survey team to Iraq to assess its military needs and identify areas where the U.S. could help. The team concluded that in addition to the helicopters, M-41 light tanks, tank transporters, and trucks already on the table, Iraq was interested in purchasing six S-61R Sikorsky helicopters, ten C-119 troop carrier aircrafts, twelve advanced jet trainers, two squadrons (36 in total) of F-104 or F-100 fighter aircrafts, and a complete set of early warning radars. As grant aid, the team recommended repairing five F-86 aircraft and three U.S.-made 8" Howitzers from the monarchy period, the latter of which would require training teams and at least 5,000 rounds of ammunition. In total, this arms package would cost approximately \$55 million.⁴²⁰ Once again, the U.S. was expanding its support for Iraq in response to Soviet provocations.

The Soviet Union's attempts to subvert the Ba'thist regime through its support of the Kurds, its diplomatic offensive at the UN, and covert action as evidenced by the Camp Rashid coup, helped convince U.S. officials that Iraq was an important Cold War battleground. This in turn translated into a rapid improvement in U.S.-Iraqi relations and provided opportunities to provide Iraq with increased military assistance, as well as opportunities to gain intelligence on the advanced Soviet weaponry Moscow had provided the Qasim regime. While segments of the U.S. government were pleased about this potential intelligence bonanza, officials at the State Department had grown disturbed about the Ba'thist regime's brutal atrocities against its Kurdish population.

VI

In mid-July 1963, U.S. policy toward Iraq and the Kurdish War shifted in response to concerns the State Department raised about the Ba'thist regime's survival, its engaging in acts that appeared to be genocide, and the lack of influence the U.S. had over the Kurds. With the war spiraling out of control and the Soviets engaged in an aggressive overt and covert campaign against the regime, it was clear the traditional "wait and see" policy had made advancing U.S. interests in Iraq

⁴²⁰ "Aid to Iraq," July 10, 1963, *Op.Cit.*, pp.2-3.

challenging. Recognizing this, the Kennedy administration adopted a proactive policy toward both Iraq and the Kurdish War during the summer and early fall of 1963, eventually leading it to engage in a short-lived and unsuccessful initiative to bring about a ceasefire.

On July 12, James Spain of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff drafted a memo arguing Iraq was moving toward the decisive stages of two separate but connected issues: a showdown with the Soviet Union and its war with the Kurds. Spain saw Moscow's interference in Iraq and its support for the Kurds as troubling developments. With hostility between Baghdad and Moscow escalating, Spain was concerned the regime's survival might depend on stronger U.S. support than "envisaged in the limits of [their] present policy." Further, because Iraq's "extreme policy" toward the Kurds resembled an act of genocide, it made it difficult for the U.S. to build diplomatic support to block Soviet efforts in international forums.

...[The] policy of the nationalist Arabs who dominate the Baghdad government does in fact come close to genocide. According to a senior Iraqi army officer it consists of: taking only such Kurdish prisoners as may supply information and then shooting them, ultimately reducing the adult male Kurdish population to one-tenth of what it now is, letting the women and children fend for themselves, and repopulating the area with Arabs.

A third problem was the U.S. "had little or no contact with [the Kurds] or opportunity to try to influence their attitudes." While Kurds had always maintained contact with U.S. officials, the U.S. had never tried to cultivate influence. Spain felt this was a mistake and argued "future U.S. actions and initiatives [in Iraq] may have to go beyond the bounds of [their] previous 'stand by' policy" and proposed three policy alternatives:

- (A) Development of a vigorous coordinated U.S. effort to encourage and facilitate a transition to greater reliance on Western sources of supply for Iraq's foreign trade and development needs;
- (B) A U.S. commitment in discreet but clearcut terms to support Iraq against Communist threats and pressures in the political and security fields; and
- (C) A frank representation to the Baghdad government that while, unlike the Soviets, we will not support the Kurds against it, we do disapprove of its unduly repressive policy toward them and

cannot bring to bear the full power of our sympathy and support as long as this policy continues; in addition, that we are aware that in fact their military action against the Kurds is not succeeding as claimed.

He also made two additional suggestions worth consideration. The first was the “establishment of a secret or semi-official contact with [Barzani] for the purpose of getting better information on his activities and intentions and, hopefully, of exerting some influence on him.” The second option was to promote third-party “good offices” designed to reach a negotiated settlement in the conflict.⁴²¹ Spain’s proposals would have a considerable impact on the U.S. policy toward Iraq and the Kurdish problem and lead to a U.S. initiative aimed at bringing about a ceasefire in the conflict.

On July 18, the department sent out policy guidelines to all its posts in the region reflecting Spain’s analysis. Citing “private admissions from Iraqi Army officers,” it was clear the Kurdish War had stalemated. Given this, the department felt the conditions for a mediated settlement were ideal. While the U.S. would continue to regard the Kurdish problem as a “purely internal Iraqi question, in which U.S. [would] not intervene directly or indirectly,” it was also sympathetic to legitimate Kurdish claims. Nevertheless, interests dictated that maintaining good relations with Baghdad was a paramount consideration, since the U.S. had a “strong stake in [the] survival [of the] present [Iraqi regime] which [is] better for U.S. interests than any likely successor.” Given this dichotomy, U.S. policy had to encourage the regime to grant Kurds cultural autonomy and local administration; offer assistance for the reconstruction, development, and modernization of the Kurdish region; provide Iraq with food and work relief projects; and continue urging the regime of the “wisdom of moderation” in dealing with Kurdish civilians. At the UN, the department was inclined to step back from the genocide claim and encourage its Arab allies to lead in the opposition to the charge. Taken together, the

⁴²¹ DoS, Memorandum, Spain to Grant, “Policy Toward Iraq,” July 12, 1963 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq-1961-63), pp.1-4.

U.S. had decided to pressure the Iraqi regime into settling the Kurdish question peacefully, while avoiding being dragged into the conflict.⁴²²

By chance, the same day State was issuing its guidance, Cyrus Habibi, a former local employee of the U.S. Consulate in Tabriz with close contacts with the Kurds, delivered a letter from Barzani asking President Kennedy to help mediate a ceasefire.⁴²³ The administration's response to Barzani's proposal highlighted the impact of Spain's recommendations. For instance, when the new U.S. Ambassador to Iran, Julius Holmes, forwarded the letter to Washington, he recommended Tabriz reiterate the non-intervention policy.⁴²⁴ But when the department passed both the letter and Holmes' recommendation to the White House in early August, it suggested the U.S. go "one step further ... by having [their] Consul [in Tabriz] state ... the message was forwarded to the Department and that the Consul is responding ... on behalf of the United States Government." State argued this acknowledgement would "demonstrate, if only symbolically, United States concern for and interests in the Kurds." The NSC staff agreed, with Komer scribbling in the margins of the document: "Approve. I believe this [is] a sensible thing as our Consul [would] only be reiterating standard U.S. policy, which we have already told [the] Iraqis."⁴²⁵ This demonstrated a shift was taking place within the U.S. government regarding the Kurds, even though the White House adopted a "favorable" arms policy toward Iraq and agreed to an extensive arms package.⁴²⁶ Despite this, the new instructions were

⁴²² State 10313, July 18, 1963, *Op.Cit.*, pp.1-3.

⁴²³ Tabriz 1 to State, July 24 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.6/63-8/63/doc.31), pp.1-2; and Tehran A-67 to State, "Mullah Mustafa Barzani's Letter to President Kennedy," letter attached, July 30, 1963 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/Box3944/POL-13-Non Party Blocs [Iraq] 2/1/63), pp.2-3.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.2-3.

⁴²⁵ DoS, Memorandum for Bundy, August 6, 1963 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq. Kurds-1961-63/doc.6), pp. 1-2.

⁴²⁶ The U.S. arms policy toward Iraq consisting of responding favorably to Iraqi requests falling within the approved U.S. arms policy and are available from U.S. sources; deliveries should be made as rapidly as possible; any equipment furnished had to be on a cash basis; credit terms could be arranged but only if it would not have an adverse impact on Iraq's economy; and consultations should be undertaken with U.S. allies to encourage the adoption of similar arms policies. See Department of Defense, Memorandum, JCS to McNamara, "US Assistance to Iraq," JCSM-623-63, August 15, 1963 (FRUS/1961-63/XVIII/doc.311), pp. 673-75. McNamara forwarded this proposal onto White House for approval on August 19, see White House, Memorandum, Smith to Komer, August 19, 1963 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq-1961-63/doc.10), p. 1.

forwarded on to Tehran on August 7 and raised with Barzani's intermediary on August 12.⁴²⁷

The shift in U.S. policy caught Barzani's attention, leading to the opening of a new channel to the U.S. government. According to Carleton Coon, the U.S. Consul in Tabriz, on August 16 a prominent Kurd approached the consulate and asked the U.S. to "take [a] leading role in getting negotiations started and particularly in bringing about [a] truce or cease-fire."⁴²⁸ Unlike Barzani's earlier letter to Kennedy, this was the first time that the Kurds had asked the U.S. to assume a direct role in mediating a ceasefire, prompting the department to cable Baghdad to ascertain its views on the matter, while asking Tehran to await further guidance.⁴²⁹

The embassy in Baghdad responded positively on August 20, arguing a Barzani-initiated ceasefire held promise since it would allow the regime to sell it to its people as a victory and let it save face. There was, however, a chance the regime would interpret the proposal as a sign of weakness or a clever ploy to undermine its credibility. Even so, the embassy felt it was worthwhile for the U.S. to act as a messenger between Barzani and Baghdad but advised against a mediating role. Significantly, the embassy urged the department to act immediately, since the Iraqi army stood little chance of holding out against the Kurd during the oncoming winter.⁴³⁰ Another reason for urgency was fear that word of the U.S.-Barzani contacts could be leaked before a decision about how to respond had been reached. The basis of this concern stemmed from the Cold War. After all, the entire approach could have been a Soviet plot aimed at driving a wedge between the U.S. and Iraq.⁴³¹

These concerns were addressed in a cable to Baghdad, Tehran, and London on August 23. Because of the matter's urgency, the department recommended

⁴²⁷ See State to U.S. Embassy Tehran, Action Tehran 91, August 7, 1963 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/Box3944/POL-13-Non Party Blocs [Iraq] 2/1/63), p.1; and Tabriz 2 to State, August 14, 1963 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/Box3944/POL-13-Non Party Blocs [Iraq] 2/1/63), p.1.

⁴²⁸ Tehran 166 to State, August 17, 1963 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/Box3944/POL-13-Non Party Blocs [Iraq] 2/1/63), pp.1-2.

⁴²⁹ State to U.S. Embassy Baghdad, info: Tehran, Action Baghdad 112, August 18, 1963 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/Box3944/POL-13-Non Party Blocs [Iraq] 2/1/63), pp.1-2.

⁴³⁰ Baghdad 219 to State, August 20, 1963 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/Box3944/POL-13-Non Party Blocs [Iraq] 2/1/63), pp.1-3.

⁴³¹ State 14287 to U.S. Embassy Baghdad, August 23, 1963 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/Box3944/POL-13-Non Party Blocs [Iraq] 2/1/63), pp.1-2.

Baghdad “promptly and unilaterally inform [the] Iraqi Government in confidence that Barzani claims to desire [a] cease fire” and its willingness to transmit a response. Tehran was advised to inform the Iranians of Barzani’s approach, though on the condition it be held in the strictest of confidence. The department endorsed Baghdad’s recommendation that the U.S. “act alone as messenger rather than in concert with Iran.” The department also ordered Tabriz to inform Barzani’s intermediary that the Iraqi government would be told of the request for negotiations and was to “stress [their] role as solely [a] messenger, and that [the] USG [could not] ... become [an] intermediary.” Finally, the department believed that the British needed to be informed of the approach.⁴³² When Strong informed al-Bakr of Barzani’s proposal and U.S. willingness to pass a response on August 25, he “expressed astonishment” at America’s involvement and questioned why Barzani had not sent the message through the Soviets, who appeared to be his ally. Strong emphasized he was only passing along information and was not dealing with the substance of the Kurdish problem.⁴³³ When Holmes informed Iran’s Foreign Minister, Abbas Aram, on August 26, he told Washington the conversation “was inconclusive and produced nothing worth reporting.”⁴³⁴ The next day, Coon reported from Tabriz that the message to Barzani had been passed to the intermediary.⁴³⁵

On September 12, Benjamin Read, the State Department’s new executive secretary, sent Bundy a memo detailing Barzani’s letters to Kennedy, the debate over the administration’s response, and the approach taken by Tabriz. After reviewing the documents, Komer recommended Bundy apprise Kennedy on this matter, if only to better prepare him in the “off chance someone may ask [the President] if he’s heard from [the] Kurds.” Komer emphasized the political sensitivity of this issue, pointing out the Iraqis had proven highly sensitive about the

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Baghdad 241 to State, August 25, 1963 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/Box3944/POL-13-Non Party Blocs [Iraq] 2/1/63), p.1.

⁴³⁴ Tehran 200 to State, August 27, 1963 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/Box3944/POL-13-Non Party Blocs [Iraq] 2/1/63), p.1. See also Tehran 189, August 25, 1963, *Op. Cit.*, p.1.

⁴³⁵ Tehran 211 to State, August 29, 1963 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/Box3944/POL-13-Non Party Blocs [Iraq] 2/1/63), p.1.

impending arrival of a Kurdish delegation to New York for the upcoming General Assembly meeting and had tried unsuccessfully to lobby the U.S. to bar the Kurds entry.⁴³⁶

In mid-September, it became clear the Iraqi regime had no interest in using the U.S. channel to Barzani, leading Strong to advise the department to “avoid any further action with either Barzani or [the] Iraqi government unless one or both of them shows initiative.”⁴³⁷ Unexpectedly, the U.S. decision to abandon the Barzani channel led the Iranians to try to revive it. On September 16, Major General Hassan Pakravan, the head of SAVAK, visited Holmes to discuss the Kurdish War. Apparently, a few days earlier the Shah had met with Barzani, who had complained about the collapse of the ceasefire effort. Pakvaran said the Shah wanted the U.S. to know five things about Barzani: he was not a communist; understood an independent Kurdistan would be “sheer foolishness”; was pushing for only a minimal degree of autonomy; and wanted to stop fighting and return to the negotiating table. But most importantly, Barzani needed external guarantees that his people would not be “delivered to the tender mercies of the Baghdad government.” The Shah felt these were reasonable points and wanted the Kennedy administration to continue pressuring the Iraqi regime to end the fighting. The Shah also was “perplexed as to what to do next” and wanted to know where the U.S. stood on the Kurdish question. Holmes explained the present regime in Baghdad was the best it could hope for; agreed a ceasefire was the best option; and expressed hope the U.S. and Iran could work together to achieve this. However, the Iraqi regime showed a “general lack of enthusiasm” toward earlier efforts to mediate a ceasefire.⁴³⁸

Pakvaran’s approach made clear Iran’s role in supporting the Kurds. Certainly, the U.S. had known since mid-1962 that the Shah was assisting the Kurds, but Iran had never before conducted diplomacy on Barzani’s behalf. While U.S. officials would continue to resist Iranian pressure, the Shah’s identification with Barzani made it easier for the U.S. to accept that he was neither pro-communist nor

⁴³⁶ DoS, Memorandum, Read to Bundy, “Letter to the President from Mullah Mustafa Barzani,” September 12, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.9/63-11/63/doc.5), pp.1-2.

⁴³⁷ Baghdad 312 to State, September 14, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.9/63-11/63/doc.6), p.1.

⁴³⁸ Tehran 276 to State, September 17, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.9/63-11/63/doc.8), pp.1-3.

beholden to the Soviets. This was important given the Kurdish War's growing relevance to the Cold War.

In mid-September, the Soviet diplomatic offensive against Iraq at the UN fizzled out. Due to opposition from the Arab states, on September 16 the Soviet Union ordered the Outer Mongolia delegation to drop the Kurdish genocide question from the UNGA's agenda. It is open to speculation why the Soviets allowed the item to be removed. One explanation, according to the *New York Times*, was the Mongolians had found insufficient support for the item to inscribe it.⁴³⁹ Another explanation was the Soviets had ordered Mongolia to retract the item as a gesture of goodwill toward the Iraqi regime, as step toward political rapprochement.⁴⁴⁰ Either way, the removal of the genocide charge effectively undermined the very purpose of the Kurdish delegation to the UNGA and provided the Ba'thist regime with a much-needed political victory.

While at the UNGA, on October 1 Secretary Rusk met with Iraqi Foreign Minister Shabib and Iraq's ambassador to the UN, Adnan Pachachi. During the talks, Rusk expressed overall satisfaction with the state of U.S.-Iraqi relations, emphasized the U.S. had no ambitions in Iraq and only wanted the "maintenance and advancement of [its] independence, prosperity and security." On the Kurdish question, Rusk asked Shabib what the prospects were for peace. Shabib replied that "Barzani [was] defeated," the war was "practically over," and "military operations should be completed" before winter set in. Rusk pressed about a "political peace as distinct from an end to the fighting," to which Shabib said "development and decentralization" in Kurdistan "[could] only be accomplished after the armed threat [was] ended." It was clear from this conversation that the regime was still convinced the use of force was the only solution to the Kurdish problem.⁴⁴¹

After months of heavy fighting, by October it was evident both the Iraqis and Kurds were growing short on supplies. On the Iraqi side, the Soviet embargo had

⁴³⁹ *New York Times*, "U.N. Drops 2 Agenda Items; Africans May Ask to Add 2," September 17, 1963, p.2.

⁴⁴⁰ DoS, Memorandum of Conversation, "Iraq's Economic Prospects, Part III of V," October 1, 1963 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq-1961-63/doc.7c), p.2.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, doc.7a-d, pp.1-7. The issue of U.S. provision of Title IV food aid to Iraq also discussed. Shabib described the U.S. response as "far from enthusiastic" and Rusk explained the U.S. was being cautious and did not want to embarrass Iraq with "an over-eager and aggressive American attitude."

deprived it of ordinance lost during the fighting. In early October, the Ba'ath sent a delegation to Cairo to persuade Nasser to supply it with enough arms and ammunition to allow the war to continue. Unfortunately, details about Nasser's response to Iraq's request are unavailable.⁴⁴² In the meantime, the CIA learned Iran had "recently arranged transportation from Tehran to the Iraqi border of several shipments of bazookas, as well as additional small arms purchased in Europe."⁴⁴³ The Kurds had also purchased a radio transmitter in Europe, which was being smuggled into Iraq through Iran.⁴⁴⁴

By the fall of 1963, the U.S. approach to Iraq had shifted away from its "wait and see" policy toward that of engagement. This was due to American concerns that the Ba'athist regime's deteriorating relations with the Soviets and its ineffective war with the Kurds posed a threat to its survival. From a U.S. perspective, the only solution was for a negotiated peace. But just as the shift in thinking was taking place in Washington, Barzani provided the U.S. with an opportunity to help bring about a ceasefire, while establishing a direct line of communication to the Kurdish leadership. But Baghdad's less-than-enthusiastic response led to the initiative's collapse. Significantly, it was at this point that Iran's role in facilitating the U.S.-Kurdish opening became evident. This would, in turn, reinforce the perception among U.S. officials that Barzani was not a communist but an opportunist who would accept Soviet or Iranian support if it helped advance his strategic goals.

VII

In the fall of 1963, a power struggle emerged within the Iraqi regime over the question of Arab unification. The struggle pitted the moderate, military wing of the party led by Prime Minister al-Bakr and President Abd al'Salim Arif (who was not himself a Ba'athist) against the extremist, civilian wing, embodied by Ali Salih al-Sa'di, who was a former premier and interior minister. As Tripp describes him, "al-Sa'di was the most influential and powerful member of the three at the time, although his

⁴⁴² *New York Times*, "Iraq Seeking Arms for War on Kurds," October 5, 1963, p.25.

⁴⁴³ CIA, "Iran Increases Clandestine Support of Kurds in Iraq," *Central Intelligence Digest*, October 7, 1963 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq. Kurds-1961-63/doc.1), p.1.

⁴⁴⁴ Beirut 236 to State, September 13, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.9/63-11/63/doc.4), p.2.

authority did not go uncontested.” The source of al-Sa’di’s influence came from his position as head of the Ba’th regional command, which was the most powerful position in the Iraqi wing of the party. But it was his role as head of the militant National Guard that concerned Iraq’s military the most. Earlier, the military had tried and failed to have the National Guard dissolved, but in early September, when al-Sa’di declared his support for Marxism, his opponents opted to take matters into their own hands.⁴⁴⁵ According to the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, the plan was for al-Bakr and Arif, with the help of the military, to remove al-Sa’di and the Ba’th from the machinery of power, seize control of the government, settle the Kurdish problem, and resume unity talks with Cairo, which had collapsed earlier that year. The embassy believed this would come in the form of a cabinet reshuffle that would remove hard-line Ba’thist officials from power, see al-Sa’di arrested and sent abroad as an ambassador, and have the military neutralize the National Guard.⁴⁴⁶ While this was what would eventually happen, unforeseen circumstances delayed the plan’s implementation until mid-November.

During October, the Ba’th Party was moving forward with plans to unify Iraq with Syria, which had undergone a similar Ba’thist coup in March. On October 7 the Ba’th announced a cabinet shuffle which replaced a number of non-Ba’th ministers with Ba’thist stalwarts, a move the U.S. embassy called the “Ba’thization” of the cabinet. This, of course, complicated matters for the al-Bakr-Arif plot.⁴⁴⁷ The next day, Arif announced the unification of Iraq and Syria’s armed forces and the formation of a joint military council, made up of three representatives from each state. The Egyptians had declined joining the union.⁴⁴⁸ Throughout the rest of October, the Ba’th Party held its Sixth National Congress in Damascus to work out a framework for full unification.⁴⁴⁹ According to the *New York Times*, after a plebiscite was held in both countries, within two months a new country, called the Arab

⁴⁴⁵ Tripp (2007), pp.165-66.

⁴⁴⁶ Baghdad 276 to State, September 5, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.9/63-11/63/doc.1), pp.1-3.

⁴⁴⁷ Baghdad 393 to State, October 8, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.9/63-11/63/doc.11), pp.1-2.

⁴⁴⁸ *New York Times*, “Syria and Iraq Unify their Armed Forces,” October 9, 1963, p.3.

⁴⁴⁹ The ‘National’ Ba’ath Party was an umbrella organization that directed both ‘Regional’ parties in Iraq and Syria, respectively.

Democratic People's Republic, would be formed, and Baghdad would be the new capital.⁴⁵⁰

While Iraq moved closer toward unification with Syria, significant political developments were taking place behind the scenes in Baghdad. In early October, al-Sa'di outflanked his opponents in the military when he put forward a resolution calling for the strengthening of the National Guard. He also managed to have two moderate ministers, Interior Minister Hazim Jawad and Foreign Minister Talib Shabib, dropped from the Ba'th National Command, the party's main governing body. In effect, these moves consolidated the power of al-Sa'di's faction while weakening the moderates in both the government and military. This also convinced al-Sa'di's opponents that they had to take matters into their own hands.⁴⁵¹

At the start of November, the struggle between the moderate and radical wings of the Ba'th burst into the open. On November 1, the commander of the National Guard, Mundhir al-Wandawi, was dismissed from his post but he refused to step down, underscoring the weakness of the state and encouraging the military to finally overthrow the Ba'th.⁴⁵² However, before they could act, another group led by Jawad and Shabib moved first. On November 11, a meeting of the Ba'th Regional (Iraq) Command convened in Baghdad. At the meeting, Jawad and Shabib ambushed al-Sa'di and his supporters by accusing them of taking "unauthorized actions contrary to the policies of the government and the party." The congress voted to uphold the charges and al-Sa'di and his cohorts were escorted to a waiting plane and then flown into exile in Spain. In a matter of hours the extremist wing of the Ba'th appeared to have been eliminated from power. However, as word of al-Sa'di's ousting spread, the National Guard took to the streets occupying key positions as sporadic skirmishes broke out throughout the city. At the same time, the Ba'th National Command dispatched a Syrian delegation led by Michel Aflaq, the Ba'th

⁴⁵⁰ Dana Adams Schmidt, "Baath Pushes Syria-Iraq Union As Nucleus of Ideological State," *New York Times*, October 25, 1963, p.4.

⁴⁵¹ Penrose (1978), pp.309-10.

⁴⁵² Sluglett (2003), p.93.

Party's founding father and political ideologue, to Baghdad.⁴⁵³ It appeared the situation in Iraq was spiraling out of control.

The move against al-Sa'di caught the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad completely off guard. While the embassy knew of plotting against al-Sa'di since September, on the morning of the coup it had sent an assessment to Washington that concluded, "[the] regime probably has some time, perhaps [a] year or two, before it is really challenged."⁴⁵⁴ Even the next day the embassy was uncertain about what had happened: "several sources indicate that Saadi ... [was] exiled sometime during [the] day rather than last night."⁴⁵⁵ In short, neither the embassy nor the State Department knew what was happening in Baghdad and it was not until the morning of November 13 that the White House Situation Room informed Kennedy a coup might have taken place. Unfortunately, the U.S. was "unable to determine [its] extent" because the reports coming out of Baghdad were "sketchy."⁴⁵⁶ Even by November 15, the White House was having difficulty ascertaining what was taking place in Iraq. That day, Komer sent a memo to Bundy explaining that it was difficult to keep the Oval office apprised of what had been happening because the situation was "still too confused for confident assessment."⁴⁵⁷

Meanwhile, events in Baghdad escalated on November 13 when the National Guard held demonstrations in downtown Baghdad demanding Jawad's dismissal. Soon thereafter, it attacked and occupied a police station in a main square, as well as two other locations. Then another mob formed and tried to occupy a key radio station, but was forced away by a loyal tank battalion. Events took a turn for the worse shortly after 9 a.m. when an Iraqi Air Force jet flown by al-Wandawi strafed the Presidential Palace with both rockets and machine gun fire, and managing to drop a bomb in the same room as President Arif, who escaped uninjured. Eventually loyalist aircraft were able to force Wandawi's plane down, but he managed to escape

⁴⁵³ Penrose (1978), p.310.

⁴⁵⁴ Baghdad 498 to State, November 11, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.9/63-11/63/doc.17), p.

⁴⁵⁵ Baghdad 505 to State, November 12, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.9/63-11/63/doc.18), p.1.

⁴⁵⁶ White House, Memorandum, Situation Room to the President, November 13, 1963 (JKF/NSF/RKF/Box426/Iraq-1961-63/doc.5), p.1.

⁴⁵⁷ White House, Memorandum, Komer to Bundy, November 15, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.9/63-11/63/doc.47), p.1.

to Syria.⁴⁵⁸ With the excesses of the extremist elements of the Ba'th and National Guard evident, al-Bakr ordered the army to occupy all strategic points in Baghdad, imposed a curfew, and dispersed all traffic from the streets.⁴⁵⁹ Significantly, when al-Bakr ordered the National Guards' 23-year-old commander to return the paramilitary force to its barracks, it refused, which only infuriated members of Iraq's military further.⁴⁶⁰ Later that evening al-Bakr called a meeting of the Regional (Iraq) Command to assess the situation before the arrival of Aflaq and the National Command. According to the CIA, al-Bakr decided that Jawad and Shabib had to go into exile immediately, but when Aflaq arrived and learned of this decision he was furious that he had not been consulted.⁴⁶¹

For the next few days, the situation in Iraq continued to escalate and eventually forced the military to take action. On November 15, the National Command announced it would assume control of Iraq while the Regional (Iraq) Command resolved its internal squabbles, but for proud Iraqi nationalists, Syria's apparent usurpation of power was simply too much. As Penrose observed:

[The decision] not only enraged what there was of public opinion in the country, it also finally alienated the leading military officers, Ba'athist as well as non-Ba'athist. Their patience had already been stretched to the limit by the National Guard's open challenge to the army and to the forces of public order. Officers as well as others asked whether the country was to be taken over by a youth movement.

Throughout November 16 and 17, senior members of the regime, including Arif, al-Bakr, and General Saleh Mehdi Ammash, a high ranking Ba'thist military officer, called in the senior commanders of the military and devised a plan of action to oust not only the Syrians, but the National Guard as well.⁴⁶² On the morning of November 18, President Arif ordered the military to crush the Ba'th and the National Guard.⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁸ CIA, "Resumé of Political Activity in Baghdad on [redacted]," TDCS-3/564,915, November 14, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.9/63-11/63/doc.40), pp.1-3. See also Baghdad 507 to State, November 13, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.9/63-11/63/doc.23), pp.1-3. On al-Wandawi's escape, see Penrose (1978), p.331.

⁴⁵⁹ Baghdad 519 to State, November 13, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.9/63-11/63/doc.30), p.1.

⁴⁶⁰ "Resumé of Political Activity...", November 14, 1963, *Op.Cit.*, p.6.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp.4-6.

⁴⁶² Penrose (1978), p.312.

⁴⁶³ CIA, "Military Activity and Possible Coup," November 18, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.9/63-11/63/doc.63), p.1.

By early morning, the National Guard was ordered to return to its barracks and give up their arms or else it would be crushed by force.⁴⁶⁴ Military personnel supported the coup overwhelmingly and by noon Arif was in full control of the country. A few days later on November 21, the White House learned it did not need to consider extending diplomatic recognition to the new regime, since Arif remained the head of state.⁴⁶⁵ The next day, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, bringing his presidency to an abrupt halt.

Conclusion

Iraq between February and November 1963 was effectively a Cold War battleground. The February 1963 coup was certainly “a net gain” for America in its Cold War contest with the Soviet Union.⁴⁶⁶ After all, the pro-Soviet Qasim regime was replaced by an anti-communist, Arab nationalist one and the Ba’th regime had initiated a brutal campaign against Iraq’s communists. Despite assertions that the CIA was behind the coup and later provided death squads with lists of communists, there exists enough evidence to raise questions about whether this happened. Regardless, the Kennedy administration was pleased with the coup and sought to cultivate friendly relations with Iraq through military, economic and social assistance.

The overall objective of U.S. policy was to achieve internal stability, but the Soviet Union’s support for the Kurds and the regime’s determination to crush them militarily undermined this. Fearing its survival, throughout the spring of 1963 the Kennedy administration pressed the Ba’th to make reasonable concessions without success. Unfortunately, Iraq’s request in April 1963 to purchase American arms put the Kennedy administration in a difficult position. While it wanted Iraq to resolve the Kurdish conflict peacefully, the Kennedy administration agreed “in principle” to

⁴⁶⁴ CIA, “SITREP as of 1100 hours Local Time,” November 18, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.9/63-11/63/doc.65), p.1.

⁴⁶⁵ State 09749 to Certain Posts, November 22, 1963 (KPL/NSF/Countries/Box117a/Iraq.9/63-11/63/doc.69), p.1.

⁴⁶⁶ Komer to the President, February 8, 1963, *Op.Cit.*, p.1.

sell the arms out of Cold War considerations. It believed the deal could draw Iraq further away from the Soviets and build Western influence in Baghdad. When the Kurdish War resumed in June 1963 it took on Cold War dimensions rapidly. Whereas the Soviet Union ceased military shipments to Iraq, supported Kurdish demands for autonomy, and accused the regime of committing genocide, the U.S. approved a \$55 million arms deal for Iraq, turned a blind eye to Iraq's numerous atrocities, and urged its Arab allies to rally diplomatic support against the genocide charge at the UN.

The height of the Cold War intrigue occurred in early-July when a Moscow-backed coup failed to overthrow the Ba'th. This led the U.S. to examine further options, including further arms sales. But Iraq's atrocities against the Kurds eventually convinced members of the Kennedy administration to try to bring about a ceasefire. Interestingly, when the initiative collapsed in September, Iran's hand in bringing about the Kurdish *démarche* became clear and underscored the depth of the Kurdish-Iranian relationship. Even so, the Kennedy administration's provision of arms and its initiative to bring about a ceasefire demonstrated the importance the U.S. attached to the regime's survival and its importance in the Cold War.

The U.S. was again caught off guard when the Ba'thist regime imploded in November 1963. While the U.S. was aware of the regime's internal rivalries and divisions over the question of unification with Syria, the ousting of al-Sa'di came as a surprise. As pitched battles erupted in the streets and the Syrian Ba'th sought to seize control of Iraq, all the Kennedy administration could do was monitor events as the Iraqi military, led by President Abd al'Salim Arif, ousted the Ba'th, neutralized the National Guard, and took control of the country. Because U.S. officials were confused about what was happening in Baghdad, they had no way to influence events.

The Kennedy administration's policy toward the Ba'thist regime and the Kurdish War is explained by its belief that Iraq was a Cold War battleground. Whenever the Soviet Union increased its support for the Kurds, the U.S. responded by backing the Iraqi regime further. Washington even tried to rob Moscow of its Kurdish card by trying to bring about a ceasefire. With the exception of Douglas

Little's work on the importance of the Kurdish War, the first Ba'th regime's significance as an episode in the Cold War confrontation has been neglected in the broader historiography of the Cold War in the Middle East.

Chapter 4: Johnson and the Arab Nationalists

November 1963—January 1969

This chapter examines the U.S. policy toward Iraq and the Kurdish War during the Lyndon B. Johnson administration. Throughout Johnson's term in office, Iraq experienced an unprecedented period of stability during the presidencies of Abd al'Salim Arif and his brother Abd ar-Rahman Arif, following his untimely death in April 1966. The brothers were Arab nationalist and anti-communist domestically, but not opposed to friendly relations with Moscow internationally. This represents a foreign policy known as "positive neutrality," which balanced the Eastern and Western blocs in the Cold War.⁴⁶⁷ The Johnson administration accepted this on the condition that Iraq did not adopt broader policies aligned with Moscow. During the first Arif regime, U.S.-Iraqi relations remained friendly but never like under the Ba'th Party. By contrast, the unexpected coming to power of Abd ar-Rahman Arif in 1966 led to a rapid improvement in U.S.-Iraqi relations. Ultimately, this relationship was premised on the American belief that the Arif brothers were considered anti-communist.

Despite the friendly U.S.-Iraqi relationship, throughout the Johnson years America's policy toward Iraq was at odds with three of its closest regional allies, Britain, Iran, and Israel. While the U.S. tried to cultivate friendly relations with Iraq, its allies were giving military and economic support to the Kurds, a move that sought to destabilize the pro-Nasser Arif regimes. However, outside aid was curtailed after the Kurds defeated the Iraqi army at the Battle of Mount Handren in May 1966 when the Iraqi government issued a declaration promising the Kurds a significant measure of autonomy. Thereafter, U.S.-Iraqi relations blossomed, culminating in the visit of five Iraqi generals to the Oval office in January 1967. Unfortunately, any progress U.S.-Iraqi relations had achieved under the Arif

⁴⁶⁷ See Janet Ahner Rubinoff, *Nasser's Policy of Positive Neutrality* (University of Chicago Press, 1968).

brothers was lost with the outbreak of the Six Day War in June 1967, prompting Iraq to break diplomatic relations with America. The political instability following Israel's stunning victory provided the Ba'th Party with another opportunity to seize power in July 1968. With relations severed and the Ba'th back in power, the U.S. was helpless as the new Ba'thist regime drew Iraq towards the Soviet orbit.

The number of works detailing the Johnson administration's policy toward Iraq is limited, with only Hahn providing a short account. He argued that U.S. policy under Johnson was designed to secure the Arif regimes in power and build friendly relations.⁴⁶⁸ Unfortunately, Hahn leaves out significant details, like the Anglo-American split over Iraq in 1964-65. It is instructive to note a similar divide over Anglo-American policies toward the Yemeni Civil War at this point.⁴⁶⁹ Significantly, Little claims the CIA urged Iran and Israel to support the Kurds.⁴⁷⁰ While there is a growing body of scholarship on Iranian and Israeli support for the Kurds,⁴⁷¹ there is no evidence of the U.S. supporting the Kurds prior to 1972. While Iran's reasons for supporting the Kurds have been documented in previous chapters, during this period Israel became particularly interested in the Kurds as part of an Israeli strategy known as the "peripheral doctrine." This doctrine, according to Parsi, was conceived by David Ben-Gurion in the early 1960s and "held that the improbability of achieving peace with the surrounding Arab states forced Israel to build alliances with the non-Arab states of the periphery—primarily Iran, Turkey, and Ethiopia—as well as with non-Arab minorities such as the Kurds and the Lebanese Christians."⁴⁷² Thus, by contrast to America's non-intervention policy, from the mid-1960s onwards both Iran and Israel played a major role in supporting and training the Kurds.

The one area where U.S. regional policy has been discussed in detail is its response to Britain's announcement in 1968 that it would withdraw from the

⁴⁶⁸ Hahn (2012), pp.49-52.

⁴⁶⁹ See Spencer Mawby, "The Clandestine Defense of Empire: British Special Operations in Yemen, 1951-64," *Intelligence and National Security*, 17/3 (2002), pp.105-30; Clive Jones, "Among Ministers, Mavericks and Mandarins: Britain, Covert Action and the Yemen Civil War, 1962-64," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 40/1 (2004), pp.99-118; and Fain (2008), pp 122-34.

⁴⁷⁰ Little (2010), p.68.

⁴⁷¹ Randal (1999), pp.189-94; and Parsi (2007), pp.52-53.

⁴⁷² Parsi (2008), p.21.

region. In particular, scholars have focused on Johnson's decision to build up Iran and Saudi Arabia as 'twin pillars' to prevent the Soviet Union from filling the power vacuum left behind.⁴⁷³ Finally, the literature on the U.S. reaction to the second Ba'thist coup is limited, with Hahn arguing that the Johnson administration's initial favourable assessment waned rapidly as the regime consolidated power using brutal force.⁴⁷⁴ This chapter will therefore provide further information on each of these challenges to the Johnson administration's policy toward Iraq, the Kurds, and the Gulf region.

I

At the time of John F. Kennedy's assassination, the U.S. foreign policy establishment was busy assessing the implications of the overthrow of the Ba'th Party just four days earlier by an Arab nationalist regime with strong military connections. While the Ba'th had proven itself anti-communist and somewhat pro-Western, the level of brutality it inflicted on Iraq's population and the violent way in which it had imploded disturbed many U.S. officials. As one intelligence officer from the State Department observed, "given the Iraqi Ba'th's particularly radical ideology (and bloodbath back in 1963), there was no interest in Washington in having that gang take power again."⁴⁷⁵ While the new regime was Arab nationalist, pro-Nasser, and seemed likely to balance its relations with the U.S. and Soviet Union more than the Ba'th Party, U.S. officials believed it would maintain its domestic anti-communist policies. Given this, the Johnson administration was inclined to revert back to a "wait and see" policy toward Iraq, aimed at maintaining friendly relations, while countering any Soviet bids for increased influence.

On November 23, 1963, Phillips Talbot, the Assistant Secretary of State for the NEA, sent, Secretary of State Dean Rusk a memo summarizing the status of the region. On Iraq, Talbot said it was "too early to be sure" how the coup would affect U.S. interests, but "the new regime ... seem[ed] to have established itself as an Iraqi

⁴⁷³ Gause (1985), pp.247-273; Dumbrell (1996), pp.211-31; Macris (2010), pp.155-88; Fain (2008), pp. 141-200; and Alvandi (2012), pp.338-9.

⁴⁷⁴ Pelletiere (1984), pp.160-63; and Hahn (2012), pp.52-54.

⁴⁷⁵ Email correspondence with Wayne White, March 1, 2012.

nationalist-cum-moderate Ba'thist government relying heavily on the power of the Army."⁴⁷⁶ In early December, Robert Strong, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, sent Komer a personal letter outlining the steps the embassy had taken since the coup and his assessment of Iraq's foreign policy. Strong reminded Robert Komer, Johnson's Middle Eastern advisor, the new Iraqi President, Abd al'Salim Arif's close relationship with Egyptian President Gamal Abd al-Nasser. Strong described Arif as pro-union, moderate, anti-communist, and had the strong backing from Iraq's military, which was crucial to maintaining stability. Even so, the situation remained uncertain:

There are too many unknown factors at present to enable us to draw conclusions, including the behavior of certain key people under varying circumstances, or even what support they can muster from where, but we shall be keeping a close eye on all indicators no matter how small.

Nevertheless, Strong was convinced that as long as the regime maintained its anti-communist stance, the U.S. could find areas of common ground.⁴⁷⁷

Despite Iraq's anti-communist domestic stance, the Johnson administration was concerned about where the new regime stood in the Cold War. On December 9, the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) circulated a research memo assessing the future of Soviet-Iraqi relations. The report concluded that while the Soviets and Iraqi communists had conspired to overthrow the Ba'thist regime, "neither played a detectable role in the coup ... thereby demonstrating their inability to influence developments in the Arab world." After the coup, the Soviets approached the new regime cautiously, while they assessed Arif's stability and political orientation. The INR believe the Soviets would continue to press for a Kurdish settlement, seek to undermine the remaining Ba'thists in the regime, and encourage the formation of a National Front government along with the KDP and ICP by offering increased military and economic assistance programs. However, because the new regime unlikely to make concessions towards the Kurds or align

⁴⁷⁶ DoS, Memorandum, Talbot to Rusk "Problems and Opportunities Ahead," November 23, 1963 (FRUS/1961-63/XVIII/doc.371), pp.804-6.

⁴⁷⁷ DoS, Strong to Komer, December 12, 1963 (JPL/NSF/Box.28/RWK/Iraq-[December 1963-March 1966]/doc.31), pp.1-2.

itself with the communists, the INR concluded, "Soviet forbearance may be short-lived."⁴⁷⁸

Given the positive assessments coming from diplomats on the ground in Baghdad, senior officials in Washington, and the INR, the Johnson administration concluded Iraq had finally formed a government capable of stabilizing the country and lead it on a path toward development.

But before this could happen, Arif and his allies in the military needed to consolidate power. This occurred in two steps. First, on January 5, Arif removed the former Ba'thist prime minister, Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, from his new post as vice president and sent him into exile as an ambassador. This was significant because al-Bakr had been one of the few influential holdovers from the previous Ba'thist regime and his removal cut the Ba'th off from the levers of power.⁴⁷⁹ Next, Arif turned to the Kurdish problem and offered Mulla Mustafa Barzani recognition of Kurdish national rights within a unified Iraq, to release of prisoners, reinstate government administration, lift the economic blockade against Kurdistan, and rehabilitate the north economically. These assurances were formalized in a ceasefire announcement on February 10, 1964. While clearly a positive step, the agreement proved to be divisive within the Kurdish ranks, leading two senior KDP officials, Jalal Talabani and Ibrahim Ahmed, to denounce the agreement because provisions for local self-administration had been excluded, eventually splitting the party into two competing factions from the agreement.⁴⁸⁰

The U.S. viewed the coming to power of the Arif regime as a positive development because of its anti-communist outlook, its support from Iraq's military, and potential capability to achieve stability. The removal of al-Bakr and the truce with Barzani allowed Arif to restore stability and bring about Iraq's unification with Egypt. However, the prospect of Nasser taking control of Iraq and establishing

⁴⁷⁸ DoS, INR, "Soviet-Iraqi Relations: Arif and the Ba'th," RSB-155, December 9, 1963 (JPL/NSF/Box.28/RWK/Iraq-Kurds[1964-March 1966]/doc. 33), pp.1-5.

⁴⁷⁹ *New York Times*, "Iraqi Vice President Is Removed," January 5, 1964, p.14.

⁴⁸⁰ McDowell (2004), pp.315-16. On the split, see Tehran A-466 to State, "Implications of the Kurdish Cease-Fire: One Iranian Official View," enclosure 1, February 29, 1964 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/1964-66/Box2339/POL 13-3-Ethnic Minorities), p.1. See also State 198 to U.S. Embassy Tehran, September 3, 1964 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.166).

Egyptian influence in the Gulf region caused concern among America's closest allies, Britain, Iran, and Israel.

II

Throughout the second half of 1964, U.S. policy toward Iraq was at clear odds with the policies of its closest regional allies, Britain, Iran, and Israel. While the differences with Iran and Israel were superficial and mostly related to the Kurdish problem and Nasser's influence in Baghdad, America's differences with Britain over Iraq—much like the conflict in Yemen—reflected a breakdown in the Anglo-American 'special relationship' between August and October 1964.⁴⁸¹ The break was so apparent that Strong felt compelled to write both Talbot and Komer "informal" letters warning them of the duplicitous nature of British policy.⁴⁸² One aspect of particular concern was Britain's interest—along with Iran and later Israel—in supporting the Kurds in their war with Baghdad. It seems the interests of all three parties coalesced around two central points: a mutual hatred of Nasser, who by this point had considerable influence in Baghdad as the two countries made moves toward unity, and the use of the Kurds a useful coercive tool to be used either to overthrow the Arif regime, destabilize it to the point that Nasser would lose interest in unity, or tie down Iraq's military inside the country so it could not be used to threaten British or Iranian interests in the Gulf or in a war against Israel. The U.S. was not blind to the danger posed by Nasser's potential domination of Iraq and the Gulf, but it saw the Arif regime as the best possible government in Iraq. This suggests that during 1964-65 the Johnson administration's policy toward Iraq reflected a realist assessment in terms of the Cold War, while its closest allies viewed Iraq in terms of their own regional interests.

⁴⁸¹ On the Anglo-American split, see Mawby (2002), pp.105-30; Jones (2004), pp.99-118; and Fain (2008), pp.122-34. For U.S. policy toward Yemen, see Fawaz Gerges, "The Kennedy Administration and the Egyptian-Saudi Conflict in Yemen: Co-opting Arab Nationalism," *Middle East Journal*, 49/2 (1995), pp. 292-311; and W. Taylor Fain, "Unfortunate Arabia: The United States, Great Britain and Yemen, 1955-63," *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 12/2 (2001), pp.125-52.

⁴⁸² See Letter, Strong to Talbot, October 15, 1964 (JPL/NSF/Box.28/RWK/Iraq[December 1963-March 1966]/doc. 23), pp.1-2; and Letter, Strong to Komer, October 17, 1964 (JPL/NSF/Box.28/RWK/Iraq[December 1963-March 1966]/doc. 22), pp.1-2.

At some point in August 1964, a British official—likely the MI6 station chief—approached the CIA station chief at the U.S. embassy in Baghdad. According to a memo detailing the encounter, the British official was “seeking on a personal basis to enlist US support in a campaign against Nasser and [Egyptian]-Iraqi unity.” Britain’s Conservative government, led by Prime Minister Alec Douglas-Home, faced a general election in mid-October, and had decided it “could not live with Nasser and must do something about him, and they could not stand [Egyptian]-Iraqi unity because of their interests in the Gulf.” To prevent this, the official revealed, the British “intended to work with Iran against Nasser and the Aref regime.” The memo indicated a similar approach had been made to U.S. officials in Washington, though details are not available. The station chief gave “a strong negative answer” to the British proposal, arguing it was a “wrong” approach and that neither the British nor the Iranians had the assets to execute this operation successfully.⁴⁸³ Also in August, the U.S. officials in Baghdad learned the British Embassy’s First Secretary, Stephen Egerton, had met with a group of Kurds and urged them to renew the military conflict with Baghdad, take a “strong anti-Nasser line,” and promised British support through Iran.⁴⁸⁴ Finally, Egerton took a similar line with a pro-Barzani Kurd named Shaqat Aqrabi during a meeting held at the Baghdad home of a U.S. official, Jim Atkins, though Egerton’s promises of British aid not raised.⁴⁸⁵ Taken together, these incidents suggest that British officials in Baghdad were seeking Kurdish support to destabilize the Arif regime in August 1964. Further, it also indicates that U.S. officials had opposed these efforts.

Given the scale of British plotting at this point, it is not surprising that Iraqi security forces foiled a Ba’thist plot in early September aimed at returning to power. Though there is no direct evidence implicating them, Britain’s connection to the Ba’th Party went back at least as far as the June 1962 coup plot against Qasim.

⁴⁸³ U.S. Embassy Baghdad, Memorandum, “Indicators of British Activity Against Iraq and Cooperation with Iran in such Activity,” October 15, 1964 (JPL/NSF/Box.28/RWK/Iraq[December 1963-March 1966]/doc. 23a), p.1.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., p.1.

⁴⁸⁵ U.S. Embassy Baghdad, Memorandum, “Indicators of British Activity Against Iraq and Cooperation with Iran in such Activity,” October 15, 1964 (JPL/NSF/Box.28/RWK/Iraq[December 1963-March 1966]/doc. 23a), p.1.

Nevertheless, Iraqi news reports connected former Ba'thist premier Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr to the plot.⁴⁸⁶ But regardless of who was behind it, the plot allowed Arif to order a crackdown on the Ba'th Party, leading to the arrest of over a thousand people. At the same time, Nasser's fortunes in Iraq increased when he dispatched Egyptian troops to Baghdad to help bolster the regime. As a reward, Arif appointed Nasserist elements to seats in his cabinet. The failed coup allowed Arif to strengthen his grip on power and raise Iraqi-Egyptian relations to a new high. It would also lead to increased pressure on both Arif and Nasser for unification, but, as Tripp points out, both held private reservations.⁴⁸⁷

The rise in Nasser's fortunes following the failed coup in Iraq was viewed by London, Tehran, and Tel Aviv as a highly negative development and led to increased pressure on the Kurds to resume fighting. Consequently, in October Barzani defied the regime openly by establishing a forty-three member legislature, a revolutionary council to direct the war, and an executive committee with eleven members that Barzani would chair.⁴⁸⁸ In addition, he sent Arif a public letter on October 11 accusing the government of failing to implement the conditions of the February ceasefire. Barzani's public slap at the Arif regime would lead to an escalation of tension. Refusing to acknowledge Barzani's demands, Baghdad insisted the Kurds withdraw the Kurdish military—known as the Peshmerga or “those who seek death”—from major roads, cease military activities, return captured weapons to the army, and permit the central government to administer the region. The regime's uncompromising response to Barzani's letter perplexed U.S. officials in Baghdad, who argued it was because of a false sense of security after a year without war. Apparently, as one analyst noted, Iraq's generals had forgotten how calamitous their previous efforts at using military force against the Kurds had been.⁴⁸⁹

Not long after the foiled coup, U.S. and British officials met in Washington in order to realign their regional policies. Representing the U.S. was Rodger Davies, the

⁴⁸⁶ *New York Times*, “Iraq Said to Foil Coup, Executing 5,” September 11, 1964, p.3.

⁴⁸⁷ Tripp (2007), pp.173-75.

⁴⁸⁸ O'Ballance (1973), p.123.

⁴⁸⁹ For details of the various bargaining positions in 1964-5, see DoS, INR, “The Kurdish Situation in Iraq,” RNA-11, April 5, 1965 (JPL/NSF/Box.28/RWK/Iraq-Kurds [1964-March 1966]/doc.9), pp.3-12.

director of the NEA, and on the British side was John Killick, the British Embassy to Washington's Counselor. Davies opened by pointing out both sides had the same overall objectives in the Near East: they wished to prevent Egypt from imposing itself on the area or Egyptian-dominated Arab solidarity. The point of departure, however, was on the methods needed to attain these objectives. Davies admitted "some courses of action proposed by London [had] caused concern [in Washington] since they could only lead to a confrontation with [Egypt] and Arab nationalism in situations where it [was] doubtful that the West had the capabilities to come out on top." On Iraq, Killick said his government feared increasing instability because the Arif regime lacked the means to implement the socialized state it was seeking. Turning to the Cold War, Davies pointed to a recent intelligence estimate on the Soviet Union's objectives in the region:

The estimate concluded that U.S. policy was based on an assessment that in the Arab world Cairo would always have more influence than Moscow, that any losses to [their] position throughout the area occasioned by Nasser's Arab nationalist drive would be essentially peripheral ... and that [their] basic interests in the Near East would be maintained.

Davies argued that forcing a confrontation with Nasser over the Arab world would inevitably threaten Western interests and could lead to establishment of a "true Communist puppet state" in the area, which would be a problem of a "much greater magnitude." Given this assessment, Davies suggested the best track to proceed would be to "improve [their] capability to influence trends in [Egypt] ... by increasing [their] aid to that country." Killick responded with agreement of the U.S. assessment of the situation, but there was a "great deal of emotionalism" in London in the lead-up to the election over issues concerning the Middle East. That said, he felt it best that both countries to delay confrontation over their policies in the Middle East until after the American and British general elections that fall. Even so, Davies closed the discussion by emphasizing that the U.S. recognized that Nasser aspired to dominate the Arab world, but did believe he had the capability to do so.

In the long run, the Arabs ... will be the ones able to give check to Nasser if we do not unnecessarily interpose ourselves between them

in their disputes and give free rein to the divergent and divisive forces among them. Western intervention could only consolidate the Arabs.

This conversation, while seeking to reconcile the two side's differences, ended up emphasizing the gulf between them. The fact was the British saw matters in terms of their own regional interests and their confrontation with Nasser, while U.S. officials perceived events in terms of America's confrontation with the Soviets.⁴⁹⁰

By mid-October it was clear whatever progress might have resulted from the Washington talks had been for naught. At this point Strong, who had been present during the Washington talks, wrote to Talbot and Komer to question the integrity of British policy. While noting that British Embassy officials had been "busily reassuring" the embassy of their agreement with U.S. policy, Strong was not convinced of sincerity. In his letter to Talbot on October 15 he concluded British "games [were] going on."⁴⁹¹ Two days later, he wrote to Komer that he "deeply doubted" the British Embassy's sincerity about how "in tune" Anglo-American policies toward Iraq were, because there were "too many indicators otherwise." Indeed, Strong was convinced Britain was engaged in a "fully covert" program, possibly in concert with Iran and Israel, "with one policy being followed on the surface and the other through the clandestine mechanism," comparing it to Britain's similar actions in Yemen.⁴⁹²

In a separate document, Strong raised concerns about British-Iranian collusion with respect to the Kurds. After recounting Britain's efforts in August to seek U.S. assistance, Strong pointed out that for two weeks in August the head of Iranian intelligence, Major General Hassan Pakravan, travelled to London to meet with British officials. Though he had no information of the purpose of this visit, Strong felt it was noteworthy.⁴⁹³ Recall that Pakravan had approached the U.S. on behalf of the Shah and the Kurds after the collapse of the Kennedy administration's efforts to bring about a Kurdish-Ba'thist ceasefire in August 1963. Since mid-1962,

⁴⁹⁰ DoS, Memorandum of Conversation, "U.S./U.K. Policies in Middle East—Working Level Discussions, First Round," September 10, 1964 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.5).

⁴⁹¹ Letter, Strong to Talbot, October 15, 1964 (JPL/NSF/Box.28/RWK/Iraq[December 1963-March 1966]/doc.23), pp.1-2.

⁴⁹² Letter, Strong to Komer, October 17, 1964 (JPL/NSF/Box.28/RWK/Iraq[December 1963-March 1966]/doc.22), pp.1-2.

⁴⁹³ "Indicators of British Activity...", October 15, 1964, *Op.Cit.*, p.2.

the Shah had viewed the Kurds as a useful coercive tool to increase pressure on the Iraqi regime, tie it down militarily, and make a union with Egypt more challenging. Up to this point, his tactics had worked.

Perhaps of greatest significance, Strong's memo raises the question of Israeli support for the Kurds for the first time:

Israel plays an important role in Iran and is known to be supporting the Iraqi Kurds. Britain shares with Israel and the Shah a deep antipathy for Nasser.... It requires little imagination to conceive that, given the depth of [British] hostility to Nasser and the importance of the Gulf to the UK, the British may well engage in covert cooperation with Iran and Israel against a Nasserist dominated Iraqi regime as well as against Nasser elsewhere.⁴⁹⁴

According to Eliezer Tsafirir, the head of Mossad's operations inside Iraq during the 1960s, in 1964 Barzani's representative in Paris, Amir Badr-Khan Kamuran, approached the Israeli Embassy and made an appeal for help. Immediately, the Israelis were seduced by the prospect of having a strategic ally inside Iraq. The request was forwarded on to Tel-Aviv and soon made its way to the highest level of the Israeli government where the "matter was discussed and decided positively by David Ben Gurion, who appointed the Mossad to be in charge." Soon thereafter, Badr-Khan was invited to visit Israel.⁴⁹⁵ The establishment of a Kurdish-Israeli alliance was a perfect marriage of convenience. In return for access to Israel's considerable military experience, advanced weaponry, and intelligence tactics, the Kurds would maintain a near-constant state of revolt tying down the Iraqi military inside Iraq and rendering it incapable of being used in a wider Arab war with Israel.

The growing international involvement in the Kurdish question was not lost on the Iraqi regime. For instance, when Secretary Rusk met with the new Iraqi Foreign Minister, Naji Talib, on December 10 at the annual UNGA meeting, he complained about the Kurds receiving assistance from "unidentified forces." Describing the Kurds as "poor people," he asked where they were "getting money from to buy staple foods, arms, and equipment ... who these mysterious forces [were and] what [did] they want[?]" Rusk assured Talib the U.S. was "not directly or

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., p.2.

⁴⁹⁵ Email correspondence with Eliezer Tsafirir, October 25, 2010.

indirectly supporting the Kurdish movement” and had “no other interest in Iraq affairs” other than maintaining its independence, integrity, and prosperity. Thanking him, Talib asked if Rusk could look into who was helping the Kurds and what their motivations were.⁴⁹⁶ This exchange indicated the Iraqi regime was aware external forces—likely Iran—were plotting against it, though Talib was treading carefully with Rusk to prevent any suggestion that the U.S. were also complicit.

A few days later, a group of Barzani Kurds informed the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad that Iran was urging them to resume fighting and had asked them to participate in a plot to overthrow the Arif regime.⁴⁹⁷ When word of this reached Washington, the Department of State rejected involvement on the basis that “any scheme to overthrow [the] Iraq government would not guarantee [the] establishment [of a] regime more sympathetic to Kurdish aspirations.” It reasoned that the plot was “bound to be uncovered sooner or later” and when that happened the “Kurds would have exposed themselves as willing collaborators with Iranian intrigue against [the] government [of] Iraq thus earning deepened Arab suspicion and resentment of Kurdish ambitions.” Further, the U.S. felt there was “good reason to believe [Iraq was] already privy to Iranian subversive activity,” a clear reference to Rusk’s talk at the UN.⁴⁹⁸ Once again, the Johnson administration’s reaction to this plot reflected a clear break from its allies over the question of Iraq.

By the start of 1965, it was clear that Britain, Iran, and Israel were pressing the Kurds to resume the Kurdish War with Baghdad. But just as tensions mounted, Barzani shocked U.S. officials in mid-January 1965 when he sent the regime a letter admitting his previous demands had “been excessive” and presented a “minimum” offer for autonomy, effectively dropping all his previous demands except the maintenance of a 2-3,000-man Peshmerga force. Aware of the level of pressure on the Kurds to resume the war, U.S. officials in Baghdad described Barzani’s letter as “one of the most startling development[s] of the entire revolt.” After all, there was no evidence to suggest Barzani was weak, since he had held out against the

⁴⁹⁶ DoS, Memorandum of Conversation, “The Kurdish Problem,” December 10, 1964 (JPL/NSF/Box.28/RWK/Iraq[December 1963-March 1966]/doc.18a), pp.1-2.

⁴⁹⁷ Baghdad 486 to State, December 16, 1964 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.171).

⁴⁹⁸ State 343 to U.S. Embassy Baghdad, December 14, 1964 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.170).

government's vicious assaults for years. This led the embassy to suspect the letter was part of a psychological campaign to goad the regime attacking first, allowing Barzani to claim a moral victory. Intended or not, U.S. officials reported, the letter had convinced the regime's Barzani was weak, leading it to begin preparations for war.⁴⁹⁹

As the situation deteriorated, Nasser became concerned a renewal of the Kurdish War would threaten his strong position in Iraq and disrupt plans for unification. Indeed, in October 1964 he had informed Arif that unification was contingent on settling the Kurdish problem through political and not military means.⁵⁰⁰ As Iraqi preparations for war increased, Nasser sent Barzani an ineffective letter on February 22 urging him to surrender. According to O'Ballance, on April 3 Iraqi Prime Minister Tahir Yahya informed Nasser the regime was about to launch an offensive. Nasser responded with a furious tirade, warning Yahya force was doomed to fail and diplomacy needed to be given another chance. The regime ignored these warnings and on April 5 launched a three-prong offensive against the Kurds using 40,000 troops.⁵⁰¹

The period between August 1964 and April 1965 is indicative of the sharp contrast between the policies of the U.S. government and that of its close regional allies, Britain, Iran, and Israel. While the U.S. wished to maintain friendly relations with the Arif regime, it was willing to overlook its relationship with Nasser, whose popular, pan-Arabist ideology was assessed by the U.S. as potential ideological bulwark to communism. In short, U.S. interest in the Arif regime stemmed from its desire to keep Iraq out of the Soviet camp. But America's allies viewed the Arif regime and its relationship with Nasser in a much different light. Britain's loathing of Nasser and longstanding strategic interests in the Gulf trumped Cold War considerations when assessing its national interests in Iraq. For similar reasons, the Shah wanted to limit Nasser's influence in Iraq and the Gulf, since he had his own

⁴⁹⁹ Baghdad A-1115 to State, "Kurdish Revolution of 1961," June 30, 1965 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/1964-66/Box2339/POL 13-3-Ethnic Minorities), p.13; and Beirut A-595 to State, "Kurds Say Resumption of Hostilities in North Iraq is Imminent," January 27, 1965 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/1964-66/Box2339/POL 13-3-Ethnic Minorities), pp.1-2.

⁵⁰⁰ See Baghdad 362 to State, October 26, 1964 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.167).

⁵⁰¹ O'Ballance (1973), p.125; and Pollack (2002), pp.161-62.

imperial designs for the region. He also saw the Kurds as a useful means of coercing Iraq into territorial concessions he had long coveted. The Israelis, however, saw Iraq in terms of the wider Arab-Israeli struggle, believing support for the Kurds would tie down the Iraqi army inside Iraq and limit its effectiveness in the event of a major Arab-Israel war. For these reasons, the policies of Britain, Iran, and Israel were all at odds with that of the U.S. with respect to Iraq and the Kurdish War.

III

The renewal of the Kurdish War put the U.S. in a difficult position. On the one hand, the overriding objective of U.S. policy toward Iraq was to maintain friendly relations with the Arif regime and to prevent Soviet encroachment on Iraq's sovereignty. But, on the other hand, the war's renewal guaranteed that two of America's closest regional allies, Iran and Israel, would increase their support for the Kurds. Eventually, the Iraqis urged the U.S. to convince Iran to cease its support for the Kurds, but America's entreaties fell on deaf ears. So long as Arif maintained close relations with Nasser, the Shah had no interest in abandoning his "Kurdish card," unless, of course, Iraq was willing to make territorial concessions over the Shatt al-Arab waterway—which his father had conceded to the Iraqi monarchy in 1937. This, however, was unlikely because no Iraqi government could ever concede Arab territory to the Persians.

Just after the renewal of the Kurdish War, Secretary Rusk traveled to Tehran for a CENTO meeting. On April 7, he met with the Shah and discussed the situation in Iraq. During the conversation the Shah admitted to helping the Kurds, indicating he was using them as "a trump card" against Iraq, which he would not relinquish so long as Arif remained in league with Nasser. Even so, the Shah denied he was encouraging the Kurds to resume hostilities with Baghdad, while making it perfectly clear he had every intention of abandoning the Kurds if "a national government [was] established in Baghdad."⁵⁰² This acknowledgement is significant since it

⁵⁰² Secto 30 to State, April 8, 1965 (FRUS/1964-68/XXII/doc.75), pp.136-7. See also Tabriz A-25 to State, "Iranian Government Policy in Kurdistan and its Effect on Kurdish Attitudes," March 24, 1966 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/1964-66/Box2339/POL 13-3—Ethnic Minorities), pp.5-9.

foreshadowed the Shah's abandonment of the Kurds almost a decade later, in March 1975.⁵⁰³

At the end of April, Iraq's growing frustration with Iranian interference in the war became evident when Iraqi Foreign Minister Talib cornered Strong at a reception in Baghdad and accused Iran directly of supporting the Kurds for the first time. He was convinced the Kurdish campaign's failure was because of Iran, telling Strong he had learned that "several loads of unidentified equipment" had been "transported onto Iraqi soil in jeeps without license plates" from Iran. Given this, he asked that the U.S. try to convince the Shah to change his policy toward Iraq. Talib also demanded to know what was discussed at the recent CENTO meeting in Tehran. Strong denied the Kurds were a topic of discussion, reminded him Turkey had long been cooperative with Iraq on the Kurdish question, pointed out Pakistan had sought to mediate a rapprochement between Iran and Iraq, and argued that aiding the Kurds was not in CENTO's interests. Strong reiterated the non-intervention policy and said he would report the conversation to Washington. When Strong requested guidance from State on April 30, he complained that he had "about run out of arguments on Kurds-Iran-Iraq triangle except possibly point[ing] out Arab interference in Khuzistan [could not] be ignored by [the] Shah ... [and it] seem[ed] useless any longer [to] try [to] pretend Iran [was] not helping [the] Kurds." The department responded on May 4 stating, "it was unlikely that further arguments could erase the Foreign Minister's suspicions, but U.S. officials should continue to reiterate the U.S. policy line." With respect to the CENTO meeting, the department advised Strong to "tell Talib that Secretary Rusk had not brought any new element into his discussion of Iranian security with the Shah."⁵⁰⁴

In May 1965, Israel's involvement with the Kurds escalated when David Kimche, an experienced Mossad operative, who was later Mossad's deputy chief and director general of the foreign ministry, traveled secretly to Kurdistan to meet with Barzani. According to Trita Parsi, the purpose of the meeting was to "check if the

⁵⁰³ See Tehran 1128 to State, April 12, 1964 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.172); and State 938 to U.S. Embassy Tehran, *ibid.*, footnote 3.

⁵⁰⁴ Baghdad 937 to State, April 30, 1965 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.173); and State 655 to U.S. Embassy Baghdad, *ibid.*, footnote 6.

situation permit[ed] a permanent presence of Mossad operatives [in Iraq].” Kimche was impressed by his visit to Kurdistan and believed an operation to help the Kurds fight Baghdad was crucial to Israeli security. However, for the Israelis to help the Kurds, they needed either Iranian acquiescence or involvement in the operation. Fortunately, this was easy given the Shah’s existing program, but the Iranians insisted any operation be coordinated with SAVAK.⁵⁰⁵ Eliezer Tsafirir confirmed this account and indicated Israel agreed to exchange information with the Kurds on common interests (i.e., intelligence on Iraq); supply them arms, ammunition, and technicians; offer courses in military training, conducted in Kurdistan, Israel, and Iran; and help with political lobbying in the U.S. and Europe.⁵⁰⁶

The impact of Israel’s involvement was apparent to U.S. officials in Baghdad immediately. For instance, toward the end of May the embassy noticed a marked improvement in the Kurds’ tactics. In the past the Kurds had shown “little aptitude for guerrilla warfare” and had only been victorious due to the “gross incompetence” of Iraq’s military, but since the February 1964 ceasefire the Kurds had improved tactically. Unlike before, they now “refused to defend flat areas, [had] let the government move into the mountains albeit at the cost of some casualties, [had] attacked army supply lines and [were] now apparently attacking bivouac areas.” This led the embassy to the conclusion, “it now seem[ed] clear ... that the Kurds [were] getting some assistance, possibly even training, from Israel.”⁵⁰⁷

In early August, Iraqi officials summoned J. Wesley Adams, the U.S. Chargé d’Affairs in Baghdad, to the Foreign Ministry to ask “in the strongest terms” that the U.S. urge Iran to cease arming the Kurds. In his report to Washington, Adams indicated, “Iraq now has fairly accurate information [on the] nature and extent [of] Iranian assistance,” which put the U.S. in a very difficult position since Iraq’s “request for support [in] efforts [to] halt [the] flow of arms from Iran to dissident Iraqi Kurds [could not] reasonably be refused.” Given this, he asked for guidance on how to proceed. In response, the department advised Tehran to inform the Iranian

⁵⁰⁵ Parsi (2008), p.53.

⁵⁰⁶ Email correspondence with Tsafirir, October 25, 2010.

⁵⁰⁷ “Kurdish Revolution of 1961,” June 30, 1965, *Op.Cit.*, pp.14-15, 18.

government of Iraq's request and to express America's "concern over pressures by Iraqis arising out of Iranian assistance to Kurds." When this was done on August 13, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Aram appeared "distressed that the United States had become involved in the matter" and insisted that "Iran was not aiding the Kurds," arguing instead that Iraq was "following a studied policy of annoying Iran."⁵⁰⁸ Aram's denial, of course, was in direct contradiction of what the Shah had told Rusk a few months earlier at the CENTO meeting, not to mention a large body of evidence suggesting otherwise. Even so, the fact that the U.S. raised this matter with the Iranian government shows that the Johnson administration shared Iraq's concern about the Kurdish problem and the interference of its allies.

The Johnson administration's friendly attitude toward Iraq was only reinforced in August after a failed coup by newly appointed Prime Minister Aref Abdul Razzak, which led to the appointment of Abd ar-Rahman al-Bazzaz, Western oriented lawyer and academic with virtually no links to any political party or the military. Significantly, Bazzaz was the first civilian to lead Iraq since the 1958 revolution. The attempted coup also gave Arif a reason to break with the Nasserist elements in Iraq and assert his own personal rule, something he had been longing for since seizing power in 1963.⁵⁰⁹

The renewal of the Kurdish War put the U.S. in a difficult position. While the Johnson administration was seeking to maintain friendly relations with Iraq, America's allies Iran and Israel had escalated their support for the Kurds. Consequently, it could not reasonably reject Iraqi requests to urge Iran to cease its support for the Kurds. But with two U.S. allies, Iran and Israel, now backing the Kurds against Iraq, the Kurdish War had clearly transitioned from being a Cold War conflict to a regional one.

IV

The Johnson administration viewed the coming to power of civilian leadership in Iraq as a positive development, especially since they were pressing to

⁵⁰⁸ State 138 to U.S. Embassy Tehran, August 11, 1965 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.175).

⁵⁰⁹ O'Ballance (1973), pp.129-31; and Tripp (2007), p.176.

limit the military's influence over Iraqi politics. Unfortunately, Iran's involvement in the Kurdish War continued to mire U.S.-Iraqi relations. However, two unanticipated events would forever change the face of the Kurdish question: the unexpected death of Iraq's president Abd al'Salim Arif in April 1966 and the decimation of the Iraqi army by Barzani's forces—who were commanded by Israeli special forces—at the Battle of Mount Handren in May 1966. In the aftermath, the Bazzaz government sought peace with the Kurds and paved the way for a dramatic improvement in U.S.-Iraqi relations.

The Johnson administration was pleased with Bazzaz's appointment and Iraq's return to civilian rule. Indeed, when Bazzaz arrived in New York for the General Assembly in October 1965 not only Secretary Rusk but also Vice President Hubert Humphrey greeted him.⁵¹⁰ During both meetings the importance of the Kurdish question loomed large, but so too did Iran's support for Barzani. Bazzaz told Rusk he wanted the Iranians to understand they “were creating future trouble for themselves by continuing clandestine assistance to the Iraqi-Kurdish insurgents.” He then repeated previous requests that the U.S. urge the Shah to consider the “inadvisability of his policy.”

The Prime Minister stressed that he was not asking the United States to intervene in the internal affairs of Iran but only to advise ... that the Shah not use arms supplied to him by the United States for smuggling into Iraqi Kurdistan.

Bazzaz cited America's relationship with Iran vis-à-vis CENTO “as giving [them] a legitimate right to make such a request.”⁵¹¹ This meeting made clear a number of things. First, it showed Bazzaz viewed solving the Kurdish question as a chief priority. Second, it was significant that this was the highest level of contact between U.S. and Iraqi officials since the 1958 revolution and underscored the Johnson administration's interest in improving relations with Iraq.

⁵¹⁰ White House, Vice President's Office, “Call on the Vice President by Iraqi Prime Minister,” October 15, 1965 (JPL/NSF/Box.28/RWK/Iraq[December 1963-March 1966]/doc.5), p.3.

⁵¹¹ DoS, Memorandum of Conversation, “Kurdish Affairs,” October 8, 1965 (JPL/NSF/Box.28/RWK/Iraq[December 1963-March 1966]/doc.8), pp.1-2.

In late October, the U.S. embassy in Baghdad drafted a detailed analysis of the competing interests and motivations of various parties in the Kurdish War.⁵¹² An annex to the analysis broke down U.S., Soviet, British, and Iranian policy objectives with respect to the Kurds. The U.S. objectives were preventing Soviet influence over the Kurds or allowing them to be used to disrupt the Middle East; avoiding the establishment of full autonomy or independence for the Kurds; keeping the Kurds living peacefully within Iraq and participating fully in national life; avoiding stirring up the Kurdish problem within Turkey and Iran; and finally, preventing the Kurdish problem from affecting adversely U.S. interests in Iraq.⁵¹³ Given these objectives, the embassy believed, “the current United States policy stance seems the most suitable—that the problem is an internal Iraqi one for which a negotiated political solution is desirable.”⁵¹⁴ The Soviet Union’s objectives consisted of gaining influence over the Kurds through support short of material aid; eventually developing strong influence over an independent Kurdistan which would be brought about by indigenous efforts; utilizing an independent Kurdistan to advance Soviet aims in Turkey, Iran, and the Gulf; and avoiding severely antagonizing the Arabs. The annex identified British objectives in Iraq as preventing an Iraqi-Egyptian union; keeping Iraq internally divided and weak; protecting their interests in the Gulf from Iraqi influence; and keeping oil flowing from the region. Likewise, Iran wanted to prevent the Kurds from creating problems with its own Kurdish minority; assist Barzani in bringing about a change in government in Iraq more suitable to Iran; keep Iraq weak, divided, and separate from Egypt; advance Iranian interests in the Gulf; and stress racial and cultural links between Kurds and Persians in order to keep open the possibility of Iranian annexation of Iraqi Kurdistan.⁵¹⁵ Though the annex does not address Israel’s interests and objectives, they have already been covered in detail above.

⁵¹² Baghdad A-424 to State, “Analysis of the Kurdish Problem,” October 30, 1965 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/1964-66/Box2339/POL 13-3–Ethnic Minorities), pp.1-2.

⁵¹³ Baghdad A-424 to State, enclosure: “Kurds - Iraq,” no date (NARA/RG59/CFPF/1964-66/Box2339/POL 13-3–Ethnic Minorities), p.1.

⁵¹⁴ “Analysis of the Kurdish Problem,” October 30, 1965, *Op.Cit.*, p.2.

⁵¹⁵ “Kurds - Iraq,” no date, *Op.Cit.*, p.2.

Remarkably, in stark contrast to the 1963 Kurdish War, by 1965 U.S. policy toward the Kurdish problem was not that different from the Soviet Union's, albeit barring the long-term goal of an independent Kurdistan. As the report observed:

[While] the United States, Soviet Union and [Egyptian] postures advocating a peaceful, negotiated settlement are superficially parallel, the positions are differently motivated and, especially in the United States and Soviet cases, based on different assumptions as to probable results.

But the divergence between the U.S. and its allies was very apparent.

[The] Iranians and Israelis—and perhaps the British—appear for varying motivations to favor continuation of the conflict for its debilitating effect on Iraq.

Continued Iranian/Israeli intervention is a threat to the United States position in Iraq but, unfortunately, neither country is likely to be heedful of United States interests in this matter.

This makes clear that U.S. policy faced a conundrum, whereby its closest allies were supporting the continuation of the war, the U.S. and the Soviet Union wanted a peaceful settlement. In short, this was a catch-22:

The central conclusion from the standpoint of the United States is that a high degree of autonomy or independence for the Iraqi Kurds would be disruptive of area stability and inimical to our interests in the long run. Neither is the continuation of the fighting in United States interests, although the consequences do not, at least for the time being, warrant a major initiative by the United States....

For the immediate future, neither the Kurds [nor] the GOI appear able to force a military solution. Similarly even a negotiated solution is not likely to be permanent. The Kurdish problem is long-term.⁵¹⁶

This report makes clear that by late-1965, U.S. policy toward both Iraq and the Kurds was at odds with its closest allies.

By the end of the year, Iran's support for the Kurds became quite overt. In November, the U.S. learned Iranian forces had assisted the Kurds in a hit-and-run attack against Iraqi positions near the Iranian border. On December 7, "Iraqi irregulars shot up some Iranians on the Iranian side of the border," leading Iran to mobilize its forces along the border. Tensions escalated further on December 21,

⁵¹⁶ "Analysis of the Kurdish Problem," October 30, 1965, *Op.Cit.*, pp.1-2.

when Iraqi MiG jets attacked an Iranian border post. At the end of December, Iraqi forces launched a surprise offensive against a Kurdish stronghold, capturing it with only light resistance.⁵¹⁷ After regrouping, the Kurds counterattacked with the help of Iranian forces, which provided artillery support that forced Iraqi commanders to withdraw. As Kenneth Pollack observed, Iraq's unsuccessful winter offensive revealed the vulnerability of the Kurds' supply lines to Iran and convinced the Iraqi army that sealing the Iranian border was crucial to defeat the Kurds.⁵¹⁸

Meanwhile, as the fighting raged in the north, Iran informed Iraq it was "prepared to discuss pending difficulties, including the Shatt-al-Arab [waterway]," which led U.S. officials in Tehran to conclude Iran was trying to exploit the Kurdish War "to force Iraq to negotiate over another long-standing issue between the two countries." The Shah's scheme was not lost on Bazzaz, who sought to defuse the crisis by admitting Iraq's border violations and inviting Iranian Prime Minister Amir Abbas Hoveyda to come to Baghdad to discuss the matter. But just as tensions were easing, hardliners in the Iraqi government scuttled the proposal by demanding Iran cease its aid to the Kurds before further discussions could take place.⁵¹⁹

On January 20, 1966, the Shah met with the new U.S. Ambassador, Armin Meyer, to discuss the situation. Remarkably, the Shah hinted to Meyer that his long term strategy was to "exploit tension with Iraq to force [the] solution of [the] Shatt [al-Arab] issue," but he was prepared to "wait a few more years", since this "question ha[d] [a] history of many decades". The Shah said time was on Iran's side, especially with the development of Iran's Gulf ports and Kharg Island, which would eventually handle up to 98% of Iran's oil exports.⁵²⁰ This, in turn, would reduce Iraq's income from the waterway. At this point, the Shah believed Iraq "[would] come to Iran in hope of sharing [the financial] burden [of maintaining the waterway], and dividing [the] Shatt between them." On the Kurds, the Shah explained he had no intention of antagonizing his own Kurdish population by

⁵¹⁷ Tehran A-607 to State, "The Iran-Iraq Crisis of December/January: An Analysis," March 5, 1966 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/1964-66/Box2339/POL 13-3-Ethnic Minorities), pp.2-3.

⁵¹⁸ O'Ballance (1973), p.133; and Pollack (2002), p.162.

⁵¹⁹ "The Iran-Iraq Crisis...", March 5, 1966, *Op.Cit.*, p.3.

⁵²⁰ *Press TV*, "Iran increases oil storage capacity to foil EU sanctions," March 19, 2012. Available online: <http://presstv.com/detail/232470.html>

colluding with Iraq against Barzani, which he saw as an internal Iraqi problem that could not be solved by “butchering” them.⁵²¹ The fact that the Shah linked these two problems together for the first time is significant since it foreshadowed precisely what would happen a decade later under nearly identical circumstances.

In early March, Barzani’s liaison to SAVAK, Shamsuddin Mofti, approached the U.S. Embassy in Tehran with a letter addressed to President Johnson. As usual, the letter appealed to the U.S. to intervene on behalf of the Kurdish people by preventing Iraq’s acquisition of arms, supporting the Kurdish people, and using its influence in Baghdad to help solve the Kurdish problem peacefully. In the forwarding letter, the embassy recommended that it reiterate the non-intervention policy and urge the Kurds to seek accommodation with the regime through peaceful negotiations. The department approved this approach.⁵²²

Notably, as the spring fighting season approached, Bazzaz sought to stave off war by reaching out to Barzani at the eleventh hour—indicating he had been drafting a decentralization law, was prepared to engage in economic and social projects in the north, and to recognize the Kurdish national identity in cultural spheres. Unfortunately, his efforts were in vain. According to the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, both Arif and Iraq’s Defense Minister, General Abd al-Aziz al-Uqaili, were determined to go ahead with an offensive, albeit engaging in secret talks.⁵²³ By late March the talks had broken down, with Uqaili denying reports while saying “military operations [would] continue until the [Kurds were] defeated.”⁵²⁴ However, on the evening of April 13, Abd al’Salim Arif was flying to Basra when his plane crashed, killing all on board.⁵²⁵ When word of Arif’s death reached the U.S. on April 14, the

⁵²¹ Tehran A-1044 to State, “Iran-Iraq Relations,” January 20, 1966 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.179).

⁵²² Tehran A-625 to State, “Iran-Iraq: Letter to President Johnson from Mullah Mustafa Barzani,” March 12, 1965 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/1964-66/Box2339/POL 13-3–Ethnic Minorities), pp.1-2.

⁵²³ Baghdad A-801 to State, “Confidential Contacts Between the Iraqi Government and the Kurdish Rebels,” March 26, 1966 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/1964-66/Box2339/POL 13-3–Ethnic Minorities), pp.1-4.

⁵²⁴ Baghdad A-792 to State, “Iraqi Defense Minister Uqaili on Kurdish Situation; Outlook for Spring Campaign,” March 26, 1966 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/1964-66/Box2339/POL 13-3–Ethnic Minorities), pp.1-2.

⁵²⁵ DoS, Denney to the Acting Secretary, “Iraqi President’s Death Opens Power Struggle,” IN-234, April 14, 1966 (JPL/NSF/HSF/Box16/Iraq 4/1/66-1/20/69/doc.53), p.1.

White House sent the Iraqi government a letter conveying Johnson's "sincerest condolences."⁵²⁶

After a few days of internal debate, on April 17 Arif's brother, General Abd ar-Rahman Arif, emerged unexpectedly as Iraq's new president—apparently as a compromise among the regime's vying factions.⁵²⁷ Upon coming to office, Abd ar-Rahman Arif took steps to consolidate his position, replacing Uqaili with a moderate as defense minister and kept Bazzaz on as prime minister, despite the problems this created with his generals, who wanted war.⁵²⁸ Even so, the generals won the debate over war and launched its fourth offensive against the Kurds on May 2, using 40,000 troops against Barzani's meager force of only 3,500 Peshmerga.⁵²⁹

The 1966 campaign was significant because of Israel's role in defeating the Iraqi army. After pushing its way through the Rawanduz Gorge and capturing part of two large mountains, Mount Handren to the south and Mount Zozik to the north, of an important road running to the Iranian border.⁵³⁰ According to Zuri Sagy, an Israeli Defense Force (IDF) military officer sent to Kurdistan to advise Barzani, for many months the IDF had been training Peshmerga at bases inside Iran. In an interview, Sagy explained that Iraq's forces had made a crucial error when it set up camp in the valley below the two mountains on the evening of May 10, by leaving the surrounding heights undefended. Upon learning this, Sagy convinced Barzani to attack immediately. In the early hours of May 11, Sagy ordered a group of Kurds holding the front line to retreat, leaving open a gap in the lines. Thinking they had made a major breakthrough, the Iraqis poured hundreds of troops through the gap and consolidating their apparent gains. But the Iraqis fell right into Sagy's trap. Like earlier that night, the Iraqis failed to secure the heights above, where unknown to them, hundreds of Kurds laid in wait. Before long, Sagy and the Kurds fell upon several battalions from the heights above, leading to a bloodbath.⁵³¹ After just two

⁵²⁶ White House, Memorandum, Smith to Read, April 14, 1966 (JPL/NSF/HSF/Box16/Iraq 4/1/66-1/20/69/doc.54), p.1.

⁵²⁷ Herein Abd ar-Rahman Arif will be referred to as "Arif".

⁵²⁸ O'Ballance (1973), p.136.

⁵²⁹ O'Ballance (1973), pp.136-7.

⁵³⁰ Baghdad A-212 to State, "Kurdish and General Iraqi Situations," September 14, 1966 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/1964-66/Box2339/POL 13-3-Ethnic Minorities), p.1.

⁵³¹ Interview with Zuri Sagy, March 15, 2012. See also Randal (1999), pp.191-93.

days of fighting, between 1,400 and 2,000 Iraqi soldiers had been killed, and hundreds more captured at what became known as the Battle of Mount Handren.⁵³² Barzani's defeat of the Iraqi army underscored the ineffectiveness of solving the Kurdish question through force, discredited the hardline elements in the regime, and finally gave Bazzaz the mandate he needed to negotiate peace with Barzani, who immediately agreed to talks.⁵³³

After a few weeks of negotiations, Bazzaz announced a Twelve Point Plan for peace with the Kurds on June 29, consisting of:

1. Recognition of Kurdish national rights;
2. Administrative decentralization to give effect to these rights;
3. Recognition of Kurdish as an official language;
4. Kurdish representation in parliament;
5. Kurdish share of official positions;
6. Scholarships for Kurds and a Baghdad University branch in the North;
7. Kurdish local government officials;
8. Kurdish political organizations;
9. Amnesty for Kurds;
10. Return of Kurdish guerrillas to previous posts and maintenance by some in an approved organization (i.e., Peshmerga);
11. Relief and economic assistance; [and]
12. Resettlement of Kurds and others in their traditional locales.⁵³⁴

After five years of failed offensives, countless deaths, and considerable expense, an Iraqi government was finally prepared to meet the Kurds' demands. While the deal was a major breakthrough, it was not without its detractors. As Tripp observed, many Iraqi military officers feared Bazzaz would use the peace deal as justification to slash their budget and reign in their lavish perks.⁵³⁵ Consequently, on June 30, a

⁵³² O'Ballance (1973), p.137, and Pollack (2002), p.163, indicate 2,000 killed, while Shawqat Akrawi says 1,400. See Baghdad A-193 to State, "Shawkat Akrawi Discusses Kurdish Split," September 6, 1966 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/1964-66/Box2339/POL 13-3-Ethnic Minorities), p.2 of enclosure; and London A-2825 to State, "Informal Meeting with Ismet Sherif Vanli and Other Kurds in London," May 20, 1966 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/1964-66/Box2339/POL 13-3-Ethnic Minorities), pp.1-2.

⁵³³ Tripp (2007), pp.179-80.

⁵³⁴ Baghdad A-1065 to State, "Iraqi Government's 12-Point Proposal to the Kurds," June 22, 1966 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/1964-66/Box2339/POL 13-3-Ethnic Minorities), pp.1-2.

⁵³⁵ Tripp (2007), p.181.

group of prominent Nasserists tried to seize power.⁵³⁶ Fortunately, forces loyal to the president had infiltrated the plot and caught the coup's leaders "redhanded."⁵³⁷

The Johnson administration was pleased with both the Bazzaz peace plan and the successful thwarting of the coup. It issued a public statement on July 8 congratulating both Arif and Bazzaz.⁵³⁸ Throughout July, Bazzaz took steps to implement the terms of the agreement by approving a massive rehabilitation program, lifting the economic blockade, releasing hundreds of Kurdish prisoners, removing Arab tribes from former Kurdish lands, and passing a general amnesty law.⁵³⁹ But in the background, the military pressured Arif to dismiss Bazzaz, who eventually conceded on August 6, bringing Iraq's brief experimentation with civilian government to an end. On the Kurdish question, even though talks with Barzani were suspended by the new regime, somehow an unstable peace managed to endure throughout the remainder of Johnson's presidency.

The Johnson administration viewed the coming to power of civilians in Iraq as a positive step. While seeking friendly relations with Iraq, the U.S. found its policy of urging a peaceful settlement on the Kurdish question become more closely aligned with the Soviet Union than with its allies, Iran and Israel. When the Kurdish War renewed in the winter of 1965-66, Iranian and Israeli involvement became much more pronounced, culminating in Israel's significant role in bringing about the defeat of the Iraqi army at the Battle of Mount Handren, which forced the Iraqi government to sue for peace. This account is supported by Randal and stands in stark contrast to Hahn's explanation that U.S. diplomats had encouraged Arif and Barzani to agree to the 1966 ceasefire.⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁶ O'Ballance (1973), pp.140-1.

⁵³⁷ Baghdad 12 to State, July 2, 1966 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.182).

⁵³⁸ Baghdad A-28 to State, "United States Statement on Iraq's Kurdish Settlement," July 13, 1966 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/1964-66/Box2339/POL 13-3-Ethnic Minorities), p.1.

⁵³⁹ Baghdad A-67 to State, "Summary of Government of Iraq Moves to Implement the Recent Kurdish Settlement," July 23, 1966 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/1964-66/Box2339/POL 13-3-Ethnic Minorities), pp.1-3; and Baghdad A-90 to State, "Amnesty for Kurds," July 30, 1966 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/1964-66/Box2339/POL 13-3-Ethnic Minorities), p.1.

⁵⁴⁰ Randal (1999), pp.191-93; and Hahn (2012), p.50.

V

The year between the June 1966 peace plan and the outbreak of the Six Day War in June 1967 saw a remarkable improvement in U.S.-Iraqi relations. The reason for this was Iraq's new president was well disposed toward the United States. Remarkably, Johnson and Arif managed to cultivate a friendly personal relationship, which culminated in the visit of five Iraqi generals to the Oval Office in January 1967. Unfortunately, any progress in U.S.-Iraqi relations was cut short in June 1967 when Israel launched its preemptive war against Egypt, seizing the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza Strip, West Bank, and Golan Heights. Outraged by the Johnson administration's backing of Israel, Arif was forced to sever diplomatic relations with the United States.

Upon Arif's coming to office, the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad noticed a marked improvement in U.S.-Iraqi relations. This was facilitated by two factors. First, prior to his brother's death, Arif had become friends with Ambassador Strong and told him he preferred to discuss matters "as friend to friend rather than President to Ambassador." Second, Arif was already well disposed toward the U.S., but had to be cautious due to Iraq's anti-Western political environment.⁵⁴¹ Consequently, throughout 1966 the Johnson administration observed a steady succession of friendly gestures from Iraq, albeit in private.⁵⁴²

The high mark of U.S.-Iraqi relations occurred in January 1967, when Johnson met with five Iraqi generals at the White House. Before agreeing to the meeting, Rusk sent Johnson a memo requesting the meeting on the basis that Iraq was "entering a critical decision period" about what direction its future would take. There was evidence that Arif was the leader of the "forces of moderation" by

⁵⁴¹ Baghdad 688 to State, "Call on President Aref," May 17, 1966 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.180).

⁵⁴² For the exchanges see, State 9189 to U.S. Embassy Baghdad, April 18, 1966 (JPL/NSF/HSF/Box16/Iraq 4/1/66-1/20/69/doc.51), p.1; Baghdad 1800 to State, Message from President of Iraq to President Johnson, April 26, 1966 (JPL/NSF/HSF/Box16/Iraq 4/1/66-1/20/69/doc.49a), p.1; State 3091 to U.S. Embassy Baghdad, July 7, 1966 (JPL/NSF/HSF/Box16/Iraq 4/1/66-1/20/69/doc.48), p.1; State 5619 to U.S. Embassy Baghdad, July 12, 1966 (JPL/NSF/HSF/Box16/Iraq 4/1/66-1/20/69/doc.46), p.1; State 91650 to U.S. Embassy Baghdad, November 25, 1966 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.186); Baghdad 1022 to State, November 30, 1966 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.187); and State 111240 to U.S. Embassy Baghdad, December 31, 1966 (JPL/NSF/HSF/Box16/Iraq 4/1/66-1/20/69/doc.45), p.1

charting an “Iraq-first” policy. Because of this, Rusk felt receiving the generals would:

... continue to stiffen President Arif’s morale, and that any such personal recognition by [Johnson] of his special emissary would serve this purpose by strengthening the cordial ties already established by past messages exchanged between [him] and President Arif through diplomatic channels.⁵⁴³

Johnson’s national security advisor, Walt Rostow, agreed that this proposal, while “rather unusual,” warranted “serious consideration.” Building on Rusk’s argument, Rostow reminded Johnson the objective of U.S. policy toward the Middle East was “to encourage governments like Aref’s to stand on their own—and not get sucked into the more radical Arab nationalist movements that cause [them] (and Israel) so much trouble.” He said the NSC had even considered inviting Arif to Washington on a state visit, but rejected it because of his tenuous grip on power. Nevertheless, the fact that Arif was sending a delegation suggested he was “reaching out” and wished to “strengthen his relationship” with Johnson, which was “unexpectedly encouraging.”⁵⁴⁴ The White House agreed and Johnson met with the five generals and Iraq’s Ambassador to Washington, Nasir Hani, on January 25, where he presented the generals with a gift and a personal message for Arif conveying his “desire to build an ever closer relationship between [the] two governments.”⁵⁴⁵

It is clear from this series of exchanges that between mid-1966 and June 1967 the Johnson administration established a friendly relationship with Arif, who was viewed as an anti-communist, Iraqi nationalist, and one of the few forces of moderation within his country. Unfortunately, Arif was also weak politically and increasingly beholden to the more hardliner tendencies of Iraq’s powerful military. This was evident in his removal of Bazzaz in 1966. But Arif’s weakness was also

⁵⁴³ DoS, Memorandum, from Secretary of State to the President, January 20, 1967 (JPL/NSF/HSF/Box16/Iraq 4/1/66-1/20/69/doc.44), pp.1-2.

⁵⁴⁴ White House, Memorandum, Rostow to the President, “Gift and Message from Iraq’s President,” January 21, 1967 (JPL/NSF/HSF/Box16/Iraq 4/1/66-1/20/69/doc.43), pp.1-2.

⁵⁴⁵ White House, Memorandum, Rostow to the President, “Your Meeting with Iraqi Generals – 25 January,” January 24, 1967 (JPL/NSF/HSF/Box16/Iraq 4/1/66-1/20/69/doc.41), p.1. For subsequent exchanges, see State 169615 to U.S. Embassy Baghdad, April 6, 1967 (JPL/NSF/HSF/Box16/Iraq 4/1/66-1/20/69/doc.35), p.1; and Iraqi Embassy Washington to State, April 26, 1967 (JPL/NSF/HSF/Box16/Iraq 4/1/66-1/20/69/doc.34b), p.1.

evident in how Iraq responded to the outbreak of war with Israel and the frontline Arab states, Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, in June 1967.

When the Six Day War began on June 5, the Iraqi government was incapable of assisting the frontline Arab states for three reasons. First, Israel's rapid defeat of Jordan—where Iraq's Third Armoured Division was stationed—meant the battle was already over by the time Iraq could muster its forces. Secondly, the Iraqi army's morale was already at an all time low following its defeat at Mount Handren in May 1966. Finally, the Iraqi government was cautious about diverting its forces away from Kurdistan in the event that Barzani took advantage of its preoccupation with Israel and counterattacked.⁵⁴⁶ This fear, it turns out, was well grounded. According to the INR, just prior to the war, "an Israeli agent ... visited Mullah Mustafa to arrange, if possible, some Kurdish action to tie down the Iraqi army." While Israel "did not succeed," this option would be raised again during the October War of 1973.⁵⁴⁷ The speed of Israel's victory, the low morale of Iraq's army, and the Kurdish threat meant Iraq's contribution to the Six Day War was modest, mostly limited to air operations.

Iraq's response to U.S. support for Israel, however, was much more aggressive. On June 7, the Iraqi Foreign Ministry informed the U.S. Embassy that Iraq had broken relations with the U.S. for its "alleged air and other aid to Israel." The U.S. Chargé d'Affairs, Enoch Duncan, who was in charge while Ambassador Strong was on leave at the time, and the embassy staff were given a "reasonable period" of five days to wind up affairs, collect their belongings, and leave the country, presumably to Iran.⁵⁴⁸ Other measures taken by Iraq as part of its break in relations included suspending oil shipments, refusing the U.S. over flight permission, and a boycott of U.S. goods. Before leaving Baghdad on June 10,⁵⁴⁹ Duncan managed to cable Washington to report the moderates, who at first seemed "in the saddle," had been eclipsed by radical elements, which forced the government to make

⁵⁴⁶ Pollack, p.167.

⁵⁴⁷ DoS, INR, "New Kurdish Insurgency Threatens," IN-709, September 1, 1967 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc. 197).

⁵⁴⁸ Baghdad 2111 to State, June 6, 1967 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.194).

⁵⁴⁹ Tehran A-121 to State, "Events in Iraq, June 25 – July 8," August 28, 1967 (NARA/RG59/CFPF/1967-69/Box 2220/"Political Affairs and Relations–Iraq.1/1/67"), p.1.

concessions to “extremists in [the] name of national unity[,] such as [the] release [of] notorious plotters,” including Arif Abd al-Razzaq.⁵⁵⁰ With radicals hijacking the moderate Arif regime, there is no question Israel’s preemptive war destroyed the budding U.S.-Iraqi relationship.

Following the break, the U.S. and Iraq agreed to establish “Interests Sections” in each other’s capitals, with the U.S. entrusting its interests to Belgium and, similarly, Iraq having India represent its interests in Washington. Initially, the U.S. wanted to send several officers to Baghdad, but the Iraqis objected to the numbers, preferring only a single junior officer and an administrative assistant. This was untenable and so the State Department decided against sending representative altogether, preferring instead to work through the Belgians who inherited the U.S. Embassy’s staff of local employees.⁵⁵¹ From this point until the deployment of U.S. officers to Baghdad in early 1972, contacts between U.S. and Iraqi officials became rare.⁵⁵²

There is no question that in the period prior to the Six Day War the U.S. and Iraq had undergone an unprecedented period of growth in their relationship. The regular, friendly exchanges between Johnson and Arif and the welcome for the Iraqi generals in Washington make clear that both sides were interested in improving relations. But the breaking of relations following the war destroyed any chance at further improvement and crippled the Arif regime, which would collapse before long.

VI

For the remainder of Johnson’s term as president, his administration appeared to be jumping from crisis to crisis, all while the Vietnam War—particularly after the Tet offensive in January 1968—demanded his undivided attention. Eventually this would lead to Johnson’s decision not to seek reelection. But in

⁵⁵⁰ Baghdad 2143 to State, June 8, 1967 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.195).

⁵⁵¹ DoS, Memorandum, Seelye to Sisco, “Proposed Assignment of US Officers to Baghdad Interests Section,” April 9, 1971 (NARA/RG59/Records Relating to Iraq/1966-72/Box 14/POL-17), p.1.

⁵⁵² See DoS, Memorandum of Conversation, “Talk with Iraqi Foreign Minister Pachachi,” June 29, 1967 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.196).

January 1968, just as his administration was completing a review of its Near East policy,⁵⁵³ the British government stunned the U.S. when it announced it would withdraw its military forces from “East of Suez” by the end of 1971, including from the Gulf.⁵⁵⁴ While the British decision had been debated internally for years,⁵⁵⁵ the catalysts for the decision were the resulting financial difficulties after Egypt closed the Suez Canal following the Six Day War, the subsequent devaluation of Sterling in November, and currency speculation following thereafter.⁵⁵⁶ A final factor, as David McCourt observed, was that “by 1968 ... it was clearly no longer in Britain’s interests to expend such effort—material and financial—in an area where its immediate security was not endangered.”⁵⁵⁷ In short, Britain could no longer afford its empire. But in the wake of the British decision, the Soviet Union made a series of moves to improve relations with Iraq, which were soon followed by the overthrow of the Arif regime in July 1968. All of these events combined made clear that the Johnson administration had virtually no ability to influence the series of crises engulfing the region.

Despite the Johnson administration lobbying to convince the British government to delay announcing its decision, London never budged. In one notable encounter just prior to the British announcement, Secretary Rusk gave British Foreign Secretary George Brown what the State Department’s administrative history described as, an “eloquent presentation” on why it should not announce the decision, but this was hardly the case.⁵⁵⁸ In a heated exchange, Rusk stressed the importance the U.S. attached to the British presence in the region, argued an early announcement would “have a particularly unsettling effect,” and raised U.S. fears that the Soviets could attempt to fill the power vacuum created by their departure.

⁵⁵³ See Department of Defense, Special State-Defense Study Group, “Near East, North Africa and the Horn of Africa: A Recommended American Strategy,” no date (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.22).

⁵⁵⁴ See Saki Dockrill, *Britain’s Retreat from East of Suez: The Choice between Europe and the World?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

⁵⁵⁵ Fain (2008), p.141.

⁵⁵⁶ DoS, Administration History of the Department of State, Volume I, Chapter 4, Section F, “The Persian Gulf” (JPL/Administrative History/Department of State/Box 2), p.2. Herein, this source will be referred to as Administrative History.

⁵⁵⁷ David McCourt, “What was Britain’s ‘East of Suez Role’? Reassessing the Withdrawal, 1964-1968”, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 20/3 (2009), p.453.

⁵⁵⁸ Administrative History, *Op.Cit.*, pp.3-4.

He recognized the financial strain Britain faced, and said the U.S. would have assisted financially had Congress not “sharply curtailed” its own resources in response to Vietnam. But total withdrawal was an “irreversible decision” that could preferably be offset instead by a gradual reduction of its forces.⁵⁵⁹ Then, when Brown replied that the decision had already been made and would not be reversed, Rusk lashed out, “for God’s sake, act like Britain!” and said he resented the “acid aroma of the *fait accompli*.”⁵⁶⁰

Amid the ensuing instability following the British decision, Iran began to exercise its strength in the Gulf, while the British tried to craft the lower Gulf Arab states into a union (later the United Arab Emirates). While Anglo-American consultations over the withdrawal plan continued, U.S. officials were furious about Britain’s perceived abdication of its regional responsibilities. The central problem was that there was “no politically feasible way for the U.S. or other Western power to step in” and fill the power vacuum “with an equally effective presence once the British [were] gone.” Worse yet, the best possible contender for influence, the Soviet Union, had already been making inroads in the region following the Six Day War.⁵⁶¹ In terms of U.S. Cold War strategy, the British announcement had dealt the U.S. a tremendous blow.

To make matters worse, two weeks later the Vietcong launched the Tet Offensive against U.S. forces in Vietnam, which eventually led Johnson to announce on March 31 that he would not seek reelection.⁵⁶² As Roham Alvandi notes, from this point onward, the Johnson administration sought to establish a regional security arrangement focusing on bolstering Iran and Saudi Arabia, which became known as the ‘twin pillar’ policy. By building up the two largest Gulf powers, which were both pro-Western, the Johnson administration believed it could avoid the logistical and financial difficulties of policing the Gulf. This policy would remain in place until

⁵⁵⁹ DoS, Briefing Memorandum, Battle to Rusk, “British Plans to Accelerate Withdrawal of Military Presence from Persian Gulf: Your Meeting with Foreign Secretary Brown, January 11,” January 9, 1968 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.122).

⁵⁶⁰ Fain (2008), p.141; and Brown to Foreign Office, January 11, 1968 (BNA, PREM 13/2081), pp.1-2.

⁵⁶¹ “British Plans to Accelerate Withdrawal...,” January 9, 1968, *Op.Cit.*

⁵⁶² James Jones, “Behind JPL’s Decision Not to Run in ’68,” *New York Times*, April 16, 1968.

Richard Nixon modified it in the early 1970s by putting more emphasis on shoring up Iran as opposed to Saudi Arabia.⁵⁶³

Within weeks of the British announcement, American fears of Soviet encroachment in the region were realized when Moscow moved to shore up its influence inside Iraq. On April 2, the U.S. learned Soviets had signed a major oil deal with Iraq, which included technical assistance in both oil exploration and marketing. While U.S. officials recognized the deal did not give the Soviets leverage over the Iraqi regime, it was still perceived as a “real danger” to U.S. interests in Iraq.⁵⁶⁴ Another move occurred in late April, when Iraq announced that Soviet naval vessels planned to visit Iraqi ports in May. When this occurred on May 11, it was the first time a Russian naval vessel had entered the Gulf since 1903.⁵⁶⁵ While some U.S. officials viewed these developments with concern, the CIA was more sanguine, concluding Moscow still did not have any influence on the Iraqi regime’s policy decisions.⁵⁶⁶ Nevertheless, it was clear U.S. officials believed the Soviets saw the British announcement as an opportunity to expand their influence in the region.

The Israelis and Iranians were not blind to the developments in Iraq and decided to reactivate their Kurdish connection. According to Tsafir, with SAVAK’s blessing, Barzani, Dr. Mahmud Othman, and an Iranian liaison traveled surreptitiously to Israel in the spring of 1968 via an Israeli Air Force plane (which had just delivered weapons to the Kurds) in order to meet with high-level Israeli officials, including Israel’s president, prime minister, and the ministers of defense and foreign affairs, among many others. While most of the meetings were ceremonial in nature, Barzani’s talks with Mossad focused on how Israel could strengthen their relationship and the scale of its support. The Kurdish leader was also taken on a trip to the Sinai to see personally the scale of Israel’s victory over the Arabs. Israel’s generosity, courtesy, and the level of support impressed Barzani.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶³ See Alvandi (2012), pp.338-9.

⁵⁶⁴ White House, Memorandum for the Record, “Soviet Move into Iraqi Oil Production,” April 2, 1968 (JPL/NSF/HSF/Box16/Iraq 4/1/66-1/20/69/doc.5), p.1.

⁵⁶⁵ Administrative History, *Op.Cit.*, pp.11-12.

⁵⁶⁶ CIA, “Iraq: The Stagnant Revolution,” SM 11-68, May 22, 1968 (JPL/NSF/HSF/Box16/Iraq 4/1/66-1/20/69/doc.25), pp.1-15.

⁵⁶⁷ Email correspondence with Tsafir, November 16, 2010.

Almost immediately after the trip, Supreme Court Justice William Douglas, a longtime sympathizer to the Kurdish cause, asked the White House to meet with one of Barzani's emissaries, Shawfiq Qazzaz. The task fell to Harold Saunders, a Middle East expert that had replaced Komer on the NSC staff.⁵⁶⁸

When Qazzaz met with Saunders on March 12, he complained the regime had not fulfilled the promises made in 1966 and humanitarian aid was only reaching pro-government Kurds. In response, Saunders pointed out there was little U.S. could legally do and suggested he contact the Red Cross directly.⁵⁶⁹ The next day, Saunders drafted a memo to the president's special assistant that pointed out that since Iraq severed relations with the U.S., "the [Kurdish] problem [was not] so ticklish," though "for the moment, [their] hands [were] tied unless [they] want[ed] to begin clandestine aid to the Kurds, and [they had not] so far seen much to be gained from that." To this end, he advocated sticking "to [their] general approach until there seem[ed] good reason to change it."⁵⁷⁰ Quite clearly, a shift in U.S. thinking toward the Kurds had occurred, a shift that was facilitated by Iran and Israel's hidden hand.

But just as the U.S. was growing concerned about rising Soviet influence in Iraq, Arif regime's survival was becoming uncertain. On May 22, the CIA produced a pessimistic analysis of the state of Iraq's revolution after ten years, suitably titled, "The Stagnant Revolution," which described the Arif regime as "ineffective and fumbling." The CIA confirmed the regime's radical elements from the military had overtaken the moderates. The analysis stated, "the balance of forces is such that no group feels power enough to take decisive steps; the result is a situation in which many important political and economic matters are simply ignored," like the implementation of the Kurdish peace agreement. While neither side appeared to want to resume the Kurdish War, the CIA felt there was plenty of room for "miscalculation" and noted an increase in plotting against the regime, particularly by the Ba'th and Arab nationalist groups. Taken together, the deadlock between the

⁵⁶⁸ White House, Memorandum for the Record, "Talk with Shafiq [sic.] Qazzaz," March 12, 1968 (JPL/NSF/HSF/Box16/Iraq 4/1/66-1/20/69/doc.7), p.1.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., p.1.

⁵⁷⁰ White House, "Memo for Mr. Goldstein," March 13, 1968 (JPL/NSF/HSF/Box16/Iraq 4/1/66-1/20/69/doc.6), p.1.

competing factions and the increased plotting against the regime led the CIA to fear for the regime's survival.⁵⁷¹

In June 1968, the U.S. passed word to Iraq through the Belgians that it was interested in resuming diplomatic relations. The U.S. set out three conditions: 1) Iraq agree to compensate the U.S. for damages to its embassy and consulates; 2) the U.S. could have unimpeded access to its properties in Iraq; and that the Iraqi boycott of U.S. goods and services and overflights be lifted. The Belgians agreed to pass these points to Iraq, but commented that the Iraqis would likely find the lifting of the boycott unacceptable.⁵⁷² This account contrasts with Hahn's assertion that Iraq sought to renew diplomatic relations with the U.S. in June 1968.

Before long, American fears about the Arif regime were realized when, in the pre-dawn hours of July 17, the Ba'th Party, working with radical elements of the army, overthrew it in a bloodless coup.⁵⁷³ It was evident from the start that the Johnson administration was apprehensive about how radical the new regime would be, though U.S. officials seemed certain it would be "more difficult than their predecessors."⁵⁷⁴ The regime consisted of a triumvirate of Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr as Prime Minister, Abd ar-Rahman al-Dawud as Defense Minister, and Abd al-Razzaq al-Nayif as Interior Minister. But, as Tripp pointed out, this would not last long, since neither the Ba'thist nor non-Ba'thist elements wanted to share power. Having learned hard lessons in 1963, al-Bakr moved swiftly to consolidate his power. On July 30, while al-Dawud was visiting Jordan, al-Bakr ordered an armoured brigade to seize all of the strategic buildings in Baghdad, arrest al-Nayif, and send him into

⁵⁷¹ "The Stagnant Revolution," May 22, 1968, *Op.Cit.*, pp.1-15.

⁵⁷² Brussels 7128 to State, June 7, 1968 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.198).

⁵⁷³ For details of the coup, see DoS, Hughes to Rusk, "Iraqi Ba'this Take Over Government; Get Feet Wet Again," IN-561, July 17, 1968 (NARA/RG59/SN/1967-69/Box 2221/"POL 15-Iraq 1/1/67"), p.1; and DoS, draft telegram, "Iraqi coup," July 17, 1968 (NARA/RG59/Records Relating to Iraq/1966-72/Box3/POL-23), pp.1-4. While Roger Morris claimed the U.S. were behind the coup, there is no available evidence to support this. In fact, an initial U.S. response to the coup, shows considerable confusion over what had happened, see White House, Memorandum, Foster to Rostow, "The Iraqi Coup," July 17, 1968 (JPL/NSF/HSF/Box16/Iraq 4/1/66-1/20/69/doc.3), p.1. Finally, a CIA official, who at the time was in charge of "denied area operations", said "I do not know how the rumor got started that we were involved in the Bathist coup. We weren't." In fact, the prevailing view at the time was that Arif "was the best of the lot." Email correspondence with CIA official, March 1, 2012.

⁵⁷⁴ "The Iraqi Coup," July 17, 1968, *Op.Cit.*, p.1.

exile.⁵⁷⁵ Following the second coup, Iraq's new supreme ruling body, the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), dismissed al-Nayif's cabinet and named al-Bakr as Iraq's President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.⁵⁷⁶ In doing so, the Ba'th Party had managed to finally seize power for a second time, a grip they would not relinquish until the U.S. invaded in March 2003.

VII

The Ba'th Party's seizure of power at the end of July 1968 was followed by a period of intense insecurity. The regime moved quickly to improve its relations with the Soviet Union, while blaming all of its domestic shortcomings on Israeli subversion. Viewed from Washington, Iraq's actions would have a profound impact on how Johnson's successor, Richard Nixon, would view it, not just in terms of the wider Cold War but also in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

On August 2, Iraq's new foreign minister, Abdul Karim Sheikhi, announced Iraq would work to strengthen its relations "with the socialist camp, particularly the Soviet Union and the Chinese People's Republic." This, however, did not come as a complete surprise to U.S. officials in light of the large-scale military and economic agreements the previous regime had just signed with the Soviets. Nevertheless, the speed at which Baghdad sought to improve relations with Moscow provided a first glimpse at a strategic alliance that would soon emerge.⁵⁷⁷

In late November, not long after Republican presidential candidate Richard Nixon defeated his two rivals, Hubert Humphrey and George Wallace, in the U.S. general election, the U.S. Embassy in Beirut drafted a report on the first hundred days of the Ba'thist regime in Iraq. The report makes clear that the Ba'th had submitted to Soviet pressure and released a large number of left wing and communist political prisoners, however, "there [was] no indication that Marxists and communists [had] been given any major role in the regime." In short, the regime

⁵⁷⁵ Tripp (2007), p.184.

⁵⁷⁶ DoS, Hughes to Rusk, "Right-wing Ba'thi Takeover in Iraq: Near-term Outlook," IN-618, August 6, 1968 (NARA/RG59/SN/1967-69/Box 2221/"POL 15-Iraq 1/1/67"), pp.1-3.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., p.7.

appeared willing to accept Soviet arms and would accommodate their wishes so long as it did not involve sharing power with anyone, including the communists.⁵⁷⁸

In early December, the Iraqi regime made international headlines when its forces in Jordan shelled Israeli settlers in the Jordan Valley, prompting a fierce retaliation by the IAF that left a number of Iraqi soldiers dead. According to an INR report, "Iraq: Internal Stresses and the Search for the Bogeyman," the attack had little to do with the Arab-Israeli conflict and everything to do with the regime's insecurity. In the seven months since seizing power the regime had alienated "virtually every significant political and ethnic group in Iraq" through "inept leadership, factionalism, duplicity, and repression." The regime was engaged in a "classic ploy of psychological mobilization against an external threat," namely Israel and the U.S. (Iran was quickly soon added to the list).⁵⁷⁹ This view was supported by a speech al-Bakr gave the day after the battle, claiming "while Iraq was facing the enemy on the Arab-Israel front, a fifth column of agents of Israel and the U.S. was striking from behind."⁵⁸⁰

Then on December 14, the regime announced it had broken up "an Israeli spy network" seeking to "bring about a change in the Iraqi regime."⁵⁸¹ Based on two confessions, Iraq claimed an Israeli spy network had been gathering information on the Iraqi military and conducting sabotage training for Jewish youths. While U.S. officials acknowledged Israel likely had "covert assets in Iraq," they were skeptical the Israelis would recruit Iraqi Jews who, "with their movements restricted and under constant surveillance, would make poor recruits for any Israeli espionage or sabotage net." The second claim lumped together all of the regime's enemies into a single conspiracy with the objective of obtaining military and political intelligence on Iraq, while also seeking the regime's overthrow, establishing peace with Israel, and forming a U.S.-backed government with both Arabs and Kurds.⁵⁸² Though U.S.

⁵⁷⁸ Beirut A-1469 to State, "Iraq: Bakr's Hundred Days," November 21, 1968 (NARA/RG59/SN/1967-69/Box2220/"POL 7 - Iraq"), pp.1-2.

⁵⁷⁹ DoS, INR, Hughes to Rusk, "Iraq: Internal Stresses and the Search for the Bogeyman," RNA-6, February 14, 1969 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.251), p.1.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., p.6.

⁵⁸¹ *New York Times*, "Iraq Says She Broke Ring of Israeli Spies," December 15, 1968, p.19.

⁵⁸² "...Search for the Bogeyman," February 14, 1969, *Op.Cit.*, pp.1-2.

officials acknowledge this would be an ideal outcome, the real purpose was to stoke nationalist fervor against Israel by targeting local Iraqi Jews. In total, the regime arrested eighty-six people and of the twenty-one that were put on trial immediately, nine were Jews. Upon learning of the arrests, the State Department sought to intervene through the Indian Embassy in Washington but to no avail.⁵⁸³

In the meantime, the Ba'th escalated tensions with Barzani by lending support to Talabani's "progressive" Kurdish movement as part of "a rather crude divide-and-rule campaign designed to undermine Barzani, who reacted strongly to the regime's duplicity." When fighting broke out between the two factions in late November, Barzani emerged victorious, inflicting considerable losses on Talabani's followers, despite indirect support from the Iraqi army.⁵⁸⁴ In the aftermath, the RCC ordered an offensive against Barzani that was launched on January 3 and modeled on the disastrous 1966 campaign, which, as Pollack observed, was strategically sound though poorly executed.⁵⁸⁵ After three weeks of fighting, severe winter weather forced the offensive to a halt.⁵⁸⁶ Similarly, like in 1965, Iraq's offensive prompted the Shah to once again order an increase support for Barzani, while pressing Iraq on the question of the Shatt al-Arab waterway.⁵⁸⁷

In short, just as Johnson was departing the White House, the situation in Iraq had reached a point of acute crisis. On the one hand, Iraq had rounded up a number of Iraqi Jews and was putting them on show trials in a vain effort to obtain support from both the Arab and Iraqi street. Unsurprisingly, this was bound to antagonize Israel and raised the possibility of retaliatory strikes against Iraq's forces in Jordan. The Johnson administration felt this would play right into the Iraqi regime's hand, by proving it was a front-line Arab state and establishing its anti-Israeli *bona fides*, and urged Israel to back off.⁵⁸⁸ In the meantime, the Iranians heightened their

⁵⁸³ Hedrick Smith, "U.S. Urges Israel Not to Retaliate Against the Iraqis," *New York Times*, January 29, 1969, p.1.

⁵⁸⁴ "...Search for the Bogeyman," February 14, 1969, *Op.Cit.*, pp.4-5.

⁵⁸⁵ Pollack (2002), pp.163-64.

⁵⁸⁶ O'Ballance (1973), pp.151.

⁵⁸⁷ Assadollah Alam, *The Shah and I: The Confidential Diary of Iran's Royal Court, 1968-1977* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 1991), p.39. For details on Iran-Iraq negotiations, see Saunders to Hinchcliffe, "Iran/Iraq Relations," 1 March 1969 (BNA/FCO.17/879/doc.15).

⁵⁸⁸ "...Search for the Bogeyman," February 14, 1969, *Op.Cit.*, p.6.

military pressure on Iraq via the Kurds, while at the same time pressing Iraq for concessions on the Shatt al-Arab. While the Johnson administration was not supportive of Iran's aid to the Kurds, the new administration of Richard Nixon would take a much different view.

Conclusion

Throughout the Johnson administration, U.S. policy toward Iraq was at direct odds with that of its closest allies, Britain, Iran, and Israel. The reason for this stemmed from the perception each of these states had of Iraq. When Johnson assumed the presidency, military officers in Iraq, led by Abd al'Salim Arif, had just seized power in response to the violent conflict within the ruling Ba'th Party, which raised the possibility of a Syrian takeover. Whereas Britain, Israel, and Iran all saw the new Arif regime as too cozy with Nasser, whom each despised for their own reasons, the U.S. was content with Arif's friendly relationship with Nasser, so long as he maintained a neutralist stance in the Cold War and was anti-communist domestically.

The question of an Arab union was a point of departure between the U.S. and its allies. Since the Eisenhower administration, the U.S. had supported Arab unity, so long as it remained anti-communist and was not brought about by coercion. But the British opposed unification out of distrust of Nasser's intentions and a need to protect its considerable economic and military interests in the Gulf. At the time, Britain and Egypt were also engaged in a proxy war in Yemen. Iran's motivation for opposing unification were similar to the British. The Shah did not trust Nasser and did not want to see him established in the Gulf, where he had his own ambitions. Furthermore, Iraq, with its considerable oil wealth, was the only regional state that could potentially challenge Iran's long-term objectives. Therefore, the Shah wanted to keep it disunited and weak. Finally, Israel also wanted to prevent Nasser from controlling Iraq and its considerable oil wealth, and to keep Iraq divided and weak to limit its participation in a renewed Arab-Israeli war. For these disparate reasons, all three parties reached the conclusion that providing military and economic aid to

the Kurds and urging them to renew the war would weaken the Iraqi state and make it an unattractive partner for Nasser. This contrasted with America's non-intervention policy and its passive support for unification. As a consequence, from the start of 1964 through to June 1966, the U.S. was at clear odds with Britain, Iran, and Israel.

In the year between Abd al'Salim Arif's death in April 1966 and the outbreak of the Six Day War in June 1967, U.S.-Iraqi relations saw a rapid improvement. This was fostered by the coming to power of the moderate, pro-Western regime of Abd ar-Rahman Arif, the Kurd's defeat of the Iraqi army at Mount Handren, and the Bazzaz government's subsequent peace plan. This relationship culminated in the visit of five Iraqi generals to the White House in January 1967. Unfortunately, whatever progress may have been achieved was destroyed with the outbreak of the Six Day War and the Iraqi government's subsequent decision to sever diplomatic relations with the United States. This would have a tremendous impact on America's ability to monitor events taking place inside Iraq.

When the British government announced in January 1968 its intention to withdraw its military forces from East of Suez, U.S. officials were concerned this move would upset the regional balance of power and potentially provide the Soviet Union with an avenue into the region. The Soviets had already benefited from the decline in Western influence following the Six Day War and the U.S. was incapable of taking Britain's place because of the Vietnam War. Ultimately, after extended negotiations, the U.S. and Britain decided on a strategy that would see the buildup and improvement of Iran and Saudi Arabia's military capabilities, which became known as the 'twin pillar' policy. Given America's international commitments at the time, this policy was a logical response to the conundrum the British announcement created.

The Ba'th Party's coming to power in July 1968 posed significant new challenges to U.S. policy. Whereas the Kennedy administration welcomed the Ba'th Party in 1963, the Johnson administration quickly viewed it as a threat to U.S. interests. After all, the Ba'th had overthrown a moderate, anti-communist regime and soon adopted militant policies toward Israel and the Kurds, and then tacked

toward the Soviet Union for military and economic assistance. These activities convinced the Johnson administration that the Ba'th Party was becoming a vehicle for Soviet encroachment on Iraq's sovereignty.

Chapter 5: Nixon and the Second Ba'thist Regime

January 1969—July 1972

This chapter examines U.S. policy toward Iraq during the period between Richard Nixon's inauguration in January 1969 and his decision to approve the Kurdish operation in August 1972. As with earlier chapters, it seeks to examine U.S. perceptions toward Iraq and understand how these perceptions influenced policy. Recall that Nixon came to office in January 1969 with previous knowledge relating to Iraq, having served on the NSC as Eisenhower's Vice President during Iraq's revolution in 1958 and the resulting crisis. Certainly, this experience affected his perception of Iraq but also the direction of U.S. policy when Iraq appeared to move closer to the Soviets in 1972. In examining the available primary information, it seems the Nixon administration's concern about Soviet encroachment in Iraq evolved gradually throughout 1969-71. Meanwhile America's regional allies, like Iran and Israel, warned the U.S. throughout 1970-71 that the Ba'thist regime in Iraq was a "stalking-horse" for Soviet ambitions and a source of subversion in the Gulf.⁵⁸⁹ But the Nixon administration rejected these arguments, pointing instead to mountain of evidence that showed Iraqi-Soviet relations were deteriorating. Fain, Little and Hahn all note that prior to 1972 the Nixon administration was disinterested in Gulf affairs.⁵⁹⁰ But this changed at the end of 1971 when Britain withdrew from the region and Iraq suddenly improved relations with the Soviet Union, culminating in the signing of a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in April 1972. The timing of the Soviet-Iraqi treaty was problematic for the U.S., since it coincided with the Nixon administration's efforts to achieve détente at the Moscow Summit held in May.⁵⁹¹ The U.S., however, was not prepared to allow Moscow's

⁵⁸⁹ CIA, "The Implications of the Iran-Iraq Agreement," May 1, 1975, p.3. Available online: http://www.foia.cia.gov/docs/DOC_0001115997/DOC_0001115997.pdf.

⁵⁹⁰ Fain (2008), pp.187-88; Little (2010), pp.74-75; and Hahn (2012), pp.54-60.

⁵⁹¹ See Nigel Ashton (ed), *The Cold War in the Middle East: Regional Conflict and the Superpowers, 1967-73* (London: Routledge, 2007).

move to go unchecked, leading Nixon to approve a risky covert operation to provide the Kurds with military and financial assistance on August 1, 1972. The available record shows that Nixon's decision to approve the Kurdish operation was driven primarily by Cold War concerns relating to Iraq's relationship with the Soviet Union.

Until recently, the historiography of U.S. policy during the 1969-71 has been limited. Even Kissinger's detailed account of the Kurdish operation in his 1999 memoir avoids a discussion of U.S. policy prior to 1972.⁵⁹² The reason for this, according to Peter Hahn and Douglas Little, was that the Nixon administration was focused on more important matters elsewhere and generally disregarded Iraq.⁵⁹³ Indeed, throughout Nixon's first term he was more inclined to "farm out" regional policy to both the State Department, run by Secretary of State William P. Rogers, and America's regional allies, like Iran, under the pretext of the Nixon Doctrine. This was particularly evident during the Shatt crisis in 1969, the Kurdish War in 1969 and its subsequent ceasefire 1970, and Iraq's campaign against the communists during 1970-71.⁵⁹⁴ Some aspects of U.S. policy toward Iraq during these events have been raised by scholars of U.S. policy toward the region. For instance, Roham Alvandi, a scholar of U.S.-Iranian relations, published an article in *Diplomatic History* that argued the Shah used the Shatt crisis to convince the Nixon administration to support his ambition to become the 'regional policeman'.⁵⁹⁵ Similarly, W. Taylor Fain and Greg Gause, who are both analysts of America's Gulf policies, support Alvandi's argument.⁵⁹⁶ However, this thesis contends that by emphasizing America's strategic interests in the Gulf, these scholars tend to overlook the importance of the Cold War on the Nixon administration's decisions toward Iraq.

There is a similar divide among scholars about why Nixon chose to support the Kurds in 1972. The vast majority of scholars explain the U.S. decision as a

⁵⁹² Kissinger (1999), pp.580-81.

⁵⁹³ Hahn (2012), pp.54-60; and Little (2010), pp.74-75.

⁵⁹⁴ For further details, see Penrose (1978), pp.360-63; Pelletiere (1984), pp.160-66; Randal, (1999), pp.142 and 149-50; and Sluglett (2003), pp.126-37 and 140-44; McDowell (2004), pp.324-30; and Tripp (2007), pp.192-97.

⁵⁹⁵ Alvandi (2012), pp.349-53, 361-64.

⁵⁹⁶ Fain (2008), pp.191-94; and Gause (2010), pp.20-21.

response to the Soviet-Iraq treaty.⁵⁹⁷ Little, for example, argues it was based on “Cold War logic”.⁵⁹⁸ However, the Gulf-centric scholars argue that the Shah played the “superpower rivalry card” and manipulated Nixon into building up Iran as the regional hegemon, while tying down Iraq—his only challenger in the Gulf—by aiding the Kurds.⁵⁹⁹ As Alvandi observed, “Nixon and Kissinger were seeing Iraq and the Gulf through the Shah’s eyes.”⁶⁰⁰ This argument is also presented in a leaked congressional report, known as the *Pike Report*, which argued Nixon’s decision to aid the Kurds was “a favor” to the Shah, “who had come to feel menaced by his neighbor [Iraq].”⁶⁰¹ This chapter argues that Nixon’s decision to aid the Kurds was driven by America’s concern about Iraq’s increasing importance to the Soviet Union, while placating the Shah’s desire to play a larger role in the Gulf.

I

Within days of Richard Nixon entering the White House, Iraq thrust itself into the headlines. On January 26, 1969, the *New York Times* reported an Iraqi court had sentenced sixteen people to death, ten of whom were Jews, as part of the spy conspiracy exposed the previous month. But there was little the U.S. could actually do; by the time word of the verdict reached America the accused were already dead.⁶⁰² The State Department later confirmed nine Jews had been hanged.⁶⁰³ Recognizing the delicacy of the situation, the Nixon administration worried Israel might retaliate against Iraqi forces in Jordan and spark another Middle Eastern war,

⁵⁹⁷ Vanly (1978), p.169; Pelletiere (1984), p.167; Marr (1985), pp.232-34; Prados (1986), pp.313–315, 323; Ranelagh (1987), pp.607–608; Meho and Nehme (1995), pp.50-54; Randal (1997), pp.145-51; Gunter (1999), pp.427-37; Pollack (2002), p.176; Sluglett (2003), p.159; Daugherty (2004), p.175; McDowell (2004), pp.330-31; Prados (2006), pp.361; Tripp (2007), p.203; Parsi (2008), pp.53-54; Gause (2008), p.35; Little (2010), pp.74-75; and Hahn (2012), p.58.

⁵⁹⁸ Little (2010), p.77.

⁵⁹⁹ Randal (1999), p.150; Fain (2008), pp.193-94; and Alvandi (2012), p.363-64.

⁶⁰⁰ Alvandi (2012), p.364.

⁶⁰¹ *Pike Report*, pp.196-97.

⁶⁰² Dana Adams Schmidt, “Court in Iraq Dooms 16, 10 of Them Jews, as Spies,” January 27, 1969, p.1.

⁶⁰³ “...Search for the Bogeyman,” February 14, 1969, *Op.Cit.*, p.1.

which U.S. officials believed was what the Iraqis wanted.⁶⁰⁴ Consequently, the Nixon administration was forced to urge restraint on Israel.⁶⁰⁵

The Nixon administration also condemned Iraq's actions publicly and at the United Nations. Nixon's Secretary of State William Rogers described the public executions as "a matter of deep concern" that was "repugnant to the conscience of the world." He also instructed the U.S. Ambassador to the UN, Charles Yost, to raise the issue with the Security Council. While acknowledging Iraq's legal right to administer justice to its citizens, Yost argued:

... the manner in which these executions and the trials that preceded them were conducted scarcely conforms to normally accepted standards of respect for human rights and human dignity.... Moreover, the spectacular way in which they were carried out seems to have been designed to arouse emotions and to intensify the very explosive atmosphere of suspicion and hostility in the Middle East.⁶⁰⁶

The U.S. also tried to work through its allies that had good relations with Iraq, like France, Spain, and India, but the Iraqis responded, "in no uncertain terms to stay out of [its] domestic affairs." Finally, the U.S. approached UN Secretary General, U Thant, but his efforts also failed. Ultimately, despite considerable effort, there was nothing more that could be done.⁶⁰⁷

Iraq's execution of the nine Jews in January 1969 set the stage for the Nixon administration's attitude toward Iraq. Unfortunately, because the U.S. did not have diplomatic relations with Iraq, there was little it could do to prevent the killings. As Fain observed, the Nixon administration did not view Iraq or the Gulf region as a priority and preferred to defer matters to the State Department or regional allies.⁶⁰⁸ In the case of Iraq, the U.S. was fortunate to have Nixon's old friend, the Shah, in a position to take action. Consequently, throughout much of 1969 Iran took aggressive measures against Iraq, urging the Kurds to resume fighting, manufacturing a crisis

⁶⁰⁴ Tel Aviv 321 to State, "Execution of Jews in Iraq," January 27, 1969 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.244), pp. 1-2; and "... Search for the Bogeyman," February 14, 1969, *Op.Cit.*, p.6.

⁶⁰⁵ Hedrick Smith, "U.S. Urges Israel Not to Retaliate Against the Iraqis," *New York Times*, January 29, 1969, p.1.

⁶⁰⁶ United Nations Security Council, S/8987, January 29, 1969, pp.1-2.

⁶⁰⁷ DoS, Memorandum, Handley to Sisco, "Iraqi Jews," March 18, 1969 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.255), pp. 1-3.

⁶⁰⁸ Fain (2008), pp.187-88.

along the Shatt al-Arab waterway, and seeking the Ba'thist regime's overthrow in January 1970. This kept the Ba'thist regime preoccupied politically and militarily during the crucial period leading up to the British departure from the region at the end of 1971.

Despite the Iraq crisis, throughout Nixon's first term the White House paid little attention to the Gulf region—let alone Iraq. Indeed, when the NSC's Interdepartmental Group for the Near East region first met on June 5, 1970, the meeting lasted for barely twenty minutes and failed to discuss a single military issue. This, as W. Taylor Fain noted, underscored the “low priority” Nixon's National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, and the White House “attached to Persian Gulf issues.”⁶⁰⁹ This was because Nixon and Kissinger had greater priorities at this time: the escalating war in Vietnam, opening up to China, and achieving détente with the Soviets. Furthermore, as Odd Arne Westad observed:

Nixon viewed the Third World first and foremost as a source of disorder in international relations, which only counted to the superpowers if its internal squabbles were made use of by one superpower to threatened the key interests of the other, especially with regard to access to raw materials [like oil].⁶¹⁰

Consequently, between 1969 and 1971 the Nixon administration preferred to “farm out” as much of the decision-making on regional matters to the State Department.⁶¹¹ It was also evident in the Nixon Doctrine. Announced in July 1969, this policy called on the U.S. to assist its regional allies in taking on the responsibility of defending themselves.⁶¹² These trends were evident in the U.S. relationship with the Shah, who Nixon wanted to establish as the regional hegemon following Britain's withdrawal at the end of the 1971.

⁶⁰⁹ Fain (2008), pp.187-88; and Hahn (2012), p.54.

⁶¹⁰ Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.195.

⁶¹¹ White House, Memorandum, Nixon to Ehrlichman and Kissinger (FRUS/1969-76/I/doc.61), p.204.

⁶¹² See Richard Nixon, “Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam,” November 3, 1969. Available online: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=2303>. See Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (London: Penguin, 2007), pp.143-44.

II

Throughout 1969 the Iranian government capitalized on Iraq's internal and external weaknesses to force it to make concessions along the Shatt al-Arab waterway. In 1937, Iraq was given legal sovereignty over this waterway, barring the approaches to two key Iranian ports.⁶¹³ However, since Iraq's 1958 revolution the Shah had sought to wrest partial sovereignty over the waterway using coercive measures. Until recently the Shatt crisis had received little scholarly attention; however, Alvandi's article on U.S.-Iranian relations provides new details. Significantly, Alvandi describes the crisis as "a harbinger of the role Iran could play under the Nixon Doctrine,"⁶¹⁴ an argument that holds ground. The Shah used the Shatt crisis to convince the Nixon administration of his importance in terms of U.S. regional strategy, by punishing the Iraqi regime for executing the Jews, while providing an opportunity to seek long-coveted concessions from Iraq. Either way, his actions found an appreciative audience in both Washington and Tel Aviv.

The Shah's opening move against Iraq began on March 1, when he ordered the Kurds to attack the IPC's installations around Kirkuk and Mosul. According to Asadollah Alam, the Shah's Minister of Court and close confidant, the Shah hoped the attack on the pipelines would reveal Iraq's poor security and undermine its credibility with the oil companies, who would then switch their production targets to Iran.⁶¹⁵ The bombing caused \$5 million in damage and reduced Iraq's oil pumping capacity by 70% for about ten days.⁶¹⁶ The attack also set off a new round of fighting between the Kurds and the Iraqi army that ended in April, when the army withdrew from the mountains. This, however, was not because of a Kurdish tactical victory, but because Iraq faced a much more menacing threat from Iran in the south.⁶¹⁷

Throughout March and April the Shah escalated tensions with Iraq along the Shatt, after Iraq demanded that Iranian vessels fly the Iraqi flag while in the

⁶¹³ See Richard Schofield, "The Shatt al-Arab Dispute in Perspective," in Lawrence Potter and Gary Sick, eds., *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp.31-36.

⁶¹⁴ Alvandi (2012), p.353.

⁶¹⁵ Alam (1991), p.39.

⁶¹⁶ Sluglett (2003), p.129.

⁶¹⁷ O'Ballance (1973), pp.152.

waterway.⁶¹⁸ The crisis was significant for two reasons. First, the reckless way in which the Shah went about seeking concessions from Iraq over the waterway nearly ended in war. For instance, following an Iraqi threat to use force to ensure its sovereignty over the waterway, Iran abrogated the 1937 border treaty unilaterally and put the Iranian army on red alert. When Alam and the head of SAVAK, General Nemattollah Nassiri, learned of this, they were outraged. That night, Alam wrote in his journal: “[Minister of Foreign Affairs Ardeshir] Zahedi has made a complete cock-up and landed us on a war footing with Iraq.... I had no idea of how far our relations had deteriorated and the magnitude of this latest crisis comes as an appalling shock.” He later expressed his concern to the Shah:

Is this really an appropriate moment for us to resort to force, in the midst of vital negotiations with oil companies and just as we are approaching an understanding with the Arabs of the Gulf? It makes my blood boil.... Never underestimate your opponents; even if the Iraqis avoid a war, they can still paralyze our economy by denying us use of the Shatt al-Arab.⁶¹⁹

This incident underscores the Shah’s increasingly autocratic and arbitrary style of conducting Iran’s foreign policy.

Second, not unlike in 1966, the Shatt crisis once again tied the waterway to the Kurdish War. Following the abrogation of the treaty, the Shah calculated Iraq would have to react, lest it look weak. He also knew the majority of Iraq’s forces—60,000 troops—were deployed against the Kurds in the north, while another three brigades were stationed in Jordan. This left the regime with two options: back off from the Kurds in the north or withdraw its forces from Jordan, but neither option was politically feasible.⁶²⁰ With the Iraqis cornered, like in 1966, the Shah passed word to Baghdad that he was willing to “break off supplies to the Kurds in return for concessions in the Shatt.” When the Iraqis rejected the proposal, the Shah encouraged the Kurds to reopen hostilities in the north and simultaneously

⁶¹⁸ See Amir Khosrow Afshar, “Parliamentary Statement on Relations with Iraq,” April 19, 1969 (BNA/FCO.17/879/doc.56).

⁶¹⁹ Alam (1991), pp.52-53.

⁶²⁰ O’Ballance (1973), pp.151 and 154.

escalated tensions along the Shatt.⁶²¹ By linking both events, the Shah sent Baghdad a clear message that Iran would be the dominant regional power once the British departed and if Iraq ever wanted relief from the Kurds it would have to give him what he wanted. Eventually, Iraq took the matter to the Security Council, where it continued to joust rhetorically with Iran until the matter was dropped in June.⁶²²

Having failed to coerce concessions from Iraq militarily, throughout the second half of 1969 Iran resorted to covert action to try to overthrow the Ba'athist regime. As with previous efforts, the Shah tried to bring together a collection of collaborators, including the Kurds.

In mid-June, Barzani's Washington representative, Shawfiq Qazzaz, visited the State Department to request U.S. assistance. As with previous representations, U.S. officials politely refused, while accepting a letter from Barzani to Secretary Rogers. U.S. officials also expressed sympathy for the Kurds' plight, said it had been a useful exchange, and indicated the department "would be pleased to talk to [Qazzaz] again at any time."⁶²³ Ultimately, the first interaction between U.S. officials and the Kurds under the Nixon administration represented an improvement from the Johnson administration, which had been sensitive about Kurdish contacts.

As tensions eased in the south, Iraq renewed the Kurdish War when it launched a major offensive in late-August.⁶²⁴ Significantly, Iraq sought to implicate Iran, claiming "thirty Persian soldiers had been killed and fourteen others captured by the Iraqi Army while trying to re-cross the frontier back to [Iran], in an area where the border was controlled by Kurdish rebels." Iran denied any involvement, suggesting instead that "certain elements" of Iran's population, which had been "the object of almost daily bombing and napalm attacks by Iraqi forces engaged against Mullah Mustafa's troops, may have been driven to participate in the fight without

⁶²¹ FCO Research Department, Middle East Section, "The Shatt-al-Arab Dispute 1964-1969," April 28, 1969 (BNA/FCO.17/879/doc.64), p.2; and Alam (1991), p.54.

⁶²² United Nations Security Council, April 29, 1969, S/9185.

⁶²³ DoS, Memorandum of Conversation, "Kurdish/Assyrian Appeal for U.S. Assistance," June 13, 1969 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.259), pp.1-3.

⁶²⁴ O'Ballance (1973), p.156.

the Persian Government's knowledge."⁶²⁵ Nevertheless, fighting continued until October when Iraqi forces halted for the winter.⁶²⁶

Meanwhile, in mid-October the U.S. learned of an Iranian plot to overthrow the Ba'thist regime. On October 15, Talcott Seelye, the Iraq desk officer at the State Department, met with an Iraqi businessman, Loutfi Obeidi, who had returned from a trip to the region. According to Obeidi, a coalition of Iraqi exiles, Kurds, and Iranians were plotting to overthrow the regime. He claimed the Shah had offered the conspirators "Iran's full support" and complained about "how poorly the Iranians had handled the operation." When Obeidi asked if the U.S. was willing to support the plot, Seelye emphatically replied in the negative.⁶²⁷ Then, on December 8, another Iraqi exile, Sa'ad Jabr, discussed the plot with U.S. officials at the embassy in Beirut. Jabr predicted his "group" would establish a government in northern Iraq in the next six weeks and foment rebellion in the south. He asked for U.S. assistance in pressing the IPC to withhold payments to the Iraqi government and provide medicine, food, and clothing. Embassy officials said the U.S. could not make these commitments and was unwilling to involve itself.⁶²⁸ When the State Department learned of these meetings it concurred with the inadvisability of providing aid, but asked the embassy in Beirut to inform Jabr the U.S. "would be prepared to consider prompt resumption of diplomatic relations and would certainly be disposed to cooperate within the limits of existing legislation and [their] overall policy" if the "new government prove[d] to be moderate and friendly." This response suggests that while the U.S. was not willing to involve itself in plotting against the regime, if a friendly regime came to power it would consider assistance.⁶²⁹

Thanks to Iran's aggressive posture over the Shatt, its continuous plotting against Iraq, and its backing of the Kurds in the war—which had cost nearly 30% of Iraq's total budget for 1969—the Ba'th concluded in late-1969 that in order to

⁶²⁵ Ibid., p.156.

⁶²⁶ O'Ballance (1996), pp.88-89.

⁶²⁷ Talcott Seelye, "How To Buy A Revolution: Talk With an Iraqi Plotter," October 15, 1969 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.262), pp.1-4.

⁶²⁸ Beirut 10069 to State, "Iraq – Possible Coup D'Etat," December 8, 1969 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.263), pp.1-2.

⁶²⁹ State 204979 to U.S. Embassy Beirut, "Iraq – Coup d'Etat Plans," December 10, 1969 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.264), pp.1-3.

survive it had to rob the Shah of his 'Kurdish Card' and reach an accommodation with Barzani.⁶³⁰ In early December, Iraq's president, Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, sent Faud Aref, a Kurd and former minister, to Kurdistan to present Barzani with an offer of regional autonomy. In response, Barzani "insisted that any agreement reached with the Government must be registered with the UN to ensure implementation."⁶³¹ When the government refused, Barzani broke off negotiations on December 21, President al-Bakr sent his deputy, Saddam Hussein, who, in his dual roles as Vice Chairman of the RCC of Iraq and Assistant Secretary General of the Ba'th Party was the strongest personality in the regime, to the north for direct talks. For the next month, Saddam and Dr. Mahmoud Othman, Barzani's personal physician and close confidant, hammered out the details of an agreement.⁶³²

Upon learning of these talks, the Shah was furious and escalated his plotting against the Iraqi regime. According to a British diplomat, the Shah's "immediate aim in mounting [a] coup [in Iraq] at this time was to forestall [an] agreement [with the Kurds]." After all, a deal would undercut the Shah's efforts to win the Shatt. But unknown to the Iranians, Iraqi security forces had infiltrated the plot and had "complete recordings of most of the meetings and interviews that took place."⁶³³ Scheduled for the night of January 20-21, the conspirators fell right into the Iraqi trap. The next day the regime announced it had foiled the plot and broadcast the secret recordings, leading one diplomat to observe the Iraqis had "caught the Iranians with their pants well below their knees."⁶³⁴ The next morning Iran's ambassador and four other diplomats were expelled from Iraq and by January 23 at least thirty-three conspirators had been executed.⁶³⁵ With this, Iran's year-long effort to overthrow the Ba'th regime ended in failure. Ultimately, the Iranian plot gave the Ba'thist regime further impetus to solve the Kurdish question. On January 24, the regime announced it would implement all aspects of the 1966 Bazzaz

⁶³⁰ O'Ballance (1973), p.157.

⁶³¹ Ibid., pp.157-158.

⁶³² O'Ballance (1996), pp.89-90.

⁶³³ McKearney to FCO, "Attempted Coup," January 24, 1970 (BNA/FCO.17/1240/doc.20), pp.1-4.

⁶³⁴ Tripp to Balfour-Paul, "Abortive Coup in Iraq," February 12, 1970 (BNA/FCO.17/1240/doc.25), p.1.

⁶³⁵ McKearney to FCO, "Attempted Coup," January 24, 1970 (BNA/FCO.17/1240/doc.20), p.4.

declaration; declared a general amnesty; and invited a Kurdish delegation to Baghdad.⁶³⁶

The Iranians and Israelis were determined to prevent a Kurdish-Iraqi agreement. In early March, SAVAK contacted Barzani and asked him to send an envoy to Tehran for discussions. On March 4, Mulla Mustafa's son, Idris Barzani, arrived in Tehran to meet with Iranian and Israeli representatives. According to the CIA, the "Israelis pushed hard for resumption of hostilities in Northern Iraq" and promised the Kurds anti-aircraft weapons, light artillery, armored cars, armored personnel carriers, and even tanks, if they could capture "at least two Iraqi tanks". Then, on March 6, Idris met with General Nassiri to discuss Iran's concern over Barzani's negotiations with the Iraqi regime and plans for further aid. Nassiri said, "Iran was fully behind the Israeli plan to renew the fighting in Northern Iraq" and Barzani should "carefully note what the Israelis were suggesting." Going further, he said Iran and Israel would increase their financial assistance to the Kurds to more than \$3 million a month. Taken together, these two approaches confirm Iran and Israel were worried about losing their 'Kurdish card' and were willing to promise anything to prevent an agreement with Baghdad. When the CIA reported these talks to the White House it was the first time the Kurdish question had been raised with the Nixon administration.⁶³⁷

Just as Idris was visiting Tehran, Saddam travelled north to Kurdistan and concluded an agreement with Mulla Mustafa. According to David McDowell, Saddam gave Barzani some blank pieces of paper and told him to write out his demands.⁶³⁸ In the agreement, known as the March Accord, the regime agreed to recognize the bi-national character of Iraq; reaffirm Kurdish linguistic and cultural rights; provide economic rehabilitation and development of the devastated regions of Kurdistan; and, most importantly, allow for the establishment of a self-governing region of Kurdistan.⁶³⁹ Once the agreement was signed, Saddam returned to Baghdad and announced on March 11 that he had achieved a "total and final" solution to the

⁶³⁶ O'Ballance (1996), pp.89-90.

⁶³⁷ CIA, "Israeli Aid to Kurdish Rebels," March 7, 1970 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.267), pp.1-3.

⁶³⁸ McDowell (2004), p.327.

⁶³⁹ CIA, "The Kurdish Problem in Perspective," June 30, 1979 (CPL, NLC-8-3-2-3-5), p.8.

Kurdish problem in Iraq. The agreement was hailed internationally as a major step towards the national reconciliation between the Arab and Kurdish populations of Iraq, but whether the Ba'th would follow through with its promises remained uncertain.⁶⁴⁰

The Nixon administration was not optimistic about the peace settlement's chances for success. On March 14, U.S. officials in Tehran cabled Washington to offer their assessment. In particular, the agreement left critical questions unanswered like the degree of autonomy the Kurds would enjoy. Even so, while the document looked "more binding than anything developed heretofore," the embassy questioned "whether it will hold for any substantial length of time." The Shah, however, feared the agreement would free Iraq's hand to interfere in the Gulf, but the embassy doubted the Ba'thist regime was secure enough to pose a threat elsewhere. After all, the agreement had not diminished the threat Barzani posed to the regime and so State believed it would not take long for the implementation of the agreement to "uncover serious if not fatal flaws."⁶⁴¹

During Nixon's first year in office Iraq was the center of a number of crises, but still never featured in terms of U.S. foreign policy. Certainly the killing of the Iraqi Jews in January 1969 caught the administration's attention, but once the crisis faded and Iraq was relegated into the back-pages of newspapers, it ceased to be of interest. This did not, however, mean the U.S. was ignoring the escalating standoff between Iran and Iraq, but rather the Nixon administration did not view the Gulf as a priority. With the announcement of the Nixon Doctrine in July and Iran's success at keeping Iraq in a state of perpetual crisis, the Nixon administration was content to let the Shah play his games, so long as he did not interfere with more important U.S. objectives at the time, like de-escalating the war in Vietnam and the budding détente with the Soviet Union. Further, because the Nixon administration did not perceive Iraq as significant in terms of either the Cold War or the Arab-Israeli conflict, it did not require significant attention from the highest levels of the U.S. government.

⁶⁴⁰ Dana Adams Schmidt, "Iraq Recognizes Kurdish Autonomy," March 12, 1970, *New York Times*, p.A8.

⁶⁴¹ State 037806 to Tehran, "Soviet-Iraq Threat to Iran in Middle East," March 14, 1970 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.268), pp.1-3.

III

The period between the announcement of the 1970 March Accord and the spring of 1972 was confusing from the standpoint of U.S. policy. On the one hand, the peace agreement with the Kurds freed the Ba'thist regime to unleash a wave of terror against the communists, but this would be short-lived. In late-1971, around the time of the British withdrawal from the region, Iraq rekindled its relationship with Moscow, ended its campaign against the communists, and tried to solve the Kurdish problem by trying to assassinate Barzani. Throughout this period, Iran and Israel pressed the Nixon administration to reconsider its position with respect to the Kurds by pointing to Britain's withdrawal and over-stating the threat the Soviets posed to the region, but the U.S. was not convinced. This reflects both a realistic analysis of the situation and the Nixon administration's disinterest in the region.

Following the March Accord, Iran and Israel sought to convince the U.S. that the agreement was part of a wider Soviet plan to replace the British as the dominant regional power. For example, on March 12, Iranian Prime Minister Hoveyda told the new U.S. ambassador, Douglas MacArthur, the agreement was part of a Soviet conspiracy, would release about 20,000 Iraqi troops for deployment to the Gulf or against Israel, increased Iraqi resources and capability for subversion in the Gulf, and showed the Ba'thist regime was "very much under the influence of the Soviets because of its dependence on Soviet military and other aid for survival." But the fifth point was the most important.

[The agreement] will prepare for [the] next step in [the] Soviet plan which is [the] eventual transformation of [the] autonomous Iraqi Kurdish province into [an] autonomous Kurdish state with [a] view to enlarging Kurdish state until it eventually has contiguous borders with [the] Soviet Union which will thus enable [the] Soviets to overcome [the] present Turkey-Iran barrier to their direct penetration of [the] Middle East.

Finally, Hoveyda said he was worried the Soviets would "begin to play on strong national sentiment of [the] Kurdish people to stir up Turkish and Iranian Kurds in subversive activities holding out bait of an enlarged independent Kurdish state." For

these reasons, he urged the U.S. to increase its support for the Iranian armed forces so it had the “minimum necessary deterrent strength” prior to the British withdrawal in December 1971. Clearly Iran saw itself as the natural heir to the British and intended to reinforce this view with U.S. officials following the announcement of the Nixon Doctrine. Responding, MacArthur agreed with the necessity of building up Iran’s military strength in the face of Britain’s impending withdrawal and saw the importance of a strong, stable Iran capable of making a major contribution to the peace and stability in the Gulf. While the request fitted with America’s ‘twin pillar’ policy for the region, Iran was clearly amplifying the Soviet threat in order to advance its own interests in the Gulf.⁶⁴²

The Iranians were not alone in trying to convince the Nixon administration that the March Accord was part of a Soviet plot. On April 10, the Director General of Israel’s Foreign Ministry, Gideon Rafael, told Secretary Rogers that the Iraqis had been “extremely reluctant” to seek peace with the Kurds, but the Soviets had insisted “they wanted peace in proximity of USSR’s borders.” According to Rafael, in exchange for peace Moscow had promised Baghdad, further arms assistance, cooperation on oil matters, and “support for [a] bigger Iraqi role in Persian Gulf affairs.”⁶⁴³ Clearly the Iranians and Israelis were depicting the agreement as a Soviet plot to convince the Nixon administration of the Gulf’s importance prior to the British withdrawal.

The Nixon administration did not accept this analysis.⁶⁴⁴ For instance, when the department described the Rogers-Rafael talks to the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv, it observed, “we realize Israelis have good sources on Kurdish matters but believe Rafael has exaggerated [the] Soviet role in recent ... agreement.”⁶⁴⁵ While the U.S. was concerned about Soviet penetration in the region, it did not accept that the agreement was part of a Soviet strategy. “We agree [the] Soviets have been

⁶⁴² Tehran 00928 to State, “Soviet-Iraq Threat to Middle East (Shah’s Views),” March 12, 1970 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.53), pp.1-3.

⁶⁴³ State 54598 to U.S. Embassy Tel Aviv, “Soviet Pressure for Iraqi-Kurdish Agreement,” April 14, 1970 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.269), p.3.

⁶⁴⁴ See Kuwait 361 to State, “[Soviet] Pressure for Iraqi-Kurdish Agreement,” April 18, 1970 (NARA/RG59/SN/1970-73/Box2382/POL 12 Iraq [Part 1] – 1970), pp.1-2.

⁶⁴⁵ State 54598, April 14, 1970, *Op.Cit.*

encouraging Iraqi/Kurdish settlement but it [is] less clear what effect this actually had in bringing about [the] current settlement.” It noted the Soviet position on the Kurds had fluctuated and was largely “subordinated to other ... policy considerations in the area.” Indeed, “it seems unlikely that the Soviets would want to risk damaging their carefully nurtured relations with Iran and Turkey” by embarking on a plan to create a “Kurdish corridor” along its border. This assessment reflected a realistic analysis of the situation.⁶⁴⁶

Another U.S. official, Lee Dinsmore—a former Iraqi desk officer in the 1960s and now the U.S. consul to Dhahran, Saudi Arabia—was amused by Iran’s sudden cry of “Soviets!” Dinsmore thought the Shah’s frustration over the settlement was amusing, since he was the one who had encouraged Barzani to sustain military pressure on Iraq, while being prepared to sell the Kurds out if the Iraqis conceded the Shatt al-Arab. In fact, Dinsmore argued it was Iran’s brinkmanship with Iraq that had pushed it to seek accommodation with the Kurds. Therefore, “if [the] Soviet Union [was] happy over [the] direction [the] Kurdish situation [was] taking in Iraq, it may have [America’s] friends to thank. It [was] doubtful [the] Kurds could have held out over [the] last ten years had they not had Iran’s help.”⁶⁴⁷

Bolstering the U.S. thesis, throughout much of 1970-71 relations between Baghdad and Moscow underwent a deep chill. The Ba’th Party, having settled the Kurdish problem, saw the ICP as a threat.⁶⁴⁸ On March 23, the Ba’th commenced a campaign against the communists and, over the next few weeks, security forces rounded up communists and targeted the ICP’s leadership with assassinations.⁶⁴⁹ From a U.S. perspective, Iraq’s repression of the communists was a positive development, but the absence of diplomatic relations made it impossible for the Nixon administration to improve relations like the Kennedy administration had in 1963.

⁶⁴⁶ State 37806 to U.S. Embassy Tehran, “Soviet-Iraq Threat to Iran in Middle East,” March 14, 1970 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.268), pp.1-3.

⁶⁴⁷ Baghdad 291 to State, March 14, 1970 (NPL/NSC/NSF/Box601/Country Files/Middle East/Iran/Vol.I/1/20/69-5/31/70), p.1.

⁶⁴⁸ Franzén (2011), pp.200-6.

⁶⁴⁹ Sluglett (2003), p.140.

By August the decline in Soviet-Iraq relations was apparent when Saddam Hussein visited Moscow from August 4 to 12 to seek deferment on payments for weapons and to obtain additional economic and military aid. Though little was known about the discussions, U.S. officials believed he received a “chilly” reception. A joint communiqué suggested the Soviets had not made any new commitments, stating both sides “exchanged views” on the situation in the Middle East, which was “standard Soviet communiqué language for lack of any agreement.”⁶⁵⁰ Then, on August 24, the CIA sent Kissinger an intelligence summary that confirmed the decline. According to the memo, a Soviet military attaché in Iraq confided to a CIA officer in July that the Soviet Ambassador was frustrated with the regime about Iraq’s failure to pay for major weapons purchases and its repeated dismissal of Soviet requests to form a national unity government—or National Front—with the communists and Barzani’s DKP. There were also reports that Iraqi security forces were monitoring the movements of Soviet officials closely and often stopped and harassed official vehicles at checkpoints.⁶⁵¹ Taken together, these reports refute Iranian and Israeli claims that the March agreement was part of a Soviet strategy to dominate the Gulf.

There were also indicators that the CIA was becoming interested in Iraq. For instance, while Saddam was in Moscow, the CIA learned Barzani was strengthening his forces in anticipation of a confrontation with the regime and had begun to offer a safe haven to communists fleeing Baghdad.⁶⁵² Then, on August 22, Iraqi security forces disrupted a Nationalist coup and a few days’ later Iraqi Shia dissidents informed the CIA of further plots against the regime.⁶⁵³ The CIA was clearly developing an interest in Iraqi affairs at this time.

This can be explained by the growing crisis in Jordan, where tension between King Hussein and the Palestinian Fedayeen escalated into a civil war in September.

⁶⁵⁰ Moscow 4546 to State, “Soviet-Iraq Communiqué,” August 13, 1970 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.274).

⁶⁵¹ CIA, “Indication of Soviet Disappointment with the Government of Iraq,” August 24, 1970 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.275), pp.1-3.

⁶⁵² CIA, “Indication that the Kurds Anticipate a Showdown with the Government of Iraq,” August 10, 1970 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.273).

⁶⁵³ CIA, “Plans of a Plotting Group led by Shi’a Muslims to Attempt Overthrow of Government of Iraq about Mid-September,” August 28, 1970 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.276).

Since the Six Day War, Jordanian authorities had tried repeatedly to bring the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) under control with no success.⁶⁵⁴ After a showdown between the Jordanian army and the PLO was averted in June 1970, the situation escalated in late July following Jordan and Egypt's acceptance of Secretary Rogers' peace plan.⁶⁵⁵ As the likelihood of a confrontation increased in early September following the hijacking and dramatic destruction of three planes by the radical Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP),⁶⁵⁶ U.S. officials became concerned that the 25,000 Iraqi troops stationed in Jordan since 1967,⁶⁵⁷ could intervene on the PLO's behalf.⁶⁵⁸ But when King Hussein unleashed the Jordanian military against the Palestinians on September 17, the Iraqis, led by Iraq's Defense Minister, Hardan al-Tikriti, failed to come to their aid. According to Jack O'Connell, the CIA's station chief in Amman, the reason for this was that an Iraqi defector named General Abud Hassan (who was a close friend and former roommate of Saddam Hussein), had tricked Iraqi officials into believing the U.S. had planned to intervene in the conflict on Jordan's behalf by leaking to them falsified NATO war plans. Fearing the capture of Iraq's forces in the event of a U.S. intervention, Tikriti ordered his troops to positions near the Iraqi border, thereby cutting them off from operations in Amman.⁶⁵⁹ Through this grand deception, the Jordanians effectively removed the Iraqi threat during the September crisis.⁶⁶⁰

Iraq's embarrassing actions during the Jordanian civil war proved to be a catalyst for Saddam Hussein's consolidation of power. Following the crisis, the PLO's chairman, Yasir Arafat, sent President al-Bakr a message, saying, "History will not forgive those who failed [to] support [the] fedayeen being massacred by [the] Jordanian army." This led the RCC, at Saddam's request, to dismiss Tikriti from his

⁶⁵⁴ Kerr (1971), p.141.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid., p.145.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid., p.147.

⁶⁵⁷ O'Connell (2012), p.129.

⁶⁵⁸ NSC, Minutes of a Combined Washington Special Actions Group and Review Group Meeting, "Middle East and Hijacking," September 9, 1970 (FRUS/1969-76/XXIV/doc.214), pp.620-32.

⁶⁵⁹ O'Connell (2012), pp.130-31.

⁶⁶⁰ See also Nigel Ashton, "Pulling the Strings: King Hussein's Role in the Crisis of 1970 in Jordan," *The International History Review*, 28/1 (2006), pp.94-118; and *King Hussein: A Political Life* (Yale University Press, 2008), pp.136-157.

civilian and military positions on October 5.⁶⁶¹ With Tikriti removed, there were no more obstacles to prevent Saddam's consolidation of power.

Despite America's renewed interest in Iraq, it took the State Department five weeks to learn of Saddam's consolidation of power. Upon learning this, the department cabled its embassy in Brussels seeking a current assessment on the Iraqi situation.⁶⁶² It found that the Belgian Embassy in Baghdad had been derelict in its reporting of political developments. For instance, when the U.S. Embassy in Brussels responded to the department's request, it complained the Belgian Foreign Office had been "unable to provide [an] in depth assessment of current Iraqi situation." U.S. officials were unimpressed with Belgium's political reporting on Iraq, describing it as "short on facts and long on conjecture." Further, the embassy complained, "as substitute [for] their assessment [the Foreign Office] officials offered ... copies [of the] last two dispatches from Belgian Embassy Baghdad. From [those they had] culled observations."⁶⁶³ Clearly, there was a problem with Belgium's reporting.⁶⁶⁴

In early December, tensions between the regime and the Kurds escalated following an assassination attempt on Mulla Mustafa's son and heir-apparent, Idris.⁶⁶⁵ The details of the attack notwithstanding, the attempt confirmed to Barzani that the regime could not be trusted. Indeed, according to Ian McDowall, a Reuters' correspondent who happened to interview Mullah Mustafa a few days after the attack, Barzani was convinced the regime was behind the plot.⁶⁶⁶ Significantly, the INR uncovered credible evidence suggesting the Soviets had played a role in the attack.⁶⁶⁷ This was significant because it suggested Moscow had turned against the

⁶⁶¹ Beirut 9048 to State, October 16, 1970 (NARA, SN, 1970-73, Box 2382, POL 13-3), pp.1-2.

⁶⁶² State 181857 to Brussels, "Recent Iraqi Developments," November 24, 1970 (NARA, SN, 1970-73, Box 2382, POL 13-3), p.1.

⁶⁶³ Brussels 5190 to State, "Recent Iraqi Developments," December 1, 1970 (NARA, SN, 1970-73, Box 2382, POL 13-3), pg. 1.

⁶⁶⁴ See London A-1857 to State, "British Assessment of Recent Iraqi Developments," December 2, 1970 (NARA, SN, 1970-73, Box 2382, POL 13-3), pp.1-9. Iranian views are unavailable.

⁶⁶⁵ The Arab World, "Baghdad Press Says Attempt to Assassinate Barzani's son was Aimed to Weaken Iraqi Unity," 5 February 1971 (BNA/FCO.17/1531/doc.10), p.1.

⁶⁶⁶ Balfour-Paul to FCO, Telegram 882, 22 December 1970 (BNA/FCO.17/1531/doc.1), p.1.

⁶⁶⁷ DoS, INR, "The Kurds of Iraq: Renewed Insurgency?," 31 May 1972 (NPL/HAK/Box138/Kurdish Problem-Vol. I/June 1972-Oct 1973), p.iii.

Kurds and was seeking to cultivate relations with the Ba'th despite its repressive campaign against the communists. Further, the incident also convinced Barzani that he could trust neither the Ba'th nor the Soviets and led him to renew his alliance with Iran and Israel.

On March 15, 1971, SAVAK officials informed the Nixon administration that it had resumed its support for the Kurds and asked the U.S. to reconsider its non-intervention policy. Once again, the Iranians framed their request in Cold War terms, warning, "if the present trend [toward the Soviet bloc] continued, Iraq would assume a status similar to that of the East European satellites." SAVAK asked the U.S. support Barzani to "forestall" the formation of a "preponderantly communist" National Front government and said any assistance could be channeled secretly through a third party—likely Jordan⁶⁶⁸—"with only al-Barzani being aware." Clearly SAVAK was trying to project the Kurdish conflict with Baghdad as part of the Cold War in order to convince the U.S. to become involved.⁶⁶⁹

In early April, Talcott Seelye wrote to the Assistant Secretary for the NEA, Joseph Sisco, to request that the department approve sending U.S. personnel to Baghdad. Seelye was clearly frustrated with the Belgians administration of the U.S. Interests Section (USINT), complaining it had "not received the close administrative supervision which it might otherwise have had if Americans had been assigned there." As a glaring example, the section's senior accountant had just been caught embezzling \$106,000, leading him to conclude, "if American officers had been in Baghdad this embezzlement might not have occurred." But more practically, Seelye felt having diplomats in Baghdad would allow the U.S. to "follow a little more closely and authoritatively developments in Iraq [since] the Belgians, with little background or experience in the area, [had] not been able to provide us with much in the way of political and economic reporting."⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁶⁸ See DoS, Memorandum from Scotese, "Kurdish Appeal for U.S. Assistance," Memorandum of Conversation, April 3, 1972 (NARA/RG59/Records Relating to Iraq/1966-1972/Box14/POL 13), p.2.

⁶⁶⁹ NSC, Memorandum, Saunders to Kissinger, "Supporting the Kurdish Rebellion," March 27, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.301), pp.3-4

⁶⁷⁰ DoS, Memorandum, Seelye to Sisco, "Proposed Assignment of US Officers to Baghdad Interests Section," 9 April 1971, (NARA/RG59/Records Relating to Iraq/1966-1972/Box14/POL 17), p.1. See also State 67409 to Amman, "Situation in Iraq," 21 April 1971 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.286), pp.1-5.

Unfortunately, just as the U.S. was contemplating sending diplomats to Baghdad, the Iraqi regime announced on May 15 that it would expropriate the U.S. Embassy in central Baghdad. After a week of tension, Iraqi security forces surrounded the embassy on May 23 and demanded the Belgian Ambassador, Marcel Van Kerchove, hand over the keys. Certainly, the seizing of the embassy grounds hardened the Nixon administration's attitude toward the Iraqi regime, but in the end there was little that could be done beyond issuing a strong note of protest.⁶⁷¹ This also meant sending U.S. diplomats to Baghdad was postponed.⁶⁷²

On July 8, Zayid Othman,⁶⁷³ a senior KDP official and one of Barzani's emissaries, approached the U.S. Embassy in Beirut to seek U.S. financial assistance. Significantly, Othman revealed Jordanian and Saudi interest in helping the Kurds, when he said funds could be transferred "via Saudi Arabia, Jordan, or Iran." Othman explained King Faisal of Saudi Arabia had "endorsed the idea of an Iraqi revolt in principle," but wanted more information before proceeding further. Since the Jordanian crisis, King Hussein had been interested in using the Kurds to tie down Iraq and would later play a role in convincing the U.S. to do the same. On Iran, Othman acknowledged the receipt of aid, but complained about the Shah's "heavy-handed control over Kurdish activities." He also indicated Barzani wanted to establish secret relations with the U.S., suggesting the CIA could send a representative to Barzani's headquarters in Haji Omran, Barzani could visit Washington personally for consultations, or he could send a delegation. In response to this, the U.S. official stressed America's non-intervention policy, but said he would report the conversation to Washington.⁶⁷⁴

⁶⁷¹ Between February 1971 and April 1972, the U.S. and Iraq entered talks about the regime's desire to purchase the U.S. Embassy and grounds, but broke down when Iraq declared the property as part of a "military zone" and confiscated it. See DoS, Memorandum, Eliot to Kissinger, "Iraqi Seizure of Baghdad Embassy Property," 25 May 1971 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.290), pp.1-2.

⁶⁷² DoS, Memorandum, Seelye to Sisco, "Assignment of U.S. Officers to Baghdad Interests Section," 13 January 1972 (NARA/RG59/Records Relating to Iraq/1966-1972/Box 14/POL 17), p.

⁶⁷³ Not to be confused with Dr. Mahmoud Othman, who herein will be referred to as Dr. Othman.

⁶⁷⁴ Beirut A-222 to State, "Request from Mustafa Barzani for Clandestine Contact with USG," July 16, 1971 (NARA, SN, 1970-73, Box 2382, POL 13-3), pp.1-2. See also Beirut A-242 to State, "Request from Mustafa Barzani for Clandestine Contact with USG," August 5, 1971 (NARA, SN, 1970-73, Box 2382, POL 13-3), pp.1-2.

Following its expropriation of the U.S. Embassy, Iraq's relations with the Soviet Union underwent a major thaw. In September, the Ba'th signed a secret arms deal with Moscow, bringing total Soviet military aid to Iraq above the \$750 billion level.⁶⁷⁵ According to the CIA, the deal included \$250 million worth of anti-aircraft guns, anti-tank rockets, armored personnel carriers, and several fighter aircrafts.⁶⁷⁶ This suggested that Iranian and Israeli warnings of a Soviet strategy to build up Iraq as replacement for the departing British had been realized. Unfortunately, word of the Soviet deal did not reach Washington until January 1972 and by then British forces had already left the region.⁶⁷⁷

As part of the Soviet-Iraqi arms deal, the Ba'th agreed to end its campaign against the communists and form a National Front government with the ICP and KDP, but Barzani refused to cooperate, leading the Iraqis and Soviets to try to eliminate him altogether. On September 29, the Ba'th sent a delegation of nine religious figures to Haji Omran to meet with Barzani and mediate a truce. Unknown to the delegation, Saddam had provided two of the delegates with audio recorders rigged with explosives and told them to record Barzani's response. About fifteen minutes into the meeting, one of the guests pressed the record button and detonated an explosion, killing most in the room except Barzani.⁶⁷⁸ Afterward, the regime attempted to distance itself from the attack, but Barzani was convinced the Ba'th Party was behind it.⁶⁷⁹

In the aftermath of the assassination attempt, the Kurds and Iranians began a concerted effort to convince the U.S. to abandon its non-intervention policy. In November, Habib Muhammad Karim, the KDP's Secretary-General, approached the

⁶⁷⁵ State 12737 to U.S. Embassy Iran, January 22, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.295).

⁶⁷⁶ CIA, "Moscow and the Persian Gulf," IM-0865/72, May 12, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.307), p.2. For the rest of the provisions of the agreement, see White House, Memorandum, Haig to Kissinger, "Kurdish Problem," July 28, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.321), pp.2-3.

⁶⁷⁷ State 12737, January 22, 1972, *Op.Cit.*

⁶⁷⁸ USINT to U.S. Embassy Brussels, "Attempt on the Life of AL-BARZANI," October 4, 1971 (NARA/RG59/Records Relating to Iraq/1966-1972/Box12/POL 23-7), p.2; and Belgian Embassy in Baghdad to Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, "Meeting with legendary Kurdish leader Mr. Mullah Mustapha BARZANI," July 13, 1972 (NARA/RG59/Records Relating to Iraq/1966-1972/Box14/POL 13), p.3.

⁶⁷⁹ Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade to State, "REPIR: Reports on Assassination Attempt Made on Al-Barzani," November 2, 1971 (NARA/RG59/Records Relating to Iraq/1966-1972/Box12/POL 23-7), p.2.

U.S. Embassy in Beirut to seek support to oust the Ba'th, but was refused politely, with embassy officers arguing it would "serve no purpose" and could "engender false hopes and future misunderstandings."⁶⁸⁰ Then, in late November, SAVAK officials contacted the CIA again to warn of Soviet efforts to convince the Kurds to join the National Front, arguing, "this government would include communists, Nasirists and Kurds subservient to the Ba'th ... and would represent a situation antithetical to both Iranian and U.S. interests." SAVAK gave a window of "three or four months" to convince the Kurds to reject the front, but Iran needed U.S. help, since Barzani did not trust the Shah.⁶⁸¹ But as Kissinger noted in his memoir, the Kurds had a blind faith in America and believed U.S. involvement would "inhibit [Iran] from abandoning the Kurds—a judgment which ... proved too optimistic."⁶⁸² Beyond the SAVAK approach, around this time the Shah appealed to Nixon directly, but was met with a polite refusal.⁶⁸³ Clearly Iran and the Kurds were ratcheting up their pressure on the U.S. to reconsider its non-intervention policy by presenting the Kurdish issue in Cold War terms.

Meanwhile, on November 30 tensions between Iraq and Iran escalated when Iranian troops were deployed to three strategically situated islands in the Gulf, Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs.⁶⁸⁴ The Iraqi regime was outraged by Iran's "invasion" and severed relations with both Iran and Britain, accusing the latter of complicity to Iran's actions.⁶⁸⁵ The Iraqis also retaliated by expelling 60,000 Iranian citizens from Iraq throughout December. Though the issue was bilateral between Iran and the newly formed United Arab Emirates, which claimed the islands,

⁶⁸⁰ Beirut 9689 to State, "Meeting with Secretary General of Kurdish Democratic Party," November 3, 1971 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.293).

⁶⁸¹ "Supporting the Kurdish Rebellion," March 27, 1972, *Op.Cit.*, p.3.

⁶⁸² Kissinger (1999), p.583.

⁶⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.581.

⁶⁸⁴ See Roham Alvandi, "Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and the Bahrain question, 1968-1970," *British Journal of Middle Eastern studies*, 37/2 (2010), pp.159-177; and *New York Times*, "Iranian Troops Occupy Three Strategic Islands in Persian Gulf, and a Sheikdom Protests," December 1, 1971, p.13.

⁶⁸⁵ *New York Times*, "Iraqis Hold Protest Against Iran Move," December 2, 1971, p.19.

Baghdad's harsh reaction clearly escalated ongoing tensions between the two states.⁶⁸⁶

It was in this context that Moscow took the provocative step of sending its Defense Minister, Marshall Andrei Grechko, to Baghdad to finalize the September arms deal.⁶⁸⁷ As expected, the Iranians portrayed Grechko's visit to U.S. officials as confirmation of Moscow's intentions toward the Gulf, while warning a friendship treaty not unlike the ones Moscow had previously signed with Cairo and New Delhi, was in the works with Iraq. Again the U.S. was dismissive, arguing it did not have any intelligence to support this claim at this point:

[While] we can understand Iranian concern in face of new Soviet-Iraqi arms deal (basically because of Iraqi recklessness and ambitions in [the] Gulf), we do not think [the] Soviets have increased military aid to Iraq as part of aggressive policy in [the] Gulf aimed at Iran.

Instead, the department believed Grechko's visit and the Iraqi arms deal were designed to placate Baghdad not threaten Tehran.⁶⁸⁸ But what the U.S. did not realize was that it was Iraq that wanted to threaten Iran, not the Soviets. While U.S. intelligence on Soviet intentions was accurate, its assessment of Iraq's designs was wrong. Fortunately, on January 28, 1972 the State Department approved sending a mid-level Foreign Service Officer to Baghdad.⁶⁸⁹

Confirming Iran's fears, in mid-February Saddam Hussein led another delegation to Moscow, where he negotiated a framework for a broadly based political, economic, and military agreement.⁶⁹⁰ According to a joint communiqué, the two sides had reached a tentative agreement that exchanged Iraqi promises of a National Front government for access to Soviet military hardware, cooperation in

⁶⁸⁶ See *New York Times*, "Iraqis Hold Protest Against Iran Move," December 2, 1971, p.19; and *New York Times*, "Iran Complains in U.N. That Iraq Has Ousted 60,000," January 5, 1972, p.3. See also Alvandi (2010), pp.159-77; and Richard Mobley, "The Tunbs and Musa Islands: Britain's Perspective," *Middle East Journal*, 57/4 (2003), pp.627-45.

⁶⁸⁷ Beirut A-38 to State, February 2, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.297), pp.8-9.

⁶⁸⁸ State 12737 to U.S. Embassy Iran, January 22, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.295).

⁶⁸⁹ State 16061 to U.S. Embassy Brussels, "REPIR: US Personnel for Baghdad Interests Section," January 28, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.296), pp.1-4.

⁶⁹⁰ NSC, "Iraq," May 18, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.308), p.6.

defense matters, the delaying of Iraq's outstanding balance of payments, and economic assistance for its oil industry.⁶⁹¹

Because the Soviets viewed Kurdish participation in the National Front as a prerequisite for stability, they continued to press the regime to include the Kurds in the government. On February 28 Moscow sent a high-level delegation to Barzani's headquarters in Kurdistan including a member of the Soviet Central Committee, to urge Barzani to join the National Front in return for establishing a Soviet liaison to "protect" him and ensure Ba'thist cooperation. According to the NSC staff, while Barzani's response was uncertain, Kurdish participation in the coalition would have "considerable geopolitical significance" by freeing Iraq's forces "for military-political action" in the Gulf and against Israel. Worse, it meant communists would be in power in Iraq.⁶⁹²

In the years since the March Accord, the U.S. had dismissed its closest allies' warnings about an Iraqi shift toward the Soviets as manipulative. The U.S. analysis was understandable. Even though it did not have diplomatic representation with Iraq, the evidence available pointed to the opposite conclusion. After all, in the twenty months since the March Accord, Iraqi security forces had unleashed a wave of repression against the communists and harassed Soviet officials regularly. At the same time, the Nixon administration had other priorities, like the escalating Vietnam War, opening to China, nuclear arms control, and building détente with the Soviets. But Iraq's improvement in relations with Moscow, its about-face toward the communists, and its assassination attempt on Barzani in late-1970 suggested Iranian and Israeli warnings of a Soviet strategy to build up Iraq in the wake of Britain's withdrawal from the region in December 1971 were correct. Faced with this conclusion, the Nixon administration was forced to reconsider its hands-off policy toward Iraq, since it appeared to be relevant in the Cold War once again.

⁶⁹¹ Moscow 1501 to State, "Iraq-Soviet Communiqué Raises Prospect of Treaty in Near Future," February 18, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.298), pp.1-3. For a discussion on what each side agreed to during these talks, see FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.308, p.6.

⁶⁹² NSC, "Soviet Contacts with Barzani," March 20, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.301), pp.1-2.

IV

The prospect of Iraq enshrining its relationship with the Soviet Union in a friendship treaty alarmed America's regional allies. Before long, the Nixon administration was bombarded with secret approaches trying to convince it to reconsider its non-intervention policy toward the Kurds, but the U.S. continued to be resistant to the idea. While the Nixon administration was sympathetic to the concerns of its allies, its over-riding priority at this point was achieving détente with the Soviet Union and the opening to China. Given this, when the Soviet Union signed its friendship treaty with Iraq in April 1972, the Nixon administration barely acknowledged the deal, much to the frustration of its allies. Clearly wider Cold War considerations had trumped regional concerns, at least in the near term.

Throughout March, Kurdish and Iranian officials sought to convince the U.S. to change its non-intervention policy. First, a "reliable Agency source" reported Barzani was under pressure from the Soviets to reach an accommodation with the Ba'th and would "have to acquiesce unless he receive[d] help". The source also said Barzani was sending an emissary to Washington to persuade the U.S. to reconsider its policy.⁶⁹³ When U.S. officials met with the emissary, he asked for ongoing political discussions, financial assistance, a radio station, and that the CIA cooperate with Kurdish intelligence.⁶⁹⁴

On March 6, SAVAK officials approached the CIA to plead for U.S. assistance to the Kurds, citing "Soviet pressures on al-Barzani and the imminence of a Soviet-Iraqi treaty" as reasonable justification for a joint CIA-SAVAK operation to overthrow the Ba'thist regime.

The SAVAK official ... wished to know if the United States would be prepared to provide financial and military support for the attempt and assist in drawing together Iraqi exiles who would comprise the nucleus of a separatist government initially harbored by al-Barzani.⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁹³ CIA, Memorandum, Waller to Sisco, "Intention of Kurdish Leader Al-Barzani to Approach the United States Government for Assistance; Iranian Intelligence Request for Expression of United States Government Willingness to Overthrow the Ba'thi Regime of Iraq," March 9, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.299), p.1.

⁶⁹⁴ CIA, Memorandum, Helms to Kissinger, et al., "Kurdish Efforts to Recruit International Support...", March 29, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.302), p.1.

⁶⁹⁵ "Intention of Kurdish Leader...", March 9, 1972, *Op.Cit.*, pp.1-2.

Significantly, unlike past approaches, details of these démarches were passed to Kissinger, suggesting that U.S. policymakers were beginning to recognize the importance of the Kurdish question to America's Cold War strategy.⁶⁹⁶

The Kurdish-SAVAK démarches in early March prompted an interagency review of the U.S. non-intervention policy. At the outset, the State Department opposed any operation that could jeopardize future opportunities for rapprochement with Iraq or the sending of U.S. diplomats to Baghdad. The department identified a number of reasons not to support Barzani: 1) it was unlikely a Kurdish-led government in Baghdad could succeed; 2) there was uncertainty about whether the Kurds had cut "the umbilical cord with Moscow"; 3) an operation would be difficult to conceal; 4) if discovered, America's Arab allies would be outraged and serve as further evidence of U.S. support for non-Arabs states (Iran and Israel) against the Arabs; and 5) it increased the likelihood of a Kurdish state, which would represent "further fragmentation in an already fragmented area."⁶⁹⁷ Other U.S. officials opposed supporting the Kurds as well. For instance, one NEA official, Andrew Killgore, warned that helping the Kurds could upset the dispatch of U.S. diplomats to Baghdad,⁶⁹⁸ while the U.S. Ambassador to Iran, Joseph Farland, argued that supporting the Kurds generated far too much risk compared to the limited benefit gained.⁶⁹⁹

The CIA was also concerned, pointing out the odds of the Kurds successfully overthrowing the Ba'athist regime were slim, while warning American involvement in this plot could be "regarded by the Soviets as a move directed against them." Finally, they questioned the need for U.S. involvement, arguing that any assistance Barzani needed was "within the capability of Iran or Israel to provide." In fact, the only reason the CIA could identify for U.S. involvement was that both Iran and Israel

⁶⁹⁶ "Kurdish Efforts to Recruit International Support...", March 29, 1972, *Op.Cit.*, p.1.

⁶⁹⁷ DoS, Memorandum from Seelye, "Some Reasons Why We Should Not Support Barzani Against the Iraqi Government," March 14, 1972 (NARA/RG59/Records Relating to Iraq/1973-1975/Box1/POL 13), p. 1.

⁶⁹⁸ DoS, Memorandum from Killgore, "Barzani Request for U.S. Assistance: Related Savak Request that USG Help Overthrow Present Iraqi Government with Aid of Barzani," March 15, 1972 (NARA/RG59/Records Relating to Iraq/1973-1975/Box1/POL 13), pp.1-2.

⁶⁹⁹ Kissinger (1999), p.581.

“want to involve [them],” but this was not enough to justify a risky operation.⁷⁰⁰ Facing widespread opposition to the Kurdish-SAVAK proposal, the Nixon administration decided to continue the non-intervention policy.⁷⁰¹

At the end of March, the Nixon administration received two additional requests to reconsider its policy toward the Kurds. The first occurred on March 28 when King Hussein asked Nixon directly to reconsider his position.⁷⁰² The second occurred that same day when UN Assistant Secretary General Ismat Kittani, an Iraqi Kurd, contacted the U.S. Ambassador to the UN, George H. W. Bush, to ask that he meet with Zayid Othman, who was going to be in New York. The next day, after obtaining approval from Washington, Bush met with Kittani, who, after stressing his call had nothing to do with his role at the UN, asked that Rogers or Kissinger meet with Othman.⁷⁰³ When Bush passed word of his meeting to Washington and requested guidance, the department said it had “no objection to [Othman] being seen by USUN working levels and intend[ed] to follow [the] same procedure ... when Othman arrives in Washington.”⁷⁰⁴ King Hussein and Kittani's approaches helped set in motion a subtle shift in U.S. thinking toward the Kurds.

On April 3, when Othman met with the Iraq Desk officer, Thomas Scotese, in Washington, he expressed concern about Saddam's recent trip to Moscow and Soviet pressure on Barzani to join the National Front. He explained, “the Soviets' aim through their support of a national front stratagem [was] to establish and consolidate further their position in Iraq, particularly at a time when their position in Egypt and Syria seem[ed] to be unpredictable.” Further, the “Soviets intended to use Iraq for subversion not only in the Gulf but against Iran and Turkey as well” and “only the U.S. [could], by supporting Barzani either directly or indirectly, stem the

⁷⁰⁰ “Supporting the Kurdish Rebellion,” March 27, 1972, *Op.Cit.*, p.1.

⁷⁰¹ CIA, Memorandum, Waller to Helms, “Background to Current Efforts by Kurdish Leader Barzani to Gain U.S. Support,” June 12, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.315), p.2.

⁷⁰² Kissinger (1999), p.581.

⁷⁰³ USUN 1132 to State, “Kurdish Emissary [sic.] Asks to Meet with Secretary and Kissinger,” March 28, 1972 (NARA/RG59/SN/1970-1973/Box2382/ POL-13-3), p.1.

⁷⁰⁴ State 54327 to U.S. Mission to the UN, “U.S. Visit of Barzani Emissary,” March 30, 1972 (NARA/RG59/SN/1970-1973/Box2382/ POL-13-3), p.1.

Soviet tide in Iraq.” Ultimately, Othman warned this was America’s “last opportunity to thwart Soviet designs in Iraq” or else all “will have been lost.”⁷⁰⁵

When Killgore reported Scotese’s conversation to Sisco on April 5, it was clear Othman’s talk had an impact on his perception of Iraq. After listing the NEA’s standard reasons for not wanting to help the Kurds, Killgore wrote:

Despite the [negative] initial reaction, we have discussed this matter with [Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Alfred “Roy” Atherton] who agrees that it would be useful if we had an informal review of the Kurdish situation with [excised] of CIA before making any final decision regarding the [Othman] appeal. CIA has also been getting through independent sources the same information and similar appeals. Such a review would be in line with your thoughts expressed to Tom Scotese ... that we continue to update our assessments and *not be guided solely by conventional wisdom* concerning such matters.

Killgore then recommended Sisco brief Secretary Rogers on the approach and pass along Barzani’s letter.⁷⁰⁶ Quite clearly a shift in thinking with respect to the Kurds was occurring in early April 1972. Significantly, this shift occurred just as the Iraqis and Soviets were formalizing their relationship in a treaty.

In early April, Soviet Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin travelled to Iraq and signed a fifteen-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with President al-Bakr on April 9. While the treaty’s wording was purposely vague, the CIA believed it would be specific in application. The CIA saw articles 8-10 as significant:

Article 8: In case of emergence of conditions that threaten violation of the peace, the two signatories will immediately hold contacts in order to coordinate their stands to eliminate the danger and restore the peace.

Article 9: In the interest of security of the two countries, the two signatories will continue to develop cooperation for consolidating the defense capability of each other.

Article 10: Each of the two signatories declares that it will not enter into pacts, or take part in any international groupings or any actions or measures aimed at the other signatory. Each of the two signatories

⁷⁰⁵ DoS, Memorandum from Scotese, “Kurdish Appeal for U.S. Assistance,” April 3, 1972 (NARA/RG59/Records Relating to Iraq/1966-1972/Box14/POL 13), pp.2-3.

⁷⁰⁶ DoS, Memorandum, Killgore to Sisco, “Kurdish Appeal for U.S. Assistance,” April 5, 1972 (NARA/RG59/SN/1970-1973/Box2382/ POL-13-3), pp.1-2. Emphasis mine.

also pledge not to allow the use of its territory in undertaking any action that would result in a military harm to the other.⁷⁰⁷

It believed article 8 implied Soviet support for the Ba'th in the event of internal or external disturbances—a clear reference to the Kurds. Article 9 alluded to the establishment of a Soviet naval base at Iraq's only Gulf port, Umm Qasr—similar to the longstanding U.S. naval base in Bahrain—and provided Soviet access to Iraqi airfields and air transit rights. In both instances, the Soviet Union's strategic position vis-à-vis the Gulf would improve significantly. Finally, article 10 placed Iraq on the Soviet side in the event of a war.⁷⁰⁸ In each instance, the treaty represented a major symbolic and psychological victory for the Soviet Union in the Cold War.

Remarkably, the Nixon administration was not perturbed with the treaty, with the NSC staff describing it as “nothing surprising or sudden but rather a culmination of existing relationships.”⁷⁰⁹ But this mild assessment was not reflective of U.S. concerns about Iraq rather the Nixon administration's priorities. By April 1972 Nixon's détente strategy was unfolding after his surprise visit to Beijing in February, which paved the way for his summit with Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev in Moscow in May.⁷¹⁰ In fact, ten days after the treaty was signed Kissinger arrived in Moscow for preliminary talks on the Moscow Summit, which resulted in the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty and the Strategic Arms Limitations Treaty (SALT-I).⁷¹¹ Therefore, the Nixon administration's subdued response to the Soviet-Iraq treaty was out of desire to avoid harming the success of its Cold War initiatives at the Moscow Summit.⁷¹² This did not, however, mean Nixon and Kissinger were resigned to do nothing.

⁷⁰⁷ CIA, “Support for Barzani: A Preliminary Estimate,” no date (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.321, attachment C), pp.12-13. See also CIA, “Moscow and the Persian Gulf,” Intelligence Memorandum No. 0865/72, May 12, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.307); and *New York Times*, “Soviet and Iraq in 15-Year Pact,” April 10, 1972, p.3.

⁷⁰⁸ “Iraq,” May 18, 1972, *Op.Cit.*, pp.5-7.

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.5.

⁷¹⁰ See Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institute, 1994); and Margaret MacMillan, *Nixon in China: The Week that Changed the World* (Toronto: Viking Press, 2006).

⁷¹¹ On Kissinger's secret trip to Moscow, see FRUS/1969-76/XIV, pp.305-67.

⁷¹² For details on the Moscow Summit, see *ibid.*, pp.246-304.

V

In the summer of 1972, U.S. policy toward Iraq underwent a major shift. Having achieved diplomatic success at the Moscow Summit, Nixon and Kissinger flew to Tehran on May 30 for a two day visit with the Shah. It is widely believed that Nixon agreed to assist the Kurds in their fight against the Iraqi regime during this time.⁷¹³ Even Kissinger claims this was the case.⁷¹⁴ However, there is no official record of Nixon ever mentioning the Kurds let alone agreeing to a covert operation to support them. What is evident is that following Iraq's nationalization of the IPC on June 1, the Shah pressed Kissinger to reconsider America's non-intervention policy toward Iraq and asked that he meet with Barzani's emissaries. When CIA officials met with the Kurds in late-June, they concluded the need to disrupt Soviet plans in Iraq outweighed the risks of an operation. This view was reinforced further on July 18 when Soviet forces withdrew from Egypt, prompting U.S. officials to conclude Iraq's importance to Soviet Middle Eastern strategy had been enhanced. Given these factors, it is clear that Nixon's decision on August 1 to help the Kurds was driven by America's regional strategy aimed at depriving the Soviets of an influential base, like Iraq.

Prior to Nixon and Kissinger's arrival, the Shah had grown concerned about Iraq, viewing the Soviet-Iraqi treaty as a challenge to his powerful position in the Gulf after Britain's withdrawal in December 1971.⁷¹⁵ Similarly, the Shah feared the formation of a Soviet-backed, National Front government in Iraq that included the Kurds, believing it would bring stability and free up Iraq's military to challenge his position in the Gulf.⁷¹⁶ While Nixon was not as alarmed about Soviet plans for the region, he clearly recognized the need to take measures to allay the Shah's fears.

⁷¹³ Vanly (1978), p.184; Pelletiere (1984), p.167; Prados (1986), pp.313-315 and 323; Ranelagh (1987), pp. 607-8; Meho and Nehme (1995), pp.50-54; Randal (1997), pp.145-51; Gunter (1999), pp.427-37; Pollack (2002), p.176; Sluglett (2003), p.159; Daugherty (2004), pp.174-76; Daugherty (2004), p.175; McDowell (2004), pp.330-31; Prados (2006), pp.391; Tripp (2007), p.203; Parsi (2008), pp.53-54; Gause (2008), p.35; Little (2010), pp.74-75; and Hahn (2012), p.58.

⁷¹⁴ Kissinger (1999), p.583.

⁷¹⁵ DoS, Memorandum, Elliot to Kissinger, April 13, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.305), p.2. See also CIA, Memorandum, Helms to Kissinger, "Mr. Kermit Roosevelt's 26 April Meeting with the Shah of Iran," May 8, 1972 (FRUS/1969-76/E-4/doc.190). For Soviet efforts to allay the Shah's concerns, see "Iraq," May 18, 1972, *Op.Cit.*, pp.5-7.

⁷¹⁶ Tehran 2604 to State, May 4, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.184).

During Nixon's visit to Tehran from May 30-31 he made a number of key decisions that would have considerable long-term consequences on the region. First, Nixon told the Shah the U.S. would "not let down [their] friends" and agreed to furnish Iran with modern weaponry, including F-14s and F-15s, to balance the Soviet Union's recent commitment to provide Iraq with the ultra modern Mig-23 jets.⁷¹⁷ This decision makes clear that Nixon intended for Iran to play a major role in the region under the pretext of the Nixon Doctrine and was a marked departure from the Johnson administration's 'twin pillar' policy. Controversially, the Pentagon misinterpreted this decision and gave Iran unfettered access to all non-nuclear U.S. weaponry, leading to massive arms sales.⁷¹⁸

The second, more controversial decision concerned Iraq and the Kurds. While numerous sources indicate Nixon agreed to support the Kurds while in Tehran,⁷¹⁹ there is no official record of Nixon deciding to aid the Kurds. According to Alam, Kissinger was concerned that "the Russians [had] gone too far in their relations with Iraq, adding that something would have to be done to stop the rot."⁷²⁰ Kissinger's memoir suggests that during the visit the Shah had asked Nixon to reconsider the U.S. position on the Kurds, arguing, "without American support, the existing Kurdish uprising against the Baghdad government would collapse." Nixon agreed, adding, "American participation in some form was needed to maintain the morale of such key allies as Iran and Jordan, disparate as their motives were, and as a contribution to the regional balance of power."⁷²¹ But the memorandum of this conversation barely mentions the Kurds. It indicates the Shah had told Nixon he was concerned that the Soviets could pull together a National Front in Iraq, including the communists and Kurds and if this happened, the Kurds, instead of being a thorn in Iraq's side, could become a communist "asset" to be used against Iran and Turkey. When Kissinger asked what could be done, the Shah replied, "Iran can help with the

⁷¹⁷ White House, Memorandum of Conversation, "May 31, 1972 – 10:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.," (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.201), p.3.

⁷¹⁸ Kissinger (1999), p.583.

⁷¹⁹ Pelletiere (1984), p.167; Randal (1999), pp.149-50; Daugherty (2004), p.174; Parsi (2008), pp.53-54; Gause (2008), p.35; Alvandi (2012), p.294; and Hahn (2012), p.58.

⁷²⁰ Alam (1991), p.225.

⁷²¹ Kissinger (1999), p.583.

Kurds.” In fact, in the available record, Nixon never mentioned the Kurds once.⁷²² Despite numerous sources—including Kissinger—claiming Nixon agreed to support the Kurds while in Tehran, the absence of an official record leaves room for doubt.

On June 1, the day after Nixon and Kissinger left Tehran, Iraq’s longstanding dispute with the IPC boiled over when the Ba’thist regime announced its nationalization. After the Ba’th came to power, it signed a deal with the Soviets to develop the oil-rich North Rumaila oilfields. After Iraq began exporting oil from the oilfields to the Soviet Union in April 1972,⁷²³ the IPC retaliated by cutting production in the northern oilfields and limiting Baghdad’s royalty payments. In mid-May the Ba’th threatened the IPC with confiscatory legislation if it did not increase production. The IPC agreed on May 31 but insisted on compensation for the loss of North Rumaila. Outraged by this demand, the Ba’th decided that a dramatic move was needed and nationalized the company the next day. The IPC’s nationalization had serious implications on U.S. policy, since American firms held a 23.75% stake in the company.⁷²⁴ It also destroyed any doubts within the Nixon administration that Iraq was fast becoming a Soviet satellite. As Randal observed, “[the] IPC nationalization was yet another reason for Iran ... and the United States to justify [the Kurdish operation], for each had reason to fear the repercussions of this first Soviet penetration of a major oil producer in the Middle East.”⁷²⁵

In the aftermath of the IPC nationalization, Kissinger’s Middle East advisor on the NSC staff, Harold Saunders, sent him a memo that analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of helping the Kurds. Saunders identified three arguments in support of a Kurdish operation—an additional reason remains classified. First, by encouraging or supporting the Kurds to be a force of instability within Iraq, the U.S. could thwart Soviet efforts to promote the formation of a National Front government. Second, U.S. assistance to the Kurds could help tie down Iraqi forces and keep the regime focused

⁷²² White House, Memorandum of Conversation, May 30, 1972 – 5:35 to 6:35 p.m. (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.200), pp.1-2; and Memorandum of Conversation, May 31, 1972 – 10:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.201), pp.1-3.

⁷²³ NSC, Haig to Kissinger, “Kurdish Problem,” July 28, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.321), p.2.

⁷²⁴ CIA, “Some Implications of Iraq’s Oil Nationalization,” IM 72-92, June 1972 (FRUS/1969-76/E-4/doc.311), pp.1-2; and DoS, Memorandum, Katz to Armstrong, “Iraqi Nationalization of IPC,” June 5, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.312), p.1.

⁷²⁵ Randal (1999), p.152.

on internal problems so it could not threaten Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, or the Gulf States. Finally, the Kurds could help facilitate U.S. contacts with Iraqi military officers, who might seek the regime's overthrow. Balancing this, Saunders identified four opposing arguments. First, the U.S. would be committing itself to a major guerrilla effort and "[if] the battle turned against the Kurds, [they] would have neither the assets nor the interest to provide decisive support." Second, Saudi Arabia and Iran had the financial resources to assist the Kurds. Third, it made more sense for the U.S. to encourage a regional solution, rather than involve itself directly. Finally, in the context of the Moscow Summit and Soviet efforts to bring about a National Front in Iraq, if a U.S. operation was discovered it could undermine détente.⁷²⁶ Ultimately, the Nixon administration needed a more sophisticated understanding of the situation before it could proceed.

On June 5, the Shah sent Kissinger a message proposing a meeting with Idris Barzani and Dr. Othman to discuss how the U.S. could help the Kurds. Afterward, the message added, the Shah "expected" Kissinger to share his views on the matter. In a memo to Kissinger seeking approval for the meeting, the NSC staff raised objections around involving him personally because that would indicate Nixon's endorsement, "at least by implication." Instead, they suggested Director of Central Intelligence Richard Helms, Harold Saunders, or General Alexander Haig, Jr. meet with the Kurds, even though the majority view "in town" (i.e., Washington, D.C.) argued against involvement.⁷²⁷ Even though the State Department and CIA continued to argue U.S. support for the Kurds was not essential, on June 23 Saunders told Haig there was "a certain attraction" to preventing the Soviets from helping the Ba'ath consolidate its rule by assisting the Kurds. Kissinger agreed and green-lighted the meeting.⁷²⁸ He also dispatched former Treasury Secretary, John Connelly, to Tehran to inform the Shah of the decision.⁷²⁹

⁷²⁶ NSC, Memorandum, Saunders to Kissinger, "Message from Shah on Kurds," June 7, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.313), pp.1-2.

⁷²⁷ Ibid., pp.1-3.

⁷²⁸ White House, Saunders to Haig, "Background for Your Talk with Kurdish Leaders," June 23, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.318), pp.1-2.

⁷²⁹ *Pike Report*, pp.196, 212.

On June 30, Director Helms, Colonel Richard Kennedy, and an unnamed CIA official met with Idris and Dr. Othman in the director's office in Langley, VA. The Kurds said Barzani wanted political, financial, and military assistance to defend himself from the Soviets and Iraqis and make Kurdistan a "positive element" in advancing U.S. interests and those of its allies. Helms thanked the Kurds for coming and said Kissinger had authorized him to express America's sympathy for their movement and assure them of his "readiness to consider their requests for assistance," but cautioned them on the need for secrecy, pointing out that military equipment would have to be channeled through third parties, like Iran, Israel, or Jordan.⁷³⁰ At a second meeting the Kurds described three escalating platforms of support: defensive, offensive, and revolutionary. The first involved a small increase in assistance aimed at preserving the status quo, while allowing the Kurds to resist the regime's political, economic, and military pressure indefinitely. The second called for increasing their financial and military capabilities so the Kurds could tie down the Ba'thist regime so it could not pose a military or subversive threat to its neighbors and western interests. Finally, they required the U.S. to use Kurdistan as a "secure base" from which it could "promote the overthrow of the Ba'thi regime in cooperation with other anti-regime Iraqis."⁷³¹

Even after the meeting, the CIA was uncertain about the prospects of a Kurdish operation. In a memo outlining the meeting, the CIA said the Kurds had "unrealistic ideas about military actions and the kinds of equipment which they could use." For instance, while they wanted to expand the Peshmerga to 60,000 men, the logistics of this "would be of staggering dimensions." They also talked of obtaining tanks and suggested engaging the Iraqi army in conventional warfare, but acknowledged the need for military advice. To this, the CIA urged the Kurds to avoid conventional warfare and stick to the mountains, where they could "engage in aggressive guerrilla tactics, hitting the Iraqis in many places and keeping them off balance." The memo identified a number of problems with a Kurdish operation: 1)

⁷³⁰ CIA, "Washington Meetings with Kurdish Representatives," July 5, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc. 319), pp.1-4.

⁷³¹ "...A Preliminary Estimate," no date, *Op.Cit.*, pp.7-8.

the “definite possibility” of Soviet involvement should fighting resume; 2) Turkey was “acutely sensitive” to Kurdish nationalism and would be upset about U.S. support for Barzani; 3) there were “deep factional cleavages rooted in tribal, political, and social conflicts [that] divide[d] the Kurds into competing and mutually hostile groups”; 4) Barzani’s age and lack of a successor; and 5) the operation could disrupt the State Department’s plans to send diplomats to Baghdad. The CIA concluded the Soviet and Iraqi threat to Western interests was justification for an assistance program for the Kurds. Once again, this suggests the Cold War was a key factor in the U.S. decision to support the Kurds.⁷³²

Another key factor behind the U.S. decision was the departure of some 15,000 Soviet military personnel from Egypt on July 18, which, as Kissinger claimed, shattered the Middle East’s Cold War balance of power.⁷³³ However, recent scholarship has challenged the concept of Egypt’s “expulsion of Soviet advisors”, pointing out that Soviet personnel were withdrawn by mutual consent and those that departed were actually the combat troops introduced during 1969-70 War of Attrition, while genuine military advisors stayed in Egypt and helped prepare for the October 1973 war.⁷³⁴ Regardless, the Nixon administration seemed pleased with Moscow’s apparent “loss” of Egypt,⁷³⁵ which Kissinger believed would enhance Iraq’s value in terms of Moscow’s Middle Eastern strategy and give it incentive to strengthen its relationship with the Ba’thist regime.⁷³⁶ Indeed, for years the Soviets had focused on building up Egypt and Syria militarily against Israel, while Iraq was never given much consideration. Nevertheless, this apparent shift had an impact on the Nixon administration’s decision to aid the Kurds. For instance, on July 28, Haig suggested to Kissinger, “a case could be made that [supporting the Kurds] is more important than ever due to recent events in Egypt which will probably result in

⁷³² “...A Preliminary Estimate,” no date, *Op.Cit.*, pp.1-18.

⁷³³ Kissinger (1999), p.584.

⁷³⁴ Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez, “The Origins of a Misnomer: The ‘expulsion of Soviet advisors’ from Egypt in 1972,” in Nigel Ashton (ed.), *The Cold War in the Middle East* (Routledge, 2007), pp.136-63. See also Dima Adamsky, “Zero Hour for Bears: Inquiring into the Soviet Decision to Intervene in the Egyptian-Israeli War of Attrition, 1969-70,” *Cold War History*, 6/1 (2006), pp.113-36.

⁷³⁵ Bernard Gwertzman, “U.S. Officials Pleased at Sadat’s Action,” *New York Times*, July 20, 1972, p.8.

⁷³⁶ Kissinger (1999), p.584.

more intense Soviet efforts in Iraq.”⁷³⁷ This indicates that while the Soviet-Iraq treaty led the U.S. to initially consider aid to the Kurds, it was the departure of Soviet forces from Egypt and its perceived impact on the Cold War regional calculus that ensured Nixon’s approval of the Kurdish operation.

On July 28, Haig forwarded Helm’s proposal to Kissinger along with an action memo seeking the operation’s approval.⁷³⁸ In total, Helms said it would require \$18 million to maintain the Kurds in an essentially defensive position and, of this figure, Iran was willing to pay half and a further \$6 million would come from “other sources.” Helms proposed providing Barzani with a monthly subsidy of \$250,000 (\$3 million a year) through CIA channels, and \$2 million worth of ordinance.⁷³⁹ Initial priority would be given to weapons and ammunition that the Kurds already had, while secondary priority would “be given to anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons, including land mines and rockets, with emphasis on portability.”⁷⁴⁰ All of the ordinance supplied would be “either non-attributable, foreign manufacture or of U.S. manufacture normally stocked by Iraq or Iran, except for artillery (ground and anti-aircraft) and tanks, which [the U.S.] should probably not in any event undertake to supply.”⁷⁴¹ Procedurally, Haig said the administration should present the operation to an interagency committee, known as the 40 Committee, for consideration before approval, though law does not required this. However, due to the operation’s extreme sensitivity, he proposed two options: 1) bypass the 40 Committee and inform Nixon directly, then deal solely with the Office of Management and Budget and Helms or 2) avoid any paper trail and inform 40 Committee principals the President approved the operation.⁷⁴² Haig recommended the latter of these two options and Kissinger approved, scribbling, “get it done next

⁷³⁷ White House, Memorandum, Haig to Kissinger, “Kurdish Problem,” July 28, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.321), p.1.

⁷³⁸ Ibid., p.1.

⁷³⁹ Figures extrapolated from CIA, “Assistance to Iraqi Kurdish Leader Mulla Mustafa Barzani,” July 18, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.321), pp.1-3.

⁷⁴⁰ “...A Preliminary Estimate,” no date, *Op.Cit.*, p.9.

⁷⁴¹ “Assistance to Iraqi Kurdish Leader...,” July 18, 1972, *Op.Cit.*, p.2.

⁷⁴² The principals were Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, U. Alexis Johnson, Deputy Secretary of Defense, Kenneth Rush, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Thomas Moorer, and Director of Central Intelligence, Richard Helms.

week by handing my memo to principals.” On August 1, Kissinger sent a one-page memo indicating Nixon had approved the covert operation to assist the Kurds to the principals.⁷⁴³

The Nixon administration was later criticized for “circumventing” the 40 Committee, with the *Pike Report* describing it as a “highly unusual security precaution” motivated by a desire to keep the State Department in the dark.⁷⁴⁴ The *Pike Report*’s use of the word ‘circumvent’ suggests that the White House was required to inform the 40 Committee of this operation. But according to the *Church Report*, “Not all covert activities are approved by the 40 Committee. Projects not deemed politically risky or involving large sums of money can be approved within the CIA. By CIA statistics, only about one-fourth of all covert action projects are considered by the 40 Committee.”⁷⁴⁵ Given the State Department’s known opposition to the proposed operation and the Nixon administration’s concerns about damaging leaks, the logical solution was to avoid the 40 Committee’s review process and limit knowledge of the operation to a select group. This, however, would have considerable long-term implications on the U.S. policy toward Iraq.

Despite the claim that the Shah manipulated the U.S. into helping the Kurds by overemphasizing the Soviet threat to Iraq, considerable evidence supports the opposite conclusion. Given the Nixon administration’s dismissal of the Shah’s manipulations about Iraq’s relations with the Soviets during the 1970-71 period, it seems unlikely that U.S. policy would change unless prompted by legitimate Cold War concerns.

Conclusion

During Nixon’s first term in office, U.S. policy toward Iraq underwent a major shift. At the start of his term, Nixon was more inclined to “farm out” regional policy to both the State Department and America’s regional allies, like Iran, under the

⁷⁴³ White House, Memorandum, Kissinger to Johnson, et al., (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.322), p.1.

⁷⁴⁴ *Pike Report*, pp.196-97.

⁷⁴⁵ *Church Report*, Chapter 4, Section A. Available online: <http://foia.state.gov/reports/churchreport.asp>.

Nixon Doctrine. With the impending British withdrawal from the region at the end of 1971, the Shah sought to convince the Nixon administration of his value as an ally. Indeed, following Iraq's killing of nine Jews in January 1969, the Shah provoked the 1969 Shatt crisis, urged the Kurds to resume the Kurdish War, and tried to overthrow the Iraqi regime in January 1970. Through these actions, the Shah sent a clear message to the Ba'th that its actions would not be tolerated, while at the same time showing Iran was a capable successor to Britain as the 'regional policeman'. This fits with Alvandi's observation that the Nixon administration was happy to encourage the Shah's ambitions.⁷⁴⁶ But Iran's actions during 1969-70 also convinced the Ba'thist regime to settle its Kurdish problem, leading to the March Accord in 1970.

Once again, America's views about Iraq differed from its regional allies, Iran and Israel, during the period between the March Accord and the British withdrawal in December 1971. Throughout this period, Iran and Israel tried to convince the U.S. that the March Accord was a Soviet plot to gain influence over Iraq. But the Nixon administration dismissed these warnings as manipulative and pointed to considerable evidence of a chill in Soviet-Iraqi relations resulting from an Iraqi campaign against the ICP. It was only when Iraq began to pivot toward the Soviet Union in November 1971—just a month before the British withdrawal—that U.S. officials began to reconsider Iraq's role in the Cold War and even then the Nixon administration was hesitant.

The major turning point was the signing of the Soviet-Iraq Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in April 1972, which effectively aligned Iraq with the Soviet Union in the Cold War and provided the Soviets with a naval base on the Gulf. To America's regional allies, the treaty confirmed longstanding suspicions about Moscow's intentions, while underscoring the CIA's poor intelligence on Iraq. While the U.S. was concerned about the treaty, the timing was problematic, since it came just as the Nixon administration was finalizing its preparations for the Moscow Summit with Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev in late-May. However, once Nixon had

⁷⁴⁶ Alvandi (2012), pp.337-72.

secured détente with the Soviets, he was no longer constrained in his dealings with Iraq, eventually leading to a CIA operation to support the Kurds. Clearly, between 1969 and 1972 the U.S. policy toward Iraq had undergone a major shift.

There is disagreement among scholars about why the Nixon administration agreed to support the Kurds during Nixon's visit to Iran in May 1972. Some argue the decision was based on American concerns about Iraq, while others believe the Shah overinflated the Soviet influence in Iraq to advance his own interests in the Gulf. Oddly enough, none have noted that there is no official record of Nixon actually agreeing to support the Kurds during his visit to Tehran. The record does, however, show that Kissinger had shown concerned about the Soviet-Iraqi relationship and agreed with the Shah that something needed to be done. In fact, the only official record of Nixon agreeing to the Kurdish operation was Kissinger's August 1 memorandum to the 40 Committee's principals. While Nixon eventually approved the Kurdish operation, the decision was based on four factors: 1) concerns about the rapid improvement in Soviet-Iraq relations, especially after the departure of Soviet personnel from Egypt in July 1972; 2) a desire to build up the Shah of Iran as a regional power in the wake of Britain's withdrawal from the region in late 1971 to prevent Soviet encroachment on the region; 3) U.S. concerns about Iraq's nationalization of the IPC in June 1972; and 4) a recognition that the Kurds could be a useful coercive tool to undermine the pro-Soviet Ba'thist regime. Quite clearly, in each of these instances the Cold War was the common denominator. Therefore, Nixon's decision to support the Kurds was not based on a naïve acceptance of the Shah's manipulations, but a realist analysis of a sequence of events suggesting Iraq was becoming a Soviet satellite.

Chapter 6: Nixon and the Kurdish Operation

August 1972—October 1973

This chapter will examine the U.S. policy toward Iraq between Nixon's approval of the Kurdish operation in August 1972 and the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War. It will show that after approving the Kurdish operation, U.S. policy toward Iraq proceeded along two separate and conflicting tracks. As the CIA began funneling money and arms to the Kurds, the State Department proceeded to send U.S. diplomats to Baghdad to set up an interests section. Meanwhile, Richard Helms, a career intelligence officer and former Director of Central Intelligence, was sent to Tehran to act as Nixon's regional "super ambassador" and run the secretive Kurdish operation. In light of these two tracks and the differing perspectives of U.S. diplomats in Baghdad and Tehran, conflict between the State Department's policy of cultivating friendly relations and the White House's policy of undermining the Ba'thist regime was inevitable.

While there are a limited number of works discussing U.S. policy toward Iraq during this period, Jonathan Randal, John Prados, and Douglas Little all agree that U.S. policy was designed to weaken the Soviet-backed Iraqi regime.⁷⁴⁷ Indeed, Kissinger said this in an interview with Randal in 1992, where he explained U.S. Middle East strategy was to "weaken any country tied up with the Soviet Union" and because the Soviet Union had just signed a military pact with Iraq, "we were very receptive to helping the Kurds."⁷⁴⁸ Prados argues the objective of the operation was to raise the cost of the conflict for Baghdad, improve the Kurds' bargaining power, and convince the Iraqi regime to meet their legitimate demands, while preventing Iraq's military from being used against America's regional allies, particularly Israel and oil-rich Kuwait.⁷⁴⁹ This conclusion is reflected in Kissinger's memoir and

⁷⁴⁷ Randal (1999), p.151; Prados (2006), p.392; and Little (2010), pp.78-79.

⁷⁴⁸ Randal (1999), p.151.

⁷⁴⁹ Prados (2006), p.392.

documents.⁷⁵⁰ Documents also support Little's argument that the U.S. did not fully comprehend what they were getting into, stating "Nixon and Kissinger were playing with fire."⁷⁵¹ Indeed, Kissinger acknowledges as much in his memoir, lamenting, "we should have understood better that the Kurds might prove to be volatile partners, difficult to fit into any overall strategy."⁷⁵² While all these works agree on the objectives of U.S. policy, none take into consideration the fact that during 1973 U.S.-Iraqi relations actually improved, with Iraq settling the IPC dispute amicably, giving public indications of its desire to improve U.S.-Iraqi relations, awarding important contracts to U.S. firms, and refusing to participate in the Saudi-led oil embargo following the October War.

I

During the autumn of 1972, the Nixon administration adopted a two track policy toward Iraq. In July 1972, just before Nixon approved the Kurdish operation, the State Department announced it was sending Arthur Lowrie to Baghdad to run the U.S. interests section (USINT).⁷⁵³ In the following months, Lowrie consulted with all major interested parties in Iraq, including U.S. oil companies, banks, and associations, and met with diplomats in London, Brussels, Paris, and Beirut to gain further perspective. Lowrie's job was to observe and report on events in Iraq, while seeking to cultivate friendly relations with the regime.⁷⁵⁴ Lowrie arrived in Baghdad in early September and took official control of USINT on October 1. He would stay until August 1975.⁷⁵⁵ In an interview in 1999, Lowrie indicated he had his suspicions about a U.S. operation, but neither he nor his superior, Roy Atherton, were informed of the Kurdish operation.⁷⁵⁶ Clearly the White House and State

⁷⁵⁰ Kissinger (1999), p.589.

⁷⁵¹ Little (2010), p.78.

⁷⁵² Kissinger (1999), p.583.

⁷⁵³ Brussels 2897 to State, "REPIR: Iraqi Foreign Ministry's Reaction to Department Spokesman's Announcement on US Personnel for USINT," August 3, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.323), p.1.

⁷⁵⁴ DoS, Memorandum, Seelye to Leamon Hunt, "Consultations for Arthur L. Lowrie en route to Baghdad," June 28, 1972 (NARA/RG59/Records Relating to Iraq/1966-1972/Box14/POL 17), p.1.

⁷⁵⁵ See DoS, "A Guide To The United States' History of Recognition, Diplomatic, and Consular Relations, By Country, Since 1776: Iraq". Available online: <http://history.state.gov/countries/iraq>.

⁷⁵⁶ Interview with Arthur Lowrie, December 23, 1989. Available online: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mfdip.2004low08>.

Department were working toward two different policy objectives when it came to Iraq.

From July 31 to August 2, the Shah met with King Hussein at his Caspian Sea palace to discuss U.S. involvement in the Kurdish operation. According to Kissinger, both monarchs welcomed U.S. aid and laid down “ground rules for the common effort.” During the discussions both agreed Barzani had to avoid any “dramatic moves that might trigger an all-out Iraqi assault, such as declaring a separate Kurdish state.” They also agreed the emphasis of their support had to be on “strengthening Kurdish defensive capabilities to preserve the greatest measure of autonomy.” This fit with U.S. perceptions on the matter.⁷⁵⁷

It was clear by August that the Soviets were concerned about Barzani’s refusal to join the National Front. In late-August, the U.S. learned of a member of the Soviet Politburo, Mikhail Suslov, traveling to Kurdistan to urge Barzani to join the government. According to Kissinger, U.S. officials attached great importance to Suslov’s visit. While in Kurdistan, Suslov apparently told Barzani that since the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Egypt, Moscow attached new meaning to its relations with Baghdad. This confirmed U.S. assessments of Iraq’s importance in the Cold War, prompting Kissinger to conclude, “the stakes were obviously being raised.”⁷⁵⁸

On October 5, Kissinger sent Nixon a memo summarizing a CIA report from Director Helms on the status of the Kurdish operation. The economic situation in Iraq was deteriorating, because the Iraqi regime was short on funds due to the boycott of its oil following the IPC’s nationalization in June 1972.⁷⁵⁹ Kissinger told Nixon the Soviets were “extremely concerned” about Barzani’s “independent course” and his refusal to join the National Front. But the CIA’s military and financial pipeline to the Kurds was fully operational and the first shipments were delivered “without a hitch.” On top of that, “more money and arms [were] in the pipeline, not

⁷⁵⁷ Kissinger (1999), p.585.

⁷⁵⁸ Kissinger, pp.584-85. Mohammad Dosky confirms this account, see Tehran 4722 to State, “Barzani Man Describes Relations Between Baghdad and Kurds as Beyond Repair,” August 7, 1972 (NARA/RG59/SN/1970-1973/Box2382/ POL-13-3), pp.1-3.

⁷⁵⁹ See “Some Implications of Iraq’s Oil Nationalization,” June 1972, *Op.Cit.*, pp.1-2.

only from Agency stocks but also [excised] captured Fedayeen ordnance,” a likely reference to Jordan, which had captured Palestinian Fedayeen weaponry during its September 1970 crackdown.⁷⁶⁰ Barzani had also received the first two monthly cash payments as well as a planeload of arms and ammunition, including 500 Kalashnikov AK-47 assault rifles, 500 Soviet submachine guns and 200,000 rounds of ammunition. Finally, by the end of October Iran had received 222,000 pounds of arms and ammunition from CIA stocks for onward shipment to the Kurds. With this, the CIA believed the Kurds could tie down two-thirds of Iraq’s army and deprive it of “a secure base from which to launch sabotage and assassination teams against Iran.”⁷⁶¹ This letter is further proof of the Nixon administration’s concern about Iraq’s place in the Cold War and the importance of the Kurdish operation in tying down Iraq’s army.

On October 21, Lowrie sent David Korn, the State Department’s regional director, a letter outlining the direction he felt U.S. policy toward Iraq should take. Logically, Iraq’s “geographic location, its role as a major oil producer, and its political vulnerability” made it “of considerable interests to [the U.S.].” Unfortunately, America’s relationship with the Shah, its support of the IPC, and the Ba’th’s belief that the U.S. sought to overthrow it in January 1970, were obstacles to rapprochement. Lowrie recommended that U.S. policy needed to “disabuse ... this erroneous impression,” but cautioned against seeking opportunities to improve relations, which he felt would raise suspicion. However, if Iraq made friendly gestures, the U.S. should “respond handsomely ... as quickly as possible, regardless of the importance.” In effect, Lowrie proposed adopting a policy similar to the Kennedy administration’s “wait and see” policy of seeking friendly relations, while avoiding provocative actions.⁷⁶²

In December, Lowrie sent the department a “very tentative assessment” of the situation in Iraq. The report confirmed the value of having an American presence

⁷⁶⁰ See Ashton (2008), pp.136-57.

⁷⁶¹ White House, Memorandum, Kissinger to the President, “Progress Report on the Kurdish Support Operations,” October 5, 1972 (FRUS/1969-76/E-4/doc.325), p.1.

⁷⁶² DoS, Memorandum, Lowrie to Korn, “U.S. Policy Toward Iraq,” October 21, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.326), pp.1-2.

in Baghdad. Lowrie identified three domestic issues that dominated the regime's attention: the ongoing conflict with the IPC, which had cut production by half; the rebellious Kurds in the north; and the regime's inability to form a National Front. Internationally, Iraq appeared to be emerging from its self-imposed isolation, improving relations with Algeria and Sudan and seeking rapprochement with Saudi Arabia. While the Soviet Union remained Iraq's closest ally, the regime had begun courting France openly. It offered special treatment to the French member of the IPC consortium and secured a major bilateral oil agreement that ensured France bought a quarter of Iraq's production.⁷⁶³ But Lowrie did not underestimate Soviet influence in Iraq and felt it endangered U.S. interests:

We should not be lulled into complacency ... by the fact that Arab states elsewhere have proved impervious to a dominant Russian presence. Iraq may be different. Few Arab countries are as culturally diverse and therefore capable of being controlled by a small, militant minority. For Russia, Iraq is geographically the closest Arab country. Its concrete interests here are substantial (oil, Indian Ocean, border security). The Soviets may not wish to gain direct control over the levers of power, but we should not discount this possibility.⁷⁶⁴

Indeed, a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iraq from December confirmed this conclusion. Significantly, it also warned Iran and Iraq's continued rivalry—as evidenced by the Shatt al-Arab dispute, Iran's backing of the Kurds, and the growing competition for influence in the Gulf—could lead to an arms race, with Iraq turning to the Soviet Union and Iran to America. In effect, this meant the Iran-Iraq rivalry was becoming part of the Cold War. Fortunately, the CIA added, Iraq had “a healthy respect” for Iran's military superiority and was “likely to refrain from escalating incidents” in the near term.⁷⁶⁵

By the end of 1972 the dispatch of U.S. diplomats to Baghdad was beginning to pay off. Thanks to Lowrie's observations, the U.S. was clearly developing a better understanding of the forces at play inside Iraq, including the cultivation of Franco-

⁷⁶³ Tripp (2007), p.200.

⁷⁶⁴ Baghdad A-6 to State, “Political Assessment of Iraq,” December 1, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.328), pp.1-5.

⁷⁶⁵ CIA, NIE 36.2-72, “Iraq's Role in Middle Eastern Problems,” December 21, 1972 (FRUS/1964-68/XXI/doc.330), pp.1-14.

Iraqi relations. This relationship would help balance Iraq's reliance on the Soviets and continue well into the 1980s.⁷⁶⁶ While Lowrie's deployment to Baghdad provided the State Department with an incredible asset, his unvarnished analyses would have little impact on Kissinger's belief that Iraq was becoming Moscow's "principal ... ally in the area".⁷⁶⁷

II

In the year between Nixon's stunning electoral victory in the November 1972 general election and the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war, U.S.-Iraqi relations underwent a remarkable thaw. The thaw was a byproduct of an internal power struggle within the Ba'thist regime, pitting a pragmatic wing led by President al-Bakr and Saddam Hussein against hardline elements within the military. Whereas the pragmatists wanted to rid themselves of troublesome issues, like the IPC dispute and balance its relations between the Soviets and the West, the hardliners were determined to project Iraqi power into the Gulf, as evidence by Iraq's bombardment of Kuwait in March 1973. Eventually, the pragmatists ousted their opponents following an attempted coup in June, leading to a rapid improvement in U.S.-Iraqi relations. Despite this, the Nixon administration ignored Lowrie's analyses and ordered an increase in U.S. aid to the Kurds.

Richard Nixon's reelection in 1972 led to changes in the U.S. foreign policy establishment, as he swept out his top leadership and replaced them with individuals responsive to him.⁷⁶⁸ The most significant change was the firing of Richard Helms and his banishment to Iran as the new U.S. Ambassador. Helms was perfect for the role. In his former role as Director of Central Intelligence, Helms came from the highest level of the U.S. government, had close connections with Kissinger, and was an experienced intelligence officer.⁷⁶⁹ Significantly, he was also

⁷⁶⁶ See Pierre Razoux, "France's involvement in the Iran-Iraq War," in Nigel Ashton and Bryan Gibson (eds.), *The Iran -Iraq War: New International Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp.213-18.

⁷⁶⁷ Kissinger (1999), p.581.

⁷⁶⁸ Theodore White, *Breach of Faith: The Fall of Richard Nixon* (New York: Atheneum, 1975), p.222; and Robert Hathaway and Russell Jack Smith, *Richard Helms: As Director of Central Intelligence 1966-1973* (Washington, D.C: CIA, 1993), p.207.

⁷⁶⁹ David Frost, "An Interview with Richard Helms," May 22-23, 1978, p.10. Available online: https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/kent-csi/vol44no4/html/v44i4a07p_0010.htm

an old friend of the Shah, having attended the same college as him in Switzerland. Because of his senior position in the U.S. government, Nixon asked Helms to operate as a “super ambassador,” coordinating U.S. policy across the region.⁷⁷⁰ Helms would play a significant role in directing the Kurdish operation and use his personal connections to Kissinger and the Shah to cut the State Department out of the decision-making process on the question of Iraq.

During the spring of 1973, two separate but related developments occurred with respect to U.S.-Iraqi relations. First, on February 28, Iraq settled its dispute with the IPC by presenting the company with a generous offer. By settling the IPC dispute, Iraq removed the main legal obstacle preventing American companies from bidding for Iraqi commercial contracts.⁷⁷¹ This led to “a steady improvement in the economic and commercial relations between Iraq and the [U.S.]” in the months after the decision, a trend that continued even after the October War.⁷⁷²

The struggle between the pragmatists and hardline elements in the Iraqi regime broke into the open on March 20 when the Iraqi army attacked a Kuwaiti border post to the east of Umm Qasr, Iraq’s only port in the Gulf, and announced claims to two Kuwaiti islands. This was first major military provocation between Kuwait and Iraq since the crisis of 1961. Worse, it was evident that the “highest levels” of the regime had been planned the incident.⁷⁷³ As Nadav Safran observed, if Iraq occupied these islands successfully, it “would not only enhance greatly the strategic position of [Umm Qasr] but perhaps even bring Iraqi troops within striking distance of Saudi Arabia’s oil region.”⁷⁷⁴ Despite this, the Nixon administration’s response to Iraq’s attack on Kuwait was tepid, with the State Department indicating on March 20 that it was “watching the situation closely,” while advising U.S. officials

⁷⁷⁰ Conversation, Nixon and Helms, January 25, 1973. Available online: <http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/forresearchers/find/tapes/tape036/036-113.mp3>.

⁷⁷¹ Baghdad 0111 to State, “Commercial Opportunities in Iraqi Oil Sector,” March 13, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), pp.1-2.

⁷⁷² DoS, Memorandum of Conversation, “Kurdish Representative’s Call on State Department,” September 5, 1973 (NARA/RG59/SN/1970-1973/Box2382/ POL-13-3), p.2.

⁷⁷³ Baghdad 191 to State, “Iraq-Kuwait Border Clash,” April 9, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), p.2; Kuwait 0872 to State, “Armed Iraqi Attack on Kuwait Border Post,” March 20, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), pp.1-2; and Kuwait 0938 to State, “Kuwait-Iraq Border Clash,” March 26, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), pp.2-5.

⁷⁷⁴ Nadav Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security* (Harvard University Press, 1985), p.138.

to avoid public statements because it could “complicate [the] problem for [Kuwait].”⁷⁷⁵ With the British gone from the region, Kuwait turned to the U.S. for assistance against Iraq. The Nixon administration, however, was hesitant about introducing U.S. forces into a regional conflict. Instead, it proposed Kuwait approach Iran, Jordan or Saudi Arabia for assistance, though each option had its advantages and disadvantages.⁷⁷⁶ Ultimately, the U.S. wanted little to do with the conflict, preferring instead to operate through its regional allies. Consequently, Saudi Arabia sent 15,000 troops to Kuwait on March 29 to help protect it from further Iraqi encroachment.⁷⁷⁷

Iraq’s unprovoked attack on Kuwait had a negative impact with its relations with the Soviets. On March 22, Saddam was summoned to Moscow to explain both the IPC settlement and Iraq’s attack on Kuwait. U.S. officials in Moscow believed the Soviets were furious about Iraq’s “ill timed and unhelpful” attack because it could potentially disrupt Moscow’s relations with Kuwait and Iran in the wake of the British withdrawal. Worse yet, Prime Minister Kosygin had been in Tehran to sign a major commercial agreement with the Shah on the day of the attack, making Iraq’s move all the more embarrassing.⁷⁷⁸

While America’s diplomatic options were limited, its covert options were not. On March 29, Kissinger ordered the new DCI, James Schlesinger, to increase Barzani’s funding from \$3 million to around \$5 million annually. According to Kissinger, this was because:

Iraq had become the principal Soviet client in the Middle East; that the Ba’ath government under Saddam Hussein continued to finance

⁷⁷⁵ State 051035 to U.S. Embassy Kuwait, “Iraqi Attack on Kuwait Border Post,” March 20, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), p.2.

⁷⁷⁶ State 066151 to U.S. Embassy Amman, “Jordan’s Anticipated Response Kuwait Request for Air Cover,” April 10, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), pp.1-3. For Jordan and Saudi Arabia’s military response, see State 060167 to Certain Posts, “Near East Highlights March 24-30,” April 2, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), pp.1-3; and State 065249 to Commander-in-Chief Europe, “Kuwaiti Request for US Assistance,” April 9, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), pp.1-2.

⁷⁷⁷ Safran (1985), p.138.

⁷⁷⁸ For the Soviet reaction, see Moscow 3137 to State, “Iraq’s Saddam Hussein Turns up in Moscow,” March 22, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), pp.1-2; Baghdad 0153 to State, March 27, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), pp.1-2; and Moscow 3797 to State, “Soviet View of Kuwait/Iraq Border Clash,” April 6, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), pp.1-2.

terrorist organizations ... and that it was the driving force in the “rejectionist front” seeking to block Arab-Israeli peace initiatives.

Correspondingly, the Shah increased his funding for the Kurds to \$30 million and began to help them with logistics and long-range artillery support. However, Kissinger was also concerned that by increasing U.S. funds, the Kurds might escalate the military situation beyond their present “defensive posture”. In a memo to Nixon, he wrote:

We may wish to ... avoid the impression of a long-term escalating commitment by telling Barzani that we will provide these additional funds for this year on a monthly basis but, in any event, would emphasize that we share the Shah’s view regarding maintenance of the defensive posture of the Kurds.⁷⁷⁹

By increasing funds to the Kurds and warning Barzani against escalating the military situation, Kissinger sought to gain leverage over the Kurds and utilize them as a coercive tool against Baghdad.

On March 27 Lowrie sent the State Department an assessment of the U.S. policy toward Iraq. By this point, it was clear a power struggle was underway between “extremist elements” controlling the party and security organs and a group of pragmatic, “constructive realistic elements,” which he called the “other Iraq.” Confronting or condemning Iraq’s aggressive actions, Lowrie argued, would be “morally confronting,” have “little chance of bringing about change for [the] better,” and “would probably strengthen [the] extremists since it would confirm their view of U.S. as chief enemy.” Instead, Lowrie proposed supporting the pragmatists by “[seizing] every opportunity that may strengthen constructive elements,” establishing “direct official ties” wherever possible, encouraging private links, and to responding favourably to any requests from the “other Iraq” elements. In short, Lowrie urged, the U.S. needed to “pursue a highly flexible policy that attempt[ed] to deal with both Iraqs.”⁷⁸⁰

⁷⁷⁹ Kissinger (1999), p.385.

⁷⁸⁰ Baghdad 0149 to State, “U.S. Policy Toward Iraq,” March 27, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), pp.1-3.

The State Department agreed with Lowrie's analysis but the U.S. Embassy in Tehran did not.⁷⁸¹ On April 10, Helms, the new U.S. Ambassador to Iran, cabled Washington to argue against the analysis. Helms indicated he sympathized with Lowrie's "commendable attempt ... to advance ideas for handling the dilemma presented to USG by [the] current regime in Baghdad," which he saw as "unremittingly extremist and relentlessly hostile to American interests." He concluded:

... [We] are frankly skeptical that in practice we could help the moderates without building up our extremist enemies, and we fear that our friends in the area would not take kindly to what appeared to them to be American courting [sic.] of [a] thoroughly irresponsible regime.

Helms warned that the Shah could misinterpret efforts to bolster the "other Iraq" and "be calculatingly accepted by Baghdad and then pointed to, both internally and externally, as a sign that the USG is not really very upset by recent incidents along the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border." Despite Helms' valid points, the department never rescinded its original approval of Lowrie's approach.⁷⁸²

In mid-May, Lowrie learned of a secret Soviet effort to bring about an Iran-Iraq rapprochement. When word of this reached Washington, the State Department informed the White House immediately. Apparently, the talks focused on two issues: Iran's support for the Kurds and the status of the Shatt al-Arab waterway.⁷⁸³ The U.S. Embassy in Tehran later confirmed this information.⁷⁸⁴ According to U.S. officials, the secret talks took place in late May in Geneva and went nowhere. Apparently Iran sought a new treaty recognizing the *de facto* situation along the waterway, which the Iraqis rejected.⁷⁸⁵ Even so, U.S. officials welcomed the Geneva talks as a step toward improving Iran-Iraq relations.⁷⁸⁶ In Baghdad, Lowrie argued the U.S. should

⁷⁸¹ State 060585 to U.S. Embassy Amman, et al., "U.S. Policy Toward Iraq," April 3, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973).

⁷⁸² Tehran 2250 to State, "U.S. Policy Toward Iraq," April 10, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), pp.1-2.

⁷⁸³ Baghdad 266 to State, "Iran-Iraq Negotiations," May 17, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), p. 1.

⁷⁸⁴ Tehran 3383 to State, "Iran-Iraq Negotiations," May 16, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), pp. 1-2.

⁷⁸⁵ Tehran 3718 to State, "Iran-Iraq Negotiations," May 30, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), p.1

⁷⁸⁶ Tehran 3548 to State, "Iran-Iraq Negotiations," May 22, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), p.1.

press Iran into meeting Iraq's "legitimate demands," since "a loosening of ties, particularly military ties, with [the] USSR and further enhancement of Iraq's independence" was in America's interests.⁷⁸⁷

On June 2, two Soviet diplomats traveled to Kurdistan to press Barzani once again into joining the National Front. Once again the Soviet efforts were fruitless, with Barzani pointing to the Ba'th's "Arabization" program, its failure to establish borders for the Kurdish region, the lack of Kurdish participation in government, and the numerous assassination attempts against him and his family, as evidence of the regime's bad faith. In response, the Soviets warned Barzani of becoming too reliant on the Shah and informed him of the secret Geneva talks. Concerned, Barzani travelled to Tehran to seek the Shah's advice.⁷⁸⁸ Brushing aside concerns about an Iran-Iraq rapprochement, the Shah suggested Barzani insist the regime hold free general elections as a precondition to his joining the coalition, arguing this would placate the Soviets and make the Ba'th adopt an intransigent position, since it could never hold elections without being swept from power.⁷⁸⁹

Meanwhile, on June 7-8 Jim Hoagland, a Pulitzer Prize winning reporter for the Washington Post, traveled secretly to Kurdistan to interview Barzani. During their conversation, Barzani told Hoagland he intended to maintain the peace until March 1974 when the terms of the March Accord were to be implemented, but should the government not keep its word, he was prepared to attack.⁷⁹⁰ Barzani also requested U.S. support against Baghdad,⁷⁹¹ offering the U.S. access to the Kirkuk oilfields in return for sending troops to protect his people from the "wolves" in Baghdad.⁷⁹² Unsurprisingly, Barzani's public call for American support provoked an aggressive response from Baghdad, with the Iraqi army attacking the Kurds in late

⁷⁸⁷ "Iran-Iraq Negotiations," May 17, 1973, *Op.Cit.*, p.1.

⁷⁸⁸ Memorandum, [excised] to Helms, "Your Memorandum relaying Shah's Statement Concerning Barzani," June 11, 1973 (CIA/FOIA/Helms), pp.1-6; and Helms to [excised], June 9, 1973 (CIA/FOIA/Helms), p.1.

⁷⁸⁹ Helms to Kissinger, August 25, 1973 (CIA/FOIA/Helms), pp.1-2.

⁷⁹⁰ Tehran 4108 to State, "Journalist Visits Barzani in Iraq," June 12, 1973 (NARA/RG59/SN/1970-1973/Box2382/ POL-13-3), p.1.

⁷⁹¹ Jim Hoagland, "The Kurds Gird for Another War," *Washington Post*, June 24, 1973, p.C4; and State 123621 to USINT Baghdad, et al., "Washington Post Article on Iraqi Kurdish Problem," June 25, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), p.1.

⁷⁹² Sluglett (2003), p.165.

June, leaving eighteen killed. Iranian officials attributed the violence to Hoagland's article, pointing out Baghdad had "decided on a degree of violence to demonstrate its displeasure [with] Barzani."⁷⁹³

In late June, Alam told Helms that Iraq was about to receive four Tupolev TU-22 "Blinder" supersonic aircrafts, equipped with missiles with a range of up to 100 miles. The missiles concerned the Shah because they could hit important targets in Iran without approaching the border. But Helms was not convinced by the Shah's assessment, concluding, "it [was] somewhat difficult at [that] point to judge whether or not [the Shah was] worrie[d] about such an eventuality, really believe[d] it, or [was] bolstering his case for increased armaments. It [was] probably a bit of all three."⁷⁹⁴ Lowrie shared Helms' skepticism but confirmed Italy and France had received similar reports.

There is something of [a] self-fulfilling prophecy to [the] Shah's analysis that Iraq could become [a] Soviet satellite. If Iran resists Iraqi overtures for détente, continues to give military assistance to [the] Kurds, maintains [an] uncompromising position on [the] Shatt al-Arab, and intensifies [its] anti-Iraqi propaganda, [the] Baath regime will continue to strike out against Iran through subversion and propaganda and continue to rely on [the] USSR for arms and protection.

Lowrie recommended the Shah meet Iraq "halfway or—as [the] stronger power—slightly more than halfway in order to test Iraqi seriousness about détente." On the Kurds, he said Iraq needed to allow a degree of self-autonomy but, because of Iranian and Israeli backing, the Kurds had been obstinate. Given this, Lowrie believed, "Kurdish resistance to compromise with [the] Baath would end if Iran stopped its assistance."⁷⁹⁵ Quite clearly, U.S. officials in Baghdad and Tehran viewed matters in a different light.

On July 5, Helms met with the Shah and King Hussein at the Caspian Sea. According to Helms, King Hussein warned of an impending Arab military operation

⁷⁹³ Tehran 4582 to State, "Report of Renewed Fighting Between Kurds and Iraqi Army," June 28, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), pp.1-2.

⁷⁹⁴ Tehran 4475 to State, "Increased Iraq-Soviet Ties," June 25, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), pp.1-2.

⁷⁹⁵ Baghdad 379 to State, "Iraqi-Soviet Ties," July 1, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), pp.1-2.

against Israel with the objective of retaking the Golan Heights, which “could occur at any time from now on.” Hussein said he had a “copy of [the] actual military plan which ha[d] been coordinated with [the] Egyptians.” This was a significant revelation, particularly since Helms reported it to Kissinger directly, and proves U.S. officials knew of the impending war at least three months prior to the October War. Worse yet, it shows Kissinger had ignored the warning. Months later after the war, Helms jotted a hand-written note on the document claiming, “I’ll bet [Kissinger] and others wish they had paid attention to this.” This makes clear that U.S. officials were aware of Egypt’s intent to attack Israel in the lead-up to the October War, yet chose to do nothing.⁷⁹⁶ On a historiographical note, Ashton’s biography of King Hussein and O’Connell’s memoirs both confirm this account.⁷⁹⁷

Meanwhile, on June 30 the power struggle between the regime’s pragmatist and extremist elements broke into the open when Nazim Kazzar, the head of Iraq’s security forces, tried to seize control in Baghdad. While the regime emerged unscathed, according to Tripp, the incident allowed Saddam to dispose of potential opponents, with over thirty senior officials executed, including the head of the Military Bureau of the Ba’th, and many more arrested.⁷⁹⁸ Another step involved the formation of a National Front government with the communists on July 6. The Kurds were excluded.⁷⁹⁹ Recognizing Western fears about the inclusion of communists in the government, Saddam met with Western journalists in early July to tell them, “Iraq would welcome moves by the U.S. and Britain that could lead to [a] normalization of relations.”⁸⁰⁰ This unexpected move led Lowrie to recommend that Nixon send President al-Bakr a “presidential message” on occasion of Iraq’s revolution’s anniversary,⁸⁰¹ but the State Department was cautious. On July 9, it advised Lowrie it was “too early to determine exactly what changes and political orientation, if any, Iraqi regime [would] adopt” following the attempted coup.

⁷⁹⁶ Helms to Kissinger, July 7, 1973 (CIA/FOIA/Helms), pp.1-8.

⁷⁹⁷ See Ashton (2007), pp.172-73; and O’Connell (2011), pp.122-25.

⁷⁹⁸ Tripp (2007), p.201. See also Sluglett (2003), pp.160-62.

⁷⁹⁹ Sluglett (2003), p.162.

⁸⁰⁰ State 140125 to USINT Baghdad, “Press Interview with Saddam Hussein,” July 17, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), pp.1-2.

⁸⁰¹ Baghdad 394 to State, “Relations with West after Abortive Coup,” July 9, 1973 (NPL/HAK/Box138/Kurdish Problem-Vol. I/June 1972-Oct 1973), pp.1-2.

Further, “it would be inopportune for USG to take any immediate initiatives which could be misinterpreted by one or another faction of the [Ba’th Party].” However, the department recognized the progress Iraq had made on economic, commercial and cultural levels, and advised Lowrie to “remain as aloof as possible from Iraq’s internal political affairs.”

Our basic position is that we would welcome an improvement in our relations with Iraq and would certainly welcome the resumption of diplomatic relations.... We are considering what further signals we might give responsive to [the] Saddam Hussein interview....⁸⁰²

Saddam’s consolidation of power following the Kazzar coup and his sudden willingness to improve ties with the U.S. signaled that the pragmatists had emerged victorious in the regime’s power struggle.

Unsurprisingly, Saddam’s interview alarmed Barzani, who feared it could lead to an improvement in U.S.-Iraqi relations and lead to the end of U.S. support. On July 27, Shawfiq Qazzaz arrived at the State Department and spoke with Edward Djerejian, the Country Officer for Iraq. When Qazzaz inquired about the state of U.S.-Iraqi relations, Djerejian replied relations had improved, pointing to the IPC settlement and Saddam’s apparent interest in improving relations. Worried, Qazzaz said Barzani was “watching very closely the status of U.S./Iraqi relations in order to know what he can expect or not expect from the U.S. in terms of support.”⁸⁰³ In response to Qazzaz’s approach, Kissinger sent Helms a cable asking whether U.S. support for the Kurds should be increased further. In his response on August 17, Helms recommended increasing the cash subsidy by 50% and for the CIA to begin “stockpiling arms for contingency supply” in the event of renewed hostilities. Kissinger agreed.⁸⁰⁴ Similarly, the Shah also increased his subsidy by “a little more” than fifty per cent.⁸⁰⁵ Meanwhile, on September 22, the Iraqi regime followed up its interest to improve relations with the U.S. by awarding a U.S. firm, Brown and Root

⁸⁰² State 139801 to USINT Baghdad, “Iraq’s Relations with West After Abortive Coup,” July 17, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), pp.1-3.

⁸⁰³ DoS, Memorandum of Conversation, “U.S. Attitude Toward the Kurds,” July 27, 1973 (NPL/HAK/Box138/Kurdish Problem-Vol. I/June 1972-Oct 1973), pp.1-3.

⁸⁰⁴ Helms to Kissinger, August 17, 1973 (CIA/FOIA/Helms), p.1. Kissinger responded to Helms’ cable in WH 31939, date unknown.

⁸⁰⁵ Helms to Kissinger, August 25, 1973 (CIA/FOIA/Helms), pp.1-2.

(a subsidiary of Halliburton), a \$122 million contract to build an offshore, deep sea, oil terminal. This was the single largest business deal Iraq had ever signed.⁸⁰⁶ This shows that as the Iraqi regime sought to improve relations with the U.S., the Nixon administration responded by increasing its support to the Kurds.

In late August Nixon told Kissinger he was planning on nominating him to replace William Rogers as Secretary of State, while keeping him on as national security advisor. Among the State Department's top brass views were mixed, with some officials uncertain if Kissinger could manage the department's massive bureaucracy, while others welcomed the prospect of returning to the center of policymaking after years of being sidelined.⁸⁰⁷ Ultimately, Kissinger's appointment as Secretary of State provided him with unparalleled influence over the machinery of U.S. foreign policy, which would prove important as the pressure of the Watergate scandal began to weigh heavily on Nixon.

III

While the U.S. policy toward the October War has been examined elsewhere,⁸⁰⁸ the Iraqi regime's response to the war, Israel's attempt to convince the Kurds to attack Baghdad, and Kissinger's personal effort to prevent the latter from happening, have not. Remarkably, the October 1973 War actually led to an improvement in U.S.-Iraqi relations. This was because the Egyptians, Syrians, and Soviets had not consulted the Iraqi regime prior to the war. In retaliation, Iraq renewed diplomatic relations with Iran, West Germany, and Britain; awarded a U.S. firm with a major contract; and refused to participate in the Saudi-led oil boycott. This again reflected Iraq's pragmatism.

Two weeks before the war, Lowrie confirmed the Soviet Union was sending Iraq two hundred helicopters and fourteen TU-22 "Blinder" supersonic bombers.⁸⁰⁹

⁸⁰⁶ Baghdad 506 to State, "US Firm Awarded Contract for Deep Sea Terminal," September 22, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), p.1.

⁸⁰⁷ *Time Magazine*, "Foreign Relations: A Super Secretary to Shake Up State," September 3, 1973.

⁸⁰⁸ See Barry Rubin, "US Policy and the October War," MERIP Reports, No.23 (1973), pp.3-12, 26; FRUS/1969-76/XXV (2012); and William Burr, "The October War and U.S. Policy," (Washington, DC: National Security Archive, 2003). Available online: <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB98/#VII>.

⁸⁰⁹ Baghdad 513 to State, "Iraqi-Indian Relations," September 23, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), p.1.

The planes arrived the next day.⁸¹⁰ About a week later, the Shah raised the bombers with U.S. officials and demanded “a firm commitment” from the U.S. about the purchase of F-14/15s to balance Iraq’s new weaponry.⁸¹¹ Days before the war, Deputy Secretary of Defense William Clements leaked details of Iraq’s receipt of the bombers,⁸¹² prompting Helms to press Kissinger into reasserting the State Department’s “traditional right to clear beforehand [all] Pentagon speeches having foreign affairs content.”⁸¹³ Kissinger agreed and drafted a new presidential directive requiring all cabinet officers clear statements on foreign policy matters with the White House.⁸¹⁴

Unknown to Iraq at the time, the delivery of the TU-22s was in anticipation of the outbreak of the war on October 6. When the war began, Baghdad was caught off guard because Cairo, Damascus, and Moscow had not consulted with it beforehand.⁸¹⁵ Even though the regime capitalized on the war to achieve a number of its domestic and foreign policy objectives, Iraq’s retaliatory measures against the U.S. for supporting Israel were restrained. For instance, when the regime announced the nationalization of the U.S. shares of the Basra Petroleum Company (BPC) it also offered the company’s owners reasonable compensation. At the same time, the INOC astonished U.S. officials by awarding a \$15 million contract to U.S. Steel for the purchase of four oil-drilling rigs.⁸¹⁶ Iraq also requested to re-establish diplomatic relations with Iran on October 7,⁸¹⁷ which was aimed at neutralizing its eastern borders so it could turn its attention on Israel. Even though Iran accepted, Iraq was still only able to dispatch a single armored brigade to Syria.⁸¹⁸ Finally, the Iraqis also

⁸¹⁰ State 197541 to U.S. Embassy Tehran, “TU-22 Bombers in Iraq,” October 4, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), p.1.

⁸¹¹ Tehran 6996 to State, “Audience with Shah,” October 2, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), p.3.

⁸¹² Tehran 6982 to State, “TU-22 Bombers in Iraq,” October 2, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), p.1.

⁸¹³ Helms to Kissinger, October 2, 1973 (CIA/FOIA/Helms), pp.1-2.

⁸¹⁴ White House, WH32433 to U.S. Embassy Tehran, October 3, 1973 (CIA/FOIA/Helms), p.1.

⁸¹⁵ Baghdad 596 to State, “Post War Assessment of Iraq and Policy Recommendations,” November 4, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), pp.1-3.

⁸¹⁶ Baghdad 546 to State, “Exxon and Mobile Nationalization,” October 9, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), p.1.

⁸¹⁷ Tehran 7124 to State, “Iraqi Bid to Re-Establish Relations with Iran,” October 8, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), pp.1-2.

⁸¹⁸ Kissinger (1999), p.586.

refused to participate in the Saudi-led oil embargo, arguing that production cuts would only hurt Europe more than the United States.⁸¹⁹ Taken together, the BPC's nationalization, the awarding of a contract to U.S. Steel, the resumption of diplomatic relations with Iran, its dispatch of only a token force to Syria, and its refusal to participate in the oil embargo, all suggests the Iraqi regime's response to the war was pragmatic and aimed at advancing its own interests, irrespective of the views of the rest of the Arab world.

On the ninth day of the war, Barzani sent Kissinger an urgent message asking for advice about an Israeli proposal to launch an offensive against Baghdad. The message read:

The [Israelis] suggest we try to gain territories in Kurdistan while it is busy with the war. They promised that they will study helping us with arms with Iran. No troops have been withdrawn from our area and we have no such offensive weapons. We [would] like to know your opinion on this.⁸²⁰

Kissinger stated in his memoir that the proposal originated from an Israeli liaison officer "eager to burnish [his] credentials at home." But from the outset, there were flaws in the plan:

The Kurds possessed very few heavy weapons; such artillery as they had was manned by Iranians who never ventured far from the Iranian border. The Kurds were capable of defending their mountainous homeland where Iraqi tanks and aircraft found it difficult to operate. But their lightly armed forces did not stand a chance in the flat terrain beyond their homeland against a large Iraqi army equipped with advanced Soviet heavy weapons and hundreds of tanks. An offensive beyond the redoubt would have guaranteed the complete destruction of Kurdish military forces.

Consequently, Kissinger asked Helms to consult with the Shah, who agreed the proposal was suicidal, since the Kurds were not equipped for offensive operations.⁸²¹ Kissinger agreed and had Helms inform Barzani it was not "advisable for you to undertake the offensive military action that the Israelis have suggested to

⁸¹⁹ Rüdiger Graf, "Making Use of the 'Oil Weapon': Western Industrialized Countries and Arab Petropolitics in 1973–1974," *Diplomatic History*, 36/1 (2012), p.194.

⁸²⁰ [excised] to Director, October 15, 1973 (CIA/FOIA/Helms), p.1.

⁸²¹ Kissinger (1999), pp.586-87.

you.” Barzani received the message on October 19.⁸²² Frankly, Kissinger saw no advantage of sending the Kurds to their death, since he knew Iraq was already irrelevant in the overall scope of the war.

The 1973 Arab-Israeli war would prove to be a pivotal moment in Kissinger’s career. In his dual roles of Secretary of State and national security advisor, he was arguably the most powerful man in Washington, surpassing even that of Nixon, who was consumed by the near-daily revelations about the Watergate scandal, his eroding domestic standing, and calls for his impeachment. While Nixon would cling to office for nearly a year, the pressure from Watergate would incapacitate him. From the 1973 war onward Kissinger assumed control of the conduct of U.S. foreign policy, especially with regard to Iraq.⁸²³

Conclusion

In the year between Nixon’s approval of the Kurdish operation and the 1973 war, the U.S. saw a remarkable thaw in its relations with Iraq. The change was due to the emergence of Saddam Hussein as the dominant force within the regime. With the support of President al-Bakr, Saddam sought to improve Iraq’s international standing by settling the IPC dispute, stabilizing domestic politics by forming a National Front government, and awarding U.S. firms with important contracts. Unfortunately, the contradictory nature of U.S. policy prevented the Nixon administration from seizing this opportunity. In Baghdad, Lowrie urged the U.S. to bolster the practical, moderate, technocratic “other” Iraq, but the White House responded by calming Barzani’s fears through increasing its aid. Indeed, Iraq’s response to the October 1973 war further underscored its moderating trend with the regime resuming diplomatic relations with Britain, Iran, and West Germany; awarding further contracts to U.S. firms in the middle of the war—a stark contrast to the more moderate Arif regime’s severing of relations in 1967; and refusing to

⁸²² White House, WH32507 to U.S. Embassy Tehran, October 3, 1973 (CIA/FOIA/Helms), p.1; and Kissinger (1999), p.587.

⁸²³ See Dallek (2007), pp.520-33.

participate in the Saudi-led oil embargo. Iraq also seemed to pull itself away from the Soviets in favour of the French. Even so, the White House, with Nixon consumed by the Watergate scandal, missed these signals, perhaps purposely. Following the war, Kissinger ordered a sharp increase in U.S. support for the Kurds at the expense of improved U.S.-Iraqi relations. This would have a profound impact in the coming year, when the Iraqi regime renewed its war against the Kurds, dragging both the U.S. and Iraq's Soviet patron deeper into the Kurdish conflict.

Chapter 7: Kissinger and the Kurdish War

October 1973—March 1975

This chapter will examine U.S. policy toward Iraq between the October War in 1973 and the Algiers Accord in March 1975. It will show that during this period, President Nixon's Secretary of State and national security advisor, Henry Kissinger and his deputy, Brent Scowcroft, took on a significant role in directing the CIA's Kurdish operation.⁸²⁴ Throughout this period, Kissinger showed a strong commitment to the Kurds, ignored the CIA's numerous warnings about the operation, and ordered further U.S. assistance, including finding ways to transfer to the Kurds Soviet-made arms captured by the Israelis during the October War. As with Nixon, Kissinger rarely consulted with the President Ford, keeping him apprised on a 'need-to-know' basis.⁸²⁵ He also kept details of the operation hidden from the State Department, which was hoping to build upon Iraq's positive gestures toward the U.S. during 1973.⁸²⁶ This meant that a small group of U.S. officials—Kissinger, Helms, the CIA station chief in Tehran (Arthur Callahan), and his deputy station chief—ran the Kurdish operation. When the Kurdish War resumed in March 1974 there were three separate dynamics—the Arab-Israeli conflict, Iran-Iraq rivalry, and the Cold War—that coalesced to ensure it would have a violent conclusion. Of these, the Ford administration's policy continued to be driven by the Cold War thinking. After all, the U.S. was backing the Kurds in a war against the Soviet-supported Iraqi regime. As with 1963, the Kurdish War once again took on Cold War dimensions, only this time the superpowers had switch sides.

⁸²⁴ See Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979); *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982); and *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999). See also Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005); Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (London: Penguin, 2007); Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007); and Alistair Horne, *Kissinger: 1973, the Crucial Year* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009).

⁸²⁵ Interview with Brent Scowcroft, June 27, 2011.

⁸²⁶ Email correspondence with CIA official, November 12, 2012; interview with Lowrie, December 23, 1989, *Op.Cit.*; and email correspondence with Ronald Neumann, April 27, 2011.

Like Nixon's decision to support the Kurds, the highly controversial and tragic end of the Kurdish War in March 1975 has been the product of much discussion. This was because when the Shah terminated his support to the Kurds, the U.S. and Israeli operations to support the Kurds also came to an abrupt halt. The dominant argument is the U.S. abandoned the Kurds without warning, ignored Barzani's heartfelt pleas to assistance, and failed to provide humanitarian assistance in the aftermath. The leading proponent of this view is Representative Otis Pike, who led the House Select Committee on Intelligence, which was charge with investigating the financial side of covert action. Pike, it seems, was determined to show that the Kurdish operation was illegal because the Nixon administration had bypassed the 40 Committee.⁸²⁷ While the report provides valuable information on aspects of the Kurdish operation, newly available documents reveal the report was quite subjective. According to Gerald Haines, Pike had once admitted privately that he wanted to use the report to expose the CIA as an out of control "rouge elephant."⁸²⁸ Kissinger modestly believed that Pike wanted "to show that [he was an] evil genius."⁸²⁹ To a degree he was right. In January 1976, when Congress voted to keep the *Pike Report* secret, members of the committee leaked the report to the press.⁸³⁰ On February 4, William Safire published an article in the *New York Times* that accused the Ford administration of selling out the Kurds. The accusations in the article, "Mr. Ford's Secret Sellout," clearly reflect the conclusions of the *Pike Report*.⁸³¹ Even though the State Department dismissed Safire's article as "a collection of distortions and untruths unsupported by any documents or the record,"⁸³² a full copy of the *Pike Report* was published in the *Village Voice* on February 16.⁸³³

⁸²⁷ White House, Memorandum of Conversation, October 31, 1975 (DNSA/KT01821), p.2.

⁸²⁸ Gerald Haines, "Looking for a Rogue Elephant: The Pike Committee Investigations and the CIA," *Studies in Intelligence* (Winter 1998-99), pp.1-2.

⁸²⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, October 31, 1975, *Op.Cit.*, p.2.

⁸³⁰ *The Village Voice*, "The Report on the CIA That President Ford Doesn't Want You to Read," 16 February 1976.

⁸³¹ *Pike Report*, pp.195-98, 211-17; and Safire (1976), p.26.

⁸³² *New York Times*, "Column by Safire on Kurds Assailed," February 6, 1976, p.8.

⁸³³ *The Village Voice*, "The Report on the CIA That President Ford Doesn't Want You to Read," 16 February 1976.

Unsurprisingly, much of the scholarship on the U.S. decision to end the Kurdish operation uses the *Pike Report* and repeat Pike and Safire's arguments.⁸³⁴ The one exception is Douglas Little's detailed account of U.S.-Kurdish relations, which is based largely on archival materials. He explains that by January 1975 the CIA's arms pipeline was "running dry," suggesting the U.S. only had a limited capacity to help the Kurds further. While he places the onus of the decision on the Shah, he is highly critical of the Ford administration, accusing it of responding with "not only with a blind eye but also with deaf ears."⁸³⁵

This chapter chronicles the formulation and execution of U.S. policy during the 1974-75 Kurdish War and argues that the Ford administration's actions were reflective of a realistic analysis of its overt and covert capabilities. When the Shah decided to cut support for the Kurds, it was presented to the U.S. as a *fait accompli*. With neither Iran nor Turkey willing to let the U.S. to support the Kurds from their territory, the U.S. and the Israelis were left with no other option but to end their operations.

I

In the five months between the October War and the outbreak of the Kurdish War, the Iraqi regime tried to realign its policy toward the West, improving its relations with France in particular. Correspondingly, Iraq's relations with the Soviets underwent a chill due to Moscow's failure to consult with Baghdad prior to the October War as the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation had required.⁸³⁶ U.S.-Iraqi commercial relations also improved when the regime rewarded U.S. firms with important contracts. But just after Kissinger secured the Egyptian-Israeli disengagement agreement in January 1974, he asked the Shah to escalate tensions with along the Iraqi border in order to draw Iraqi forces away from Syria. This tactic was aimed at securing an Israeli withdrawal from Syria, which Kissinger achieved

⁸³⁴ Vanly (1978), p.169; Pelletiere (1984), pp.167-68; Marr (1985), p.234; Ranelagh (1987), pp.607-608; Bulloch and Morris (1992), p.136-41; Meho and Nehme (1995), p.53-54; Randal (1997), pp.145-51; Gunter (1999), pp.428; Daugherty (2004), pp.174-76; and Prados (2004), pp.393-94.

⁸³⁵ Little (2010), pp.80-83.

⁸³⁶ Baghdad 596 to State, "Post War Assessment of Iraq and Policy Recommendations," November 4, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), pp.1-3.

later in May. The Shah agreed to Kissinger's request, which led to a sharp escalation of relations between Iran and Iraq and contributed to the outbreak of the Kurdish War.

Following the October War, Iraq's relations with the Soviets underwent a major decline. On November 27, Moscow sent a high level delegation to Baghdad to soften the impact of "policy differences" resulting from the war.⁸³⁷ But Iraq rejected Soviet efforts to ease tensions and retaliated by restoring diplomatic relations with Britain in December. This move shocked U.S. officials in Baghdad.⁸³⁸ Iraq also expanded its relations with France, by signing lucrative oil and arms deals and receiving high-level delegations, which culminated in a state visit by France's Prime Minister Jacques Chirac in late-1974.⁸³⁹ Iraq also improved relations with the U.S., rewarding U.S. firms with lucrative contracts, including the Deep Sea Terminal project with Root and Brown and the purchase of a fleet of Boeing passenger jets. This led U.S. officials in Baghdad to advise Washington that Iraq wanted to "keep lines to [the] U.S. open."⁸⁴⁰ Clearly Iraq's sudden tack away from the Soviet Union toward the West was a positive development in U.S.-Iraqi relations. Unfortunately, this had little impact on how the White House conducted its foreign policy.

Coinciding with Iraq's opening to the West, Kissinger engaged in shuttle diplomacy in order to bring about Israel's withdrawal from Egypt and Syria.⁸⁴¹ On the Egyptian front, Kissinger managed to achieve some success, securing a disengagement agreement in January 1974. But the Syrian front proved to be more challenging. Part of the problem was the presence of Iraqi soldiers in Syria. Initially, the Iraqis had withdrawn its forces from Syria, but had been persuaded to return

⁸³⁷ Baghdad 639 to State, "Soviet-Iraqi Relations," December 1, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), pp.1-2.

⁸³⁸ Baghdad 655 to State, "Resumption of UK-Iraq Relations not Foreseen," December 12, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), p.1.

⁸³⁹ Baghdad 863 to State, "Assessment of Chirac Visit," December 7, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), p.1.

⁸⁴⁰ "Post War Assessment...", November 4, 1973, *Op.Cit.*, pp.1-3.

⁸⁴¹ See Amos Perlmutter, "Crisis Management: Kissinger's Middle East Negotiations," *International Studies Quarterly*, 19/3 (1975), pp.316-43; Adel Safty, "Sadat's Negotiations with the United States and Israel," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 50/3 (1991), pp.287-89; and Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, "The United States and Israel since 1948: A 'Special Relationship'?" *Diplomatic History*, 22/2 (1998), pp.248-49. For U.S. documents on the disengagement talks, see FRUS/1969-76/XXVI, pp.1-380.

them by Algeria and Libya in November 1973.⁸⁴² This led Sadat and Kissinger to hatch a scheme whereby Iran would stir up trouble along the Iran-Iraq border in order to force Iraq to withdraw its forces. Though not discussed in secondary materials, primary evidence supports this claim. According to Henry Precht, a U.S. diplomat in Iran at the time, “Kissinger wanted to divert Iraq's attention away from Arab-Israel issues as he went through negotiations with Egypt and Syria” and thought the easiest way to convince Iraq to withdraw was to stir up trouble in Kurdistan.⁸⁴³ A few months later, Kissinger told Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, “the Egyptians [had] asked [him] to ask the Shah to put pressure on Iraq so Iraqi troops all leave Syria.... That [was] why there was trouble in February between Iraq and Iran.”⁸⁴⁴

Fighting between Iran and Iraq broke out on December 24 after an “Iranian incursion” into Iraq. This was followed by skirmishes on February 4, 1974 and a large battle involving artillery exchanges and armoured vehicles on February 10.⁸⁴⁵ Eventually, Iraq took the matter to the Security Council, demanding it condemn Iran’s aggression.⁸⁴⁶ Throughout February, Iran and Iraq engaged in a rhetorical “slinging match” at the Security Council,⁸⁴⁷ with the Iraqis demanding the Security Council pass a resolution or consensus statement condemning Iran’s actions. This put the U.S. in a difficult position. After all, it was Kissinger who asked the Shah to start all this. With Iran about to be condemned, the U.S. was worried the Iranians might ask it to use its veto to block a resolution.⁸⁴⁸ Obviously this was unacceptable, so Kissinger pressured the Shah to accept a watered down consensus statement,

⁸⁴² Baghdad 600 to State, “Iraq Rejoins Battle,” November 7, 1973 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1973), pp.1-2.

⁸⁴³ Interview with Henry Precht, March 8, 2000. Available online: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mfdip.2004pre01>.

⁸⁴⁴ White House, Memorandum of Conversation, Kissinger and Meir, May 7, 1974 (DNSA/KT01143), p. 12.

⁸⁴⁵ USUN 472 to State, “Iraqi Request for SC Meeting,” February 12, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), pp.1-2; and Tehran 1159 to State, “Iraqi-Iranian Border Clashes,” February 11, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), pp.1-2.

⁸⁴⁶ “Iraqi Request for SC Meeting,” February 12, 1974, *Op.Cit.*, p.1.

⁸⁴⁷ See USUN 531 to State, “Baghdad: SC Meeting on Iraqi Complaint,” February 15, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), p.1; and USUN 575 to State, “Iraqi Complaint in SC,” February 20, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), pp.1-2.

⁸⁴⁸ USUN 634 to State, “Developments in Iraqi SC Complaint,” February 26, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), pp.1-2..

passed on February 28.⁸⁴⁹ Significantly, the Security Council called for the Secretary-General to appoint a special representative to investigate the event and report back.⁸⁵⁰ Irrespective, the Iranians ignored the Security Council and continued to escalate tensions with Iraq into March.⁸⁵¹

This crisis clearly suggests the U.S. played a role in the escalation of Iran-Iraq tensions during the spring of 1974. Kissinger conspired with Sadat and the Shah to force Iraq to withdraw its forces from Syria by creating a diversion on the Iranian border. The effort was a success and contributed to Kissinger securing Israel's withdrawal from Syria in May 1974. Unfortunately, the escalation of tensions between Iran and Iraq also contributed to the renewal of the Kurdish War in March 1974.

II

In spite of Iraq's steps toward pragmatism following the October War, the American commitment to Iran and the Kurds overshadowed any desire to capitalize on these opportunities. While U.S. officials in Baghdad wanted to reinforce and encourage this trend, the White House ignored their advice and increased its financial and military support for the Kurds. Consequently, key opportunities to improve U.S.-Iraqi relations were missed because top U.S. policymakers, like Kissinger, saw greater importance in their commitment to the Shah—who helped advance U.S. interests in terms of America's Cold War strategy in the Middle East—than in cultivating friendly relations with Iraq. This stood in stark contrast to the more balanced approaches of all previous U.S. administrations examined. This situation was exacerbated in March 1974 when the Iraqi regime passed an

⁸⁴⁹ See USUN 674 to State, "Iraqi Complaint in SC," February 27, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), p.1; and USUN 697 to State, "SC Adopts Consensus in Iran-Iraq Dispute," February 28, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), pp.1-2..

⁸⁵⁰ United Nations Security Council, "Note by the President of the Security Council," February 28, 1974, S/11229, pp.1-2.

⁸⁵¹ Tehran 1735 to State, "Iran-Iraq Border Clash," March 4, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), p. 1; and Tehran 1779 to State, "Latest Iran-Iraq Border Clash," March 5, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), p.1. See also Alam (1991), p.357.

autonomy law that fell short of what had it had promised the Kurds in 1970.⁸⁵²

Before long, the Soviet-backed Iraqi army launched an offensive against the U.S.-backed Kurds, drawing the Kurdish War deeper into the Cold War.

When Iraq announced its autonomy law on March 11 it gave Barzani fifteen days to accept.⁸⁵³ Clashes soon broke out in the north and rumours began circulating in Baghdad that the Peshmerga had been called to arms.⁸⁵⁴ Correspondingly, Iran escalated tensions along the Iran-Iraq border, signaling in clear terms that it supported the Kurds.⁸⁵⁵ In the two week period before the deadline, Barzani sought reassurance from his allies of their support. On March 18, he asked the Shah for increased economic, financial and military support and to intercede with the Turkish government about reopening its border, which was sealed after Iraq's announcement. Barzani also raised the question of unilaterally declaring autonomy from Baghdad; presented the Shah with a \$180 million budget proposal, which covered administration, defense, education, and public health; and asked for Iranian recognition and diplomatic support at the UN. The Shah told Barzani he would raise his financial subsidy and look into providing him with better weaponry, but in the interim would need to consult his advisors on the autonomy question. The next day Barzani met with the CIA station chief, Arthur Callahan, at a SAVAK guesthouse in Tehran. After the meeting, Helms cabled Kissinger's new deputy, Brent Scowcroft, and suggested Iran was better positioned to intercede with the Turks and that level of U.S. diplomatic support for the Kurds at international forums, like the UN, would "depend on whether the Iraqis actually engage[d] in [a] genocidal war against the Kurds."⁸⁵⁶

⁸⁵² Baghdad 136 to State, "Nominal Autonomy for Kurdistan," March 10, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), pp.1-2. For a detailed analysis of the law, see British Interests Section to FCO, "Autonomy for Kurdistan," March 12, 1974 (BNA/FCO.8/2307/doc.7), pp.1-2.

⁸⁵³ British Interests Section to FCO, "Iraq Kurds," March 18, 1974 (BNA/FCO.8/2307/doc.12), p.1. See also Baghdad 183 to State, "Kurdish Autonomy," March 30, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), p.1.

⁸⁵⁴ Baghdad 136 to State, "Nominal Autonomy for Kurdistan," March 10, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), pp.1-2.

⁸⁵⁵ Tehran 2271 to State, "New Incidents on Iran-Iraq Border Reported," March 20, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), p.1.

⁸⁵⁶ Helms to Scowcroft, March 20, 1974 (CIA/FOIA/Helms), pp.1-2.

Because the law withheld longstanding principal demands, like a proportional share of oil revenue, and gave the regime a veto over any Kurdish legislation, Barzani and the Kurds could never have accepted it. This point was overlooked in the *Pike Report*, which claims that the U.S. prodded Barzani into reject the regime's autonomy plan, when the Kurds could have gained "at least a measure of autonomy [and avoid] further bloodshed."⁸⁵⁷ This claim, however, is misleading. When Barzani's request to declare autonomy reached Washington it "triggered a flood of communication".⁸⁵⁸ Discussions focused on two elements: 1) whether the U.S. would support a unilateral declaration of autonomy; and 2) the level of support the U.S. was willing to give. Certainly Barzani's request for \$180 million was far beyond what the U.S. could provide while maintaining plausible deniability. On March 21, the new Director of Central Intelligence, William Colby, wrote to Kissinger, cautioning against any increase in U.S. aid.⁸⁵⁹ Kissinger rejected his caution, commenting later, "Colby's reluctance was as unrealistic as Barzani's enthusiasm." Instead, he pushed the NSC staff to submit a proposal, leading to intensive discussions between the NSC staff, CIA, and Helms in Tehran.⁸⁶⁰ On March 22, the CIA sent the White House a memo arguing against increasing funds, citing the operation's objective was to stalemate the conflict, not support an autonomous Kurdish government.⁸⁶¹ The NSC staff was worried that Barzani's proposal went "well beyond" the CIA's covert capabilities and, if the U.S. agreed, the operation risked being exposed, which would create problems with the USSR, Turkey, and certain Arab states. "All of this was ... pointed out to Mulla Mustafa at the outset of [our] relationship." Additionally, the NSC staff questioned the benefit of establishing a "kind of rump government" in Kurdistan, inquiring, "would it ... even be to Mullah Mustafa's advantage ... to formalize and symbolize his autonomy"? Indeed, the NSC staff believed a declaration of autonomy "would give Iraq no choice but to launch a major attack against Kurdistan if it [was] to protect its national integrity." Finally,

⁸⁵⁷ *Pike Report*, p.197.

⁸⁵⁸ Kissinger (1999), p.589.

⁸⁵⁹ CIA, Memorandum for Kissinger, "Mullah Mustafa Barzani's Request," March 21, 1974 (NPL/HAK/Box138/Kurdish Problem-Vol. I/June 1972-Oct 1973), p.1.

⁸⁶⁰ Kissinger (1999), p.589

⁸⁶¹ *Pike Report*, p.214.

the NSC staff wondered if Barzani could even form a government, and if he did, “would the Shah look with favor on the establishment of a formalized autonomous government?” Instead, the NSC staff preferred the continuation of a stalemate situation that weakened the Iraqi regime. It concluded:

Up to now neither the Shah nor [the U.S.] ha[d] wished to see the matter resolved one way or the other.... For Mullah Mustafa to attempt to form a government in [his] safe-haven would be to narrow his own options to a dangerous point and gratuitously provoke Iraq (with strong Soviet and possibly even Turkish support) [into war].

Recognizing the difficult conundrum the Kurds faced, the NSC staff proposed providing Barzani with a “token amount” of \$500,000 to \$750,000 in refugee aid and 900,000 pounds of non-attributable small arms and ammunition. Through these gestures, the NSC staff believed would signal Barzani that the U.S. was still sympathetic and friendly to his predicament, was prepared to continue to help on a scale that could be kept covert, but could not “play a prime role in the new ballgame.”⁸⁶²

When Kissinger returned to Washington from a trip to Europe on March 28, Scowcroft presented him with the NSC staff’s proposal on the Kurds. According to Kissinger’s memoir, it was clear “the existing program was inadequate even for defense.”⁸⁶³ Consequently, Kissinger ordered Helms to tell the Shah he was prepared to: 1) offer refugee relief in amounts up to \$1 million, in addition to continuing the subsidy; 2) provide 900,000 pounds of non-attributable small arms and ammunition; and 3) increase America’s financial contribution to \$8 million. Kissinger also told Helms to emphasize to the Shah that an early Kurdish promulgation of autonomy would not serve anyone’s interests, which at this juncture were:

(a) to give [the] Kurds capacity to maintain [a] reasonable base for negotiating recognition of rights by Baghdad, (b) to keep present Iraqi government tied down, but (c) not to divide Iraq permanently because an independent Kurdish area would not be economically viable and

⁸⁶² White House, Memorandum, Scowcroft to Helms, no date, (NPL/HAK/Box138/Kurdish Problem—Vol.II/doc.7), p.1-4.

⁸⁶³ Kissinger (1999), p.589.

U.S. and Iran [had] no interest in closing [the] door on good relations with Iraq under moderate leadership.

Secondly, Helms was to convey to Barzani that U.S. support for a Kurdish government on a long-term basis was not possible because it could not be kept covert. These decisions were conveyed to the Shah and then passed to the Kurds.⁸⁶⁴ On March 26, Barzani let Saddam's deadline pass and continued to prepare for war.⁸⁶⁵

This account stands in contrast to the *Pike Report's* claims. First, there is no indication that the U.S. "prodded" Barzani into rejecting the Iraqi offer, rather it advised him that declaring autonomy would lead to war. Second, the *Pike Report* left out inconvenient truths, like its claim that the U.S. "refused to provide humanitarian assistance," which was not true.⁸⁶⁶ Further, the *Pike Report* manipulated sentences to suit its agenda, altering the NSC staff's question "would the Shah look with favor on the establishment of a formalized autonomous government?" to read, "We would think that [our ally] would not look with favor on the establishment of a formalized autonomous government."⁸⁶⁷ These misrepresentations raise questions about the *Pike Report's* objectivity.

Throughout late-March and early-April Barzani consolidated his position and prepared for the Iraqi offensive.⁸⁶⁸ The regime responded on April 6 by calling up its reserves, imposing an economic blockade, unleashing its air force against Kurdish positions, and launching a few probing assaults, while holding off a major ground offensive.⁸⁶⁹ Buoyed by his success, Barzani ignored U.S. advice and announced his plan for Kurdish autonomy on April 16.⁸⁷⁰ As expected, Baghdad saw this as

⁸⁶⁴ Memorandum, Kissinger to Helms, no date (NPL/HAK/Box138/Kurdish Problem–Vol.II/doc.20), pp. 1-2.

⁸⁶⁵ DoS, Memorandum of Conversation, "The Secretary's Principals and Regionals Staff Meeting, Monday, April 22, 1974 – 3:00 p.m.," April 23, 1974 (DNSA/KT01111), p.41. For a balance of forces, see Government of Israel, "Situation in Kurdistan," May 7, 1974 (NPL/HAK/Box138/Kurdish Problem–Vol.II/doc.29), p.2; McDowell, p.337; Parsi, p.54; Pollack, pp.176-177; and Sluglett, p.168.

⁸⁶⁶ *Pike Report*, p.198.

⁸⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.214.

⁸⁶⁸ Pollack (2002), p.178.

⁸⁶⁹ See Sluglett (2003), p.169; Tabriz 7 to State, "Kurdish War in Iraq: Iranian Inputs," June 9, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), p.1; and CIA, Memorandum, Colby to Kissinger, "Transmittal of Kurdish Democratic Party Autonomy Plan for the Kurdish Area of Iraq," April 16, 1974 (NPL/HAK/Box138/Kurdish Problem–Vol.II/doc.21), p.3.

⁸⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.1.

tantamount to a declaration of independence,⁸⁷¹ escalated its bombing campaign,⁸⁷² and finally launched a major offensive in late April. As Pollock observed, the campaign would barely resemble previous wars thanks to important changes in Iraq's tactics.⁸⁷³

In early May, Kissinger met with Golda Meir as part of his shuttle diplomacy to achieve an Israeli-Syrian disengagement agreement, which was signed on May 31. During the conversation, Meir passed Kissinger an Israeli report recommending Kurds be provided with anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons. The report stated:

If fighting continue[d] for a long time, the Kurds [would] find it difficult to hold out against the Soviet backed Iraqi army ... and to defend their traditional strongholds in the heart of Kurdistan. However, the Kurds [stood] a good chance of holding out in the mountainous area provided that they [had] sufficient artillery and adequate supplies of [anti-aircraft] and [anti-tank] ammunition.

Kissinger agreed that the situation looked worse than previous wars and promised to look into the matter.⁸⁷⁴ This would eventually lead to a major arms deal that provided the Kurds with captured Soviet weaponry from the October War.

Against the backdrop of the Kurdish War, on May 20 the UN Secretary-General issued an inconclusive report on the February skirmishes between Iran and Iraq. The only positive outcome was that both had agreed to a ceasefire, withdraw from the border, and create an atmosphere conducive to achieving peace. In addition, they agreed to resume bilateral talks to achieve "a comprehensive settlement" of outstanding issues.⁸⁷⁵ These points were enshrined in Security Council resolution 348 on May 28.⁸⁷⁶ Significantly, the resolution set the stage for increased contacts between Iran and Iraq and eventually led to the Algiers Accord in March 1975.

⁸⁷¹ "... Iranian Inputs," June 9, 1974, *Op.Cit.*, p.1.

⁸⁷² Baghdad 259 to State, "Kurdish Conflict," April 25, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), pp.1-2. See also Ankara 3279 to State, "Kurdish Conflict in Iraq; Accidental Attack on Turk Border Village," April 30, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), p.1.

⁸⁷³ Pollack (2002), p.178.

⁸⁷⁴ Situation in Kurdistan," May 7, 1974, *Op.Cit.*, p.2. See also Memorandum of Conversation, Kissinger and Golda Meir, May 7, 1974, *Op.Cit.*, pp.14-15; and Kissinger (1999), p.588.

⁸⁷⁵ United Nations Security Council, May 20, 1974, S/11291, pp.1-2; annex, pp.1-7.

⁸⁷⁶ United Nations Security Council Resolution 348, May 28, 1974.

In late May, the Iraqi regime showed further signs of wanting to improve its relations with America. In a series of meetings between May 26-28, foreign ministry officials indicated that Saddam Hussein's wife needed to visit Washington D.C. for medical treatment at John Hopkins Medical Centre and wanted U.S. approval. The Iraqis were also pleased with the State Department's apparent refusal to meet with Kurdish representatives visiting the United States. The approach immediately caught the State Department's attention and was forwarded to the White House.⁸⁷⁷ On June 8, Kissinger responded, indicating this was an "interesting and encouraging development," since it was the first time since 1967 that Iraq—on an official level—had broached the subject of improving political relations with America. He did, however, warn the USINT's interim Chief Principal Officer, John Gatch, who was manning the outpost while Lowrie was away, to "proceed cautiously" and leave the initiative to the Iraqis, but if raised again tell the Iraqis it had been "brought to [the] attention of senior levels of [the] Department where it was received with interest." Gatch was to also reiterate Washington's policy of non-intervention with regards to the Kurds and its hope that it could be resolved peacefully.⁸⁷⁸ When Gatch conveyed Kissinger's message to the Iraqis on June 22, the Foreign Ministry said his message would be raised with Iraq's new Foreign Minister, Shathil Taqa, who said "patience would be required before obstacles [in U.S.-Iraqi relations] could be overcome."⁸⁷⁹ Therefore, by late June the U.S. and Iraq were making tentative moves toward normalizing relations.

Also that month, the U.S. learned the Iraqi regime had mended its relations with the Soviets because it needed arms resupply. On June 19, a group of Kurds met with U.S. officials at the UN, where they discussed Kurdish efforts to have Iraq's "genocide" once again put on the General Assembly's agenda, like in 1963. During the conversation, the Kurds claimed a Soviet officer named Alexander Vasilef was in

⁸⁷⁷ Baghdad 338 to State, "(1) Saddam Hussein's Visit (2) US-Iraqi Relations," May 30, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), pp.1-2.

⁸⁷⁸ State 121823 to White House, "US-Iraqi Relations," June 10, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), pp.1-2.

⁸⁷⁹ Baghdad 379 to State, "US-Iraqi Relations," June 8, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), pp.1-3.

charge of IAF bombing operations.⁸⁸⁰ Meanwhile, the Shah told Callahan that SAVAK had learned the Soviets were preparing to deliver SCUD missiles to Iraq, while noting the “partial easing of strains” with Iraq was “more cosmetic than real.” Agreeing, Callahan informed Kissinger the Shah’s “continued heavy support to the Kurds [was a] better indicator of his real attitude than the reestablishment of diplomatic relations and the cessation of direct military confrontation of Iraq and Iranian forces in the border areas.” Given this, Callahan was convinced that despite the easing of tensions, both saw each other as enemies.⁸⁸¹

By late June, the IAF’s relentless bombing campaign against civilian targets had begun to take a toll on Kurdish civilians, as women and children fled to Iran to seek safe-haven. On June 26, SAVAK officials told the U.S. Consul to Tabriz, Ronald Neumann, it had established a number of refugee camps along the border for some 25,000 refugees and warned the numbers would continue to grow.⁸⁸² A few days later, the Shah confirmed the establishment of the camps, but said refugees had grown to 42,000 and would increase as Iraqi planes and armour continued to batter Kurdish villages. Reporting these details to Kissinger, Helms observed the war resembled an act of genocide:

The genocidal war which the Ba’th regime is waging against the Kurds has taken a heavy toll of civilian non-combatants. Unable to engage the [Peshmerga] on favorable terms, the Iraqis have resorted to day and night terror-bombing of Kurdish towns and villages, using high-altitude TU-16 and TU-22 bombers and employing heavy bombs and napalm.

Helms said the Kurds were virtually defenseless, having “no anti-aircraft weapons capable of reaching the Iraqi planes” and the situation was growing worse, as 250,000 Kurds had fled to the north from Baghdad and the Arab south. Given these staggering numbers, the CIA felt its financial contribution for medical aid should be increased from \$10,000 to \$30,000 monthly, in addition to the \$1 million in refugee relief provided earlier that summer. The Shah also increased his total funding of the

⁸⁸⁰ USUN 2213 to State, “Kurdish Nationalists Seek US Support at UN,” June 19, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), pp.1-3.

⁸⁸¹ [Excised] to [Excised], June 27, 1974 (CIA/FOIA/Helms), pp.1-2.

⁸⁸² Tabriz 12 to State, “Kurdish Refugees in Iran,” June 31, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), p.1.

Kurds to around \$74 million and had begun a propaganda campaign to raise awareness of Iraq's "genocidal war." Helms revealed the CIA was "discreetly supporting" the Kurds "in the media field." Finally, the Shah raised the prospect of action at the UN, but Helms was pessimistic whether this would work. He argued the safest option was to continue supplying the Kurds, since the U.S. had "reached the upper limits of concealable assistance" for the refugees. If the CIA provided any more, Helms observed, it would have to come "through voluntary agencies or some acknowledgeable government assistance program." He advised Kissinger to assign a member of his staff to study the problem "because it [would] predictably be coming [their] way before too long."⁸⁸³ Helms was correct. On July 24 the Shah forwarded an urgent plea for additional assistance. While the details of Barzani's request remain classified, Kissinger indicated the Shah attached "a warning of his own regarding the grave consequences—for Iran and the entire Gulf—should Kurdish resistance collapse."⁸⁸⁴

At the end of July, Assadollah Alam, the Shah's Minister of Court, summoned Helms' deputy, Jack Miklos, to ask about Iraq's loosening of ties with the Soviet Union and efforts to improve relations with other Arab countries and the West. Alam said both the Shah and King Hussein wanted to know Kissinger's views on this trend.⁸⁸⁵ Having received the message in Baghdad, Lowrie offered his assessment on August 2:

[The] Trend toward better relations with [the] Arabs is not [an] isolated event but [a] continuation of Iraqi policy since [the] IPC settlement of [February] 1973.... [This] policy has resulted in Iraq's political rapprochement with Western Europe (e.g., resumption of diplomatic relations with West Germany and Great Britain) and [a] dramatic shift toward [the] West for new major economic projects.

He said the USSR and Eastern Bloc countries were "disturbed" and "complained bitterly" about Iraq's current policy, concluding, "while there is certainly cause for Iranian and Jordanian suspicion of this regime, [the] thrust of [its] policy toward

⁸⁸³ Helms to Kissinger via Scowcroft, July 8, 1974 (CIA/FOIA/Helms), pp.1-4.

⁸⁸⁴ Kissinger (1999), p.590

⁸⁸⁵ Tehran 6206 to State, "Shah and King Hussein's Views on Iraq," July 28, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), p.1.

non-alignment, pragmatism and concentration on economic development [was] unmistakably clear.”⁸⁸⁶ The department agreed with Lowrie’s observations, stating it understood Iran’s suspicions of Iraq, but there was some divergence in Iran and Jordan’s assessment of the situation and their own. Concluding, the department said Iraq appeared to be “genuinely interested in improving its relations with other Arab States, and with [the] West as well.” To this end, it felt Iraq’s drift toward non-alignment was in America’s interests, though the “time span of this development [was] too brief to draw hard and fast conclusions.”⁸⁸⁷

On August 9, the Watergate scandal that had plagued and ultimately destroyed Richard Nixon’s presidency ended with his resignation in disgrace. Replacing Nixon as president was Gerald Ford, who had been appointed Vice President on December 6, 1973, after former Vice President Spiro Agnew was forced to resign amid criminal corruption charges that October. While Nixon’s resignation was a devastating blow to America’s prestige worldwide, Ford’s retention of Kissinger in his dual roles as Secretary of State and national security advisor ensured a continuity of the Kurdish operation. Significantly, it is clear from the outset that Kissinger opted to keep Ford—like Nixon—apprised on a need-to-know basis, consulting with him only when major decisions required presidential approval. Therefore, the Kurdish operation continued to rest in Kissinger’s hands.⁸⁸⁸

In the period between the outbreak of the Kurdish War in March and Nixon’s resignation in August, the Nixon administration responded by increasing its support for Barzani and cautioning against declaring autonomy. As the fighting escalated, Kissinger ordered the CIA to increase aid further, including the secret provision of humanitarian assistance for refugees inside Iran. While the war forced Iraq to mend relations with the Soviets to obtain resupply, the regime was clearly interested in improving relations with the West and the United States. Despite Iraq’s apparent desire to balance its relations more evenly with the West, Kissinger continued to

⁸⁸⁶ Baghdad 458 to State, “Shah and King Hussein’s Views on Iraq,” August 2, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), pp.1-2.

⁸⁸⁷ State 170249 to U.S. Embassy Tehran, “Iraqi-Arab States Relations,” August 5, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), pp.1-2.

⁸⁸⁸ Interview with Brent Scowcroft, June 27, 2011.

increase American support for the Kurds. Therefore, the Kurdish operation was contributing to America's Middle Eastern strategy by checking Soviet influence in the region and tying down Iraq's military. The Israelis had also benefited considerably, as evidenced by its disengagement from Syria. Unfortunately the Shah's longstanding desire to gain control over the Shatt al-Arab waterway had gone unfulfilled. The imbalance in the benefits gained from the Kurdish operation would lead the Shah to escalate the war to unprecedented levels in the fall of 1974 as he pressed the Iraqi regime harder to make concessions.

III

The period between Nixon's resignation and the end of the year saw a major escalation of the Kurdish War. Iranian support for the Kurds became overt, culminating in the downing of two Iraqi jets in December. Meanwhile, Kissinger worked closely with Iran and Israel to arrange for the Kurds a large shipment of weapons, including anti-aircraft and anti-tank missiles. The introduction of these weapons had a considerable impact on the fighting, but Iraq's improved tactics—thanks to Soviet military advisors—meant Kurdish victories became less and less common and by the end of the year their situation appeared dire. But against the backdrop of this escalation, Iran and Iraq continued to meet periodically—as required by the UN—to seek ways to resolve outstanding disputes between the two countries. This, in turn, provided an avenue for a future rapprochement, and ultimately the abandonment of the Kurds.

The war escalated sharply in August. On August 6, Iraq launched a major offensive against the Kurds.⁸⁸⁹ U.S. officials soon realized the Iraqis had changed tactics, leading to the capture of key Kurdish strongholds, the cutting off a major supply line from Iran, and a strategic mountain pass leading to Barzani's headquarters by late August.⁸⁹⁰ The Iranians responded to Iraq's offensive by initiating clashes along the border and authorizing its forces "to return fire and

⁸⁸⁹ Government of Israel, Memorandum, "Kurds," August 23, 1974 (GFL/KSF/1969-77/Box20/Kurds-10/15/73-12/5/74), p.1.

⁸⁹⁰ Tabriz 20 to State, "The Kurdish War in Iraq," September 4, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), pp.1-10. See also O'Ballance (1996), p.96.

shoot to kill instead of firing warning shots when border raids occur[ed].”⁸⁹¹ Over the next week tensions escalated further, with Iraq killing two Iranian children during a bombing raid, artillery exchanges, and finally a five-hour pitched battle on August 23.⁸⁹² Relations were clearly deteriorating.

In this context, Barzani requested another increase in American assistance. The request prompted Scowcroft to write Helms on August 22, warning little more could be done without disclosing U.S. support. Scowcroft indicated the U.S. had arranged the delivery of AK-47s and had made \$1 million available for the procurement of anti-tank weapons, which the CIA was helping the Iranians purchase. But the anti-aircraft weaponry Barzani needed “to meet the threat of high-flying bomber aircraft simply [was] just too big (would require prime movers to transport), too complicated and too expensive to pursue.” Unfortunately all the Ford administration could do was urge humanitarian aid groups to help Iran with the refugee problem.⁸⁹³ While the U.S. could not increase its direct funding for the Kurds, it was making clear efforts to assist the Kurds in the war.

Two days later, Helms sent Kissinger a message inquiring about using Iranian troops inside Iraq.⁸⁹⁴ Kissinger responded that day stating, “this must be basically an Iranian decision [and the U.S. would] understand whatever they decide[d] to do.” Kissinger also addressed Israel’s interest in providing the Kurds with anti-tank missiles.⁸⁹⁵ On the question of having the Israelis transfer Soviet-made anti-tank missiles captured from Egypt and the U.S. reimburse them with American-made anti-tank missiles, Helms told Kissinger he had raised the matter with SAVAK chief, General Nassiri, who agreed it was the best option.⁸⁹⁶ Despite this, Helms warned Kissinger that U.S. involvement was unnecessary since the Israelis had a working

⁸⁹¹ Tehran 6788 to State, “Iran-Iraq Border Incidents Mar Talks in Istanbul,” August 14, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), pp.1-2.

⁸⁹² Tehran 7134 to State, “Iran Details Additional Border Violations by Iraq,” August 25, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), p.1. See also Tehran 7218 to State, “Iran/Iraq Trade Accusations on Border Build-up,” August 27, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), pp.1-2; and Tehran 6949 to State, “Iranian Military Alert,” August 19, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), p.1.

⁸⁹³ Scowcroft to Helms, August 22, 1974 (CIA/FOIA/Helms), p.1.

⁸⁹⁴ Helms to Kissinger via Scowcroft, August 24, 1974 (CIA/FOIA/Helms), p.1.

⁸⁹⁵ Scowcroft to Helms, August 24, 1974 (CIA/FOIA/Helms), p.1.

⁸⁹⁶ Helms to Scowcroft, August 25, 1974 (CIA/FOIA/Helms), p.1.

logistics pipeline to the Kurds and were about to deliver 300 tons of ordnance.⁸⁹⁷ Despite this, Kissinger still wanted to go ahead with the arms transfer, but was required to inform President Ford. According to Kissinger, the meeting took place on August 26, where Ford gave him *carte blanche* to pursue the matter as he saw fit on August 26.⁸⁹⁸ Soon thereafter, Kissinger cabled Helms to inform him of Ford's approval of the Israeli proposal.⁸⁹⁹

After three weeks of negotiations in Istanbul, on August 31 Iran and Iraq issued a joint communiqué stating that talks would continue at the foreign minister level during the upcoming General Assembly in October. According to Lowrie, during the talks the Iraqis had "swallowed some of their pride" and appeared determined to reach an agreement, but the Iranians remained belligerent.⁹⁰⁰ On September 6, Iran complained to the Security Council that four Iraqi aircraft had crossed its border and were forced back with anti-aircraft fire. According to the Iranian complaint, two Iraqi aircraft dropped bombs on an Iranian village, killing fifteen inhabitants (nine of whom were children). The Iranians said they had "pieces of these bombs" showing foreign markings.⁹⁰¹ Therefore, just as political progress was being made, the Kurdish War continued to undermine Iran-Iraq relations.

The next day, Barzani requested U.S. advice on whether he should attack the Kirkuk oil fields, which could starve the regime of much-needed oil revenue and increase pressure to seek accommodation. Kissinger responded on September 18, indicating his concerns that doing so could "compound the already grave energy crisis by triggering a cycle of violence against Middle East oil installations." He also feared this would strengthen the hand of opponents of the Kurdish operation within the U.S. "by allowing them to claim that the Kurds must be possessing sufficient resources to defend their redoubt, if they were pressing for additional weapons so

⁸⁹⁷ Helms to Scowcroft, August 25, 1974 (CIA/FOIA/Helms), p.1.

⁸⁹⁸ Kissinger (1999), p.591.

⁸⁹⁹ Kissinger to Helms, August 26, 1974, *Op. Cit.*, p.1.

⁹⁰⁰ Baghdad 583 to State, "Iraqi-Iranian Conflict," September 7, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), pp.1-2.

⁹⁰¹ United Nations Security Council, September 6, 1974, S/11498, p.1.

that they could conduct a major offensive.” For these reasons, he rejected Barzani’s proposal.⁹⁰²

In early October, Iran and Iraq’s foreign ministers, Abbas Ali Khalatbari and Shathil Taqa, respectively, met in New York to build upon the Istanbul talks. According to Khalatbari, talks were “tough, and certainly not smooth,” because “neither side [could] afford to make concessions.” Nevertheless, progress appeared to have been made.⁹⁰³ Unfortunately, tragedy struck on October 20 when Taqa died unexpectedly of a heart attack while in Rabat, Morocco during a stopover on his way home. Taqa’s death had a negative impact on U.S.-Iraqi relations, because he had increased USINT’s access to the foreign ministry. With his death, Lowrie concluded, “this link has now been cut”.⁹⁰⁴

The day before Taqa’s death, the Israelis provided Kissinger with a list of arms it could give the Kurds and requested funds to cover the cost of procurement—roughly \$24 million.⁹⁰⁵ A few days later, Director Colby sent Kissinger a memo cautioning “against increasing the level of [U.S.] support” because it risked jeopardizing operational secrecy. He stated:

Our assistance to Barzani for FY 1973, 1974 and 1975 totals almost \$20 million and has included over 1,250 tons of ordnance.... The Iranians are able to give all of the assistance the Kurds need, and the Agency recommends that further increases in aid to the Kurds be left up to the Iranians.

Kissinger did not accept Colby’s argument, replying, “as if secrecy were more important than the plight of the Kurds” and questioning the logic of leaving support up to the Shah:

... if the Shah went much beyond the \$75 million in assistance he was already supplying, he would face the same problem as Israel. Unless we supplied replacement weapons he would be weakening his own

⁹⁰² Kissinger (1999), p.590.

⁹⁰³ Tehran 8821 to State, “Iran and Iraq Resume Talks; Khalatbari at UNGA,” October 21, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), p.1.

⁹⁰⁴ Baghdad 724 to State, “Death of Foreign Minister Taqa,” October 26, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), p.1. See also State 230834 to USINT Baghdad, “Death of Iraqi Foreign Minister,” October 20, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), p.1; and Baghdad 808 to State, “Response to Secretary’s Condolence Message,” November 20, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), p.1.

⁹⁰⁵ White House, Memorandum of Conversation, Kissinger and Dinitz, October 19, 1974 (DNSA/KT01377), p.9. For Israeli list, see page 16-18.

armed forces. But if we did so, we would find ourselves in a hopeless congressional battle.⁹⁰⁶

Given this, Kissinger was determined to continue helping the Kurds, but in a way that did not weaken Iran or Israel's defenses. He informed the Israelis that he would raise the matter with the Shah and report back.⁹⁰⁷

On October 31, Scowcroft sent Kissinger a memo outlining Barzani's recent approach to the Shah and a letter he had sent to Kissinger. In both instances, Barzani wanted the U.S. to intercede with the Turks to allow non-combatants to take refuge across the border. He presented the Israeli list of weapons and emphasized the need for anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons. The U.S. was already moving on this. Finally, Barzani said he was concerned about the impending winter and the lives of 400,000 refugees in northern Iraq and another 100,000 in Iran. According to Scowcroft, "Barzani and the Shah want[ed] the USG to use its influence ... to get American and international relief organizations to help Iran care for the Kurdish victims of the genocidal Iraqi campaign." Unfortunately, it was longstanding U.S. policy not to interfere with the independence of aid organizations.⁹⁰⁸

As Iraqi forces continued to make gains against the Kurds, the Shah responded by increasing his military support to include artillery.⁹⁰⁹ On November 12, the Shah told Callahan, Iranian artillery support was "very effective" and the Kurds were "no longer withdrawing but were fighting tenaciously". He said his support would continue, but the Iraqi army had shifted to tactics and appeared to be determined to hold ground in the coming winter. On Barzani's recent appeal, Callahan told the Shah that Kissinger had received a letter and was following up on it, but added the CIA "had exhausted its budget for this operation for this fiscal year." When Callahan reported the conversation to Kissinger, he added, "the Iraqis and Soviets surely know the Iranians have been providing this fire support but neither have said anything yet." Clearly Iraq's determination to hold its lines during the

⁹⁰⁶ Kissinger (1999), p.592.

⁹⁰⁷ Kissinger and Dinitz, October 19, 1974, *Op.Cit.*, p.9.

⁹⁰⁸ White House, Memorandum, "Defense and Humanitarian Support for General Barzani," October 31, 1974 (GFL/KSF/Box20//Kurds-10/15/73-12/5/74), pp.1-3.

⁹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.1. See also Baghdad 890 to State, "Alleged Iranian Aggression Against Iraq," December 18, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), p.2.

winter, the Shah's increasing frustration with the Kurds' fighting ability, and the CIA's growing opposition raised questions about the operation's viability.⁹¹⁰

When Kissinger met with the Shah in early November they agreed to 'green light' the arms transfer. On November 7, the new Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzak Rabin, informed Kissinger the Kurds had "destroyed several Iraqi tanks" thanks to the recently received Sagger (AT-3) and Strela missiles (SA-7).⁹¹¹ Even so, the Israelis continued to complain about delays on reimbursement, raising the issue with Kissinger on November 16. Kissinger told Israel's ambassador to the U.S., Simcha Dinitz, and his deputy, Mordechai Shalev, that the Shah had approved the arms deal, but some items still had to be procured in Europe. Paying for these items was an issue. The Israelis said they needed cash, while Kissinger preferred equipment, since coming up with \$20 million was challenging. Ultimately, Kissinger told the Israelis to begin transferring the weapons to the Kurds.⁹¹²

By December the Iraqi offensive had "sputtered, flared and finally [went] out" with the onset of winter. While Barzani's headquarters at Haji Omran and the main Iranian supply line remained secure, the Iranians had recently built a new supply road to the Iraqi border to establish a second supply line to Kurdish forces. Thanks to Iranian artillery fire, the Kurds had also forced Iraqi units to withdraw to the valleys. But the winter of 1974-75 was quite mild, allowing Iraqi aircraft to continue pounding Kurdish positions. According to Neumann, the most serious fighting was in the mountains near Rawanduz, where "British radar technicians ... observed regular and heavy Iraqi aircraft activity ... for several weeks." However, the Kurds' acquisition of anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons had prevented Iraqi advances.⁹¹³

But just as U.S. assistance was having a clear impact, Helms became concerned about the Shah's views on the war. For instance, in a meeting on December 4, the Shah mused aloud, "I wonder why the Iraqis do not simply settle with us" on the Shatt al-Arab? "After all, the issues are minor as far as they are

⁹¹⁰ Helms to Kissinger via Scowcroft, November 13, 1974 (CIA/FOIA/Helms), pp.1-7.

⁹¹¹ White House, Memorandum of Conversation, Kissinger and Rabin, November 7, 1974 (DNSA/KT01405), pp.10-11.

⁹¹² White House, Memorandum of Conversation, November 16, 1974 (DNSA/KT01417), p.13.

⁹¹³ Tabriz 32 to State, "Iraqi Kurdish War: Failure of Iraqi Summer Offensive," December 2, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), pp.1-3.

concerned.” Later, Helms learned King Hussein was working as a secret intermediary between the Iranians and Iraqis. He raised this matter with Alam on December 10, who explained that the Shah had received a message from King Hussein about an Iraqi approach, but did not elaborate on his response. When Helms reported this to Kissinger,⁹¹⁴ he commented on the possibility of an agreement between Iran and Iraq:

Anything short of [an] Iraqi agreement to Iranian positions on the Shatt al-Arab and other border questions will get nowhere with Iran. Basically the Shah holds firmly to his view that a different, ‘decent’ government is necessary in Baghdad. This is one of the reasons he militarily supports the Kurds. But an Iraqi agreement to settle with Iran might be tempting right now since the Kurdish War is becoming increasingly expensive and increasingly hazardous [sic.] from the Iranian point of view.⁹¹⁵

King Hussein’s sudden involvement as an intermediary between Iraq and Iran was a puzzling development, particularly given King Hussein’s leading role in convincing the U.S. to support the Kurds in the first place.

Not long after King Hussein’s *démarche*, the Shah decided to test Iraq’s resolve and willingness to compromise by sharply escalating the Kurdish War. Separately, on December 14 and 15, Iranian forces shot down an Iraqi TU-16 Badgers over Iraqi Kurdistan (two in total). Afterward, Iran made no attempt to conceal responsibility, claiming Iraq’s jets had been hit over Iranian airspace and had “limped back to Iraq” where they crashed.⁹¹⁶ Following the incident, the Iraqis appeared determined to drag the U.S. into the controversy, claiming the jets were shot down by “American Hawk Missiles,” while warning Iran and its backers that they will “bear the consequences of their acts.”⁹¹⁷ In a message to Washington, Helms denied the report, pointing out that Hawk missiles had not yet arrived in

⁹¹⁴ See Tehran 10429 to State, “King Hussein’s Intermediary Role,” December 10, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974) and State 270404 to U.S. Embassy Reykjavik the same day.

⁹¹⁵ Tehran 10429 to State, “King Hussein’s Intermediary Role,” December 10, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), pp.1-2.

⁹¹⁶ USUN 6059 to State, “Downed Iraqi War Planes,” December 20, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), p.1.

⁹¹⁷ Baghdad 890 to State, “Alleged Iranian Aggression Against Iraq,” December 18, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), p.1.

Iran.⁹¹⁸ The missiles, in fact, were British-made Rapiers.⁹¹⁹ Nevertheless, through this provocative act, the Shah had sent Iraq a clear signal that Iran was the dominant regional power and the only way to avoid further escalation was to concede the Shatt al-Arab.

Iran's actions prompted Lowrie to draft a position paper on December 23 that called on the department to make the "strongest possible démarche" to the Shah to end the escalating Iran-Iraq conflict. Lowrie argued this was not only in Iran's interests but the entire region. Viewed from Baghdad, he felt the Kurds were "fighting a hopeless battle" and "no interested party want[ed] to see them succeed." Indeed, "even the Iranians [said] they [would] not give them enough assistance to take [the] offensive. Their sole hope ... appear[ed] to be [the] overthrow of [the] Baghdad regime." But worse yet, British Ambassador John Graham had told him that the Shah planned to escalate the war in the spring by increasing his arms supply to Barzani. "If this represents [the] Shah's thinking," Lowrie warned, "then we are almost certainly heading for [a] large scale regional conflict." He urged the State Department to approach the Shah and urge him to "test the seriousness of Iraqi desires for rapprochement rather than inflexibly maintaining that [the] Baath regime is incorrigibly hostile to it."⁹²⁰

U.S. officials in Tehran met Lowrie's recommendations with hostility. Jack Miklos, Helms' deputy, cabled Washington on December 30 to argue that the Shah saw the Iraqi regime as a "bunch of thugs and murderers," who were "implacably hostile to him," was unconvinced of its efforts to improve relations with the West, and did not think the Kurds were fighting "a hopeless battle." Miklos also dismissed Lowrie's suggestion that the Iran-Iraq conflict was heading toward a regional war, concluding:

Baghdad must realize that if it launched a direct overt attack on Iran, the Soviets, with high stakes in Iran as well as in Iraq, would likely stand aside and Iran could inflict serious damage on Iraq in

⁹¹⁸ Tehran 10658 to State, "Iraqi Report of Planes Downed by Iranian Missiles," December 17, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), p.1.

⁹¹⁹ Alam (1991), p.403

⁹²⁰ Baghdad 898 to State, "U.S. Policy Toward Iraqi-Iranian Conflict," December 23, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), pp.1-3.

retaliation. As far as Iran is concerned, it has evidenced no desire to go beyond ensuring Kurdish survivability and frustrating Baghdad's attempts to crush the Kurds once and for all.

In fact, Miklos saw great value in Iran's support for the Kurds, pointing out that they tied down 80% of Iraq's military, which could not be used against Israel, Kuwait, or in the Gulf. Therefore, Miklos argued, Lowrie's suggestion was "inadvisable because it would be unheeded, unwise because the premise on which it is proposed is unsound (or at least unconvincing), and that in fact it would not serve overall U.S. interests." The department agreed.⁹²¹

In late December and again in early January, the Israelis raised the question of the arms transfer to the Kurds. On December 23, Dinitz told Kissinger of difficulty "getting [their] agreed program translated into effect." He said the cost of the missiles had gone up to \$28 million and the NSC staff had not found a way to finalize the deal. Dinitz was worried that if the arms were not delivered before the spring melt, the Kurds would have difficulty holding off the Iraqis offensive. Kissinger promised Dinitz he would "find a way."⁹²² The Israelis raised the matter again on January 16, 1975, with Yigal Allon, Israel's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, emphasizing to Kissinger the need to speed up the transfer. He pointed out that the Iraqis had managed to hold their positions in the mountains for the first time ever. Kissinger said, "there is no disagreement about it. We're giving you the weapons." To overcome the bureaucratic obstacles, Kissinger suggested the U.S. would simply "add \$28 million" to Israel's next major arms purchase. Significantly, Allon raised concerns about the Shah's intentions, commenting that while he was "doing more than his share," the Shah appeared to be playing "his own game." In the end, Allon gave Kissinger an ominous warning, "to abandon the Kurds [would be] a crime."⁹²³

By the start of 1975, it was clear the U.S., Iranians, and Israelis were moving forward with a large arms deal for the Kurds. While in the past the Kurds had always

⁹²¹ Tehran 10954 to State, "U.S. Policy on Iraqi/Iranian Conflict," December 30, 1974 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1974), pp.1-2.

⁹²² White House, Memorandum of Conversation, December 23, 1974 (DNSA/KT01463), pp.7-8.

⁹²³ White House, Memorandum of Conversation, January 16, 1975 (DNSA/KT01477), pp.10-11.

managed to use the winter to push back Iraqi forces from their hard fought gains, this time the situation was entirely different. Soviet influence on Iraq's tactics had a strong impact on the army's ability to take and hold positions, leading the Iranian military to take on a more overt role in the conflict. King Hussein's unexpected role as an intermediary between Iran and Iraq seemed to convince the Shah the Iraqi regime was at its breaking point, as evidenced by the downing of the two Iraqi jets in December. While this caused great concern to Lowrie in Baghdad, U.S. officials in Tehran dismissed the recommendation that the State Department press the Shah into reconsidering his position on the Kurds. But there were also signs that the Shah was already reconsidering his position, which was evident in Helms' observations and Allon's ominous warning to Kissinger. With the war reaching a boiling point, both the Shah and the Iraqi regime faced a decision: they could continue to escalate the war or decide to negotiate with one another. For years the Shah had made known to Baghdad his support for the Kurds was designed to force Iraq to concede partial sovereignty over the Shatt al-Arab, but the Iraqis had always rejected this. In short, the Shah had escalated the Kurdish War to such a level that the Iraqi regime had to choose between giving up partial sovereignty over the waterway or losing the north of the country. Even so, Kissinger's commitment to the Kurdish operation made clear that Cold War considerations still dominated U.S. thinking.

IV

Throughout early 1975, secret negotiations took place between Iran and Iraq that culminated in the Algiers Accord in early March and would cut off all American support for the Kurds. It is clear that Kissinger was against this decision, believing the Ba'thist regime was untrustworthy and the border concession offered was minimal compared to the strategic value gained from the operation. After all, Kissinger knew Iran's development of its Gulf ports, particularly its oil export terminal on Kharg Island, meant the Shatt al-Arab was not vital for the exportation of Iranian oil. He also felt the deal would empower a regime with close links to the Soviets and help Iraqi communists consolidate power. In short, he believed this deal

would undermine America's Cold War strategy in both the Gulf and the wider Middle East region.

By mid-January, U.S. officials realized that Iraqi policy was shifting. On January 15, Lowrie learned President al-Bakr and Saddam Hussein had accepted an invitation from King Hussein to visit Jordan.⁹²⁴ The next day, when Iran and Iraq's foreign ministers met in Istanbul for further talks, the Iraqis complained the Kurds would have been defeated if not for Iran's support.⁹²⁵ While the Istanbul talks were again fruitless, the two sides agreed in principle to a basic outline of an agreement.⁹²⁶ However, their terms were very different:

Iran's approach was that once its demands on [the Shatt al-Arab] were satisfied, [the] parties could then turn to resolving [the] Kurdish problem. Iraq, conversely, wanted to settle [the] Kurdish problem first and then deal with [the] Shatt-al-Arab. Furthermore, while Iraq would be willing to grant various unspecified 'facilities' to Iran in [the] disputed region, it was unwilling to consider agreeing to Iranian sovereignty over the waters involved.

In short, all that needed to happen at this stage was for one of the parties to budge.⁹²⁷ With an agreement drawing near, Iraq's new Foreign Minister, Saadoun Hammadi, toured the region and urged other Arab states to pressure Iran to accept a deal. The stage appeared to be set for an Iran-Iraq agreement.⁹²⁸

On January 22, Barzani sent Kissinger a long letter analyzing the political and military situation in Kurdistan and asked for increased military support. He also asked Kissinger if he could send an emissary to Washington to give "a personal and more detailed presentation" of the issues he outlined. Though this last passage was somewhat vague, the CIA and NSC staff believed Barzani wanted to visit Washington personally.⁹²⁹ On February 5, Kissinger's special assistant, Peter Rodman, sent him a

⁹²⁴ Baghdad 47 to State, "King Hussein's Invitation to Iraqi Leaders," January 17, 1975 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1975), p.1.

⁹²⁵ Baghdad 52 to State, "Iraqi-Iranian Conflict," January 18, 1975 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1975), pp.1-2.

⁹²⁶ Baghdad 59 to State, "Iranian-Iraq Negotiations," January 22, 1975 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1975), p.1.

⁹²⁷ Ankara 904 to State, "Iran-Iraq Talks," January 31, 1975 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1975), p.1.

⁹²⁸ "Iraqi-Iranian Conflict," January 18, 1975, *Op.Cit.*, pp.1-2.

⁹²⁹ Letter, Barzani to Kissinger, January 22, 1975 (GFL/KSF/Box20/Kurds-2/20/75-2/12/76), pp.1-13.

memo outlining the CIA's concerns about the implication of Barzani's request to send a delegate to Washington, stating:

Colby advises against a visit (a) because its main purpose would be to importune you for more aid, which we can't afford, and (b) because of the security risks. A visit by Barzani could not possibly be done securely; Colby does feel that a visit by an emissary, on the other hand, could be kept secret, at least at this end.

Even so, while Rodman felt this kind of visit would "serve no purpose except as a handholder," Barzani's "valiant and important effort" necessitated a positive response, like informing him of the secret Israeli arms deal.⁹³⁰ Once again, in the face of Colby's opposition, the White House continued to view the Kurds as an important asset.

By the start of February the anticipated Kurdish winter counter-offensive had failed to materialize.⁹³¹ The Kurds' failure to dislodge the Iraqi army during the winter of 1974-75 proved to be a decisive factor in the war's outcome. According to Neumann:

The Kurds, for all their skill as defensive fighters, showed no appetite for the kind of attacks necessary to storm through wire and machine guns to take fortified positions, even when cloud cover prevented the Iraqi air force from operating. The result was that as the winter was drawing to a close the Kurds had taken back very little if anything and were going to have to start fighting from positions into which they had been pushed the previous fall.⁹³²

This meant the Kurds would be even more dependent on Iranian military assistance and would have a major impact on the Shah's assessment of the war.⁹³³

On February 18, the Shah blindsided Kissinger during a meeting in Geneva when he said he was considering a deal with the Iraqis to abandon the Kurds for a concession on the Shatt al-Arab. The Shah said the Kurds had "no guts left" and was worried a Kurdish defeat could lead to an "autonomous Kurdish state which would

⁹³⁰ White House, Memorandum, Rodman to Kissinger via Scowcroft, "Reply to Letter from Barzani," February 6, 1975 (GFL/KSF/Box20/Kurds-2/20/75-2/12/76), p.1.

⁹³¹ Tabriz 8 to State, "Iraqi Kurdish War: Temporarily Quiet," February 2, 1975 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1975), pp.1-5.

⁹³² Email correspondence with Ronald Neumann, October 2, 2011.

⁹³³ "...Temporarily Quiet," February 2, 1975, *Op.Cit.*, pp.1-5; and interview with Ronald Neumann, June 20, 2011.

be under the dominance of a Communist Iraqi central government.” He was also concerned that Iraq could stimulate incidents along the Iran-Iraq border that could lead to an internationalization of the Kurdish War and be brought before the Security Council. According to Kissinger’s report of the meeting to Ford, “In short, he seems tempted to try to move in the direction of some understanding with Iraq regarding the Kurds, but is understandably skeptical that much is possible.” Therefore, the Shah was considering meeting with Saddam Hussein at an upcoming meeting of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) held in Algiers in March.⁹³⁴ According to Kissinger’s memoir, he responded negatively to this proposal, reminding the Shah of his “own repeated warnings that the collapse of the Kurds would destabilize the entire area.” He also said:

Any assurances by Saddam regarding the governance of the Kurdish area ... would be worthless. And since the Soviets would view Iran’s retreat as symptomatic of the growing weakness of the West, their adventurism was likely to increase even on that front.

He felt an agreement with Iraq was a “bad idea—particularly the idea that he believed the [Iraqi regime’s] assurances that no Communist would be put in [charge of the autonomous Kurdish zone].” When the conversation ended, the Shah had given Kissinger assurances that he would continue to support the Kurds for the time being. A few days later, Kissinger warned the Israelis that the Shah was “afraid the Kurds have had it. He may begin a negotiation with the Iraqis if they meet at OPEC, in exchange for a veto over whom they put in if Barzani gets driven out.” Clearly Kissinger was worried about losing his Kurdish card.⁹³⁵

With the Shah’s assurances, on February 20 Kissinger responded to Barzani’s message from January. An unusually personal letter, reflected Kissinger’s concern:

I want you to know of our admiration for you and your people and for the valiant effort you are making. The difficulties you have faced are formidable. I very much appreciated reading your assessment of the military and political situation. You can be assured that your messages

⁹³⁴ White House, Memorandum, Scowcroft to the President, February 19, 1975 (GFL, NSC, Middle East and South Asian Affairs Staff Files, December 2008 Opening, Box 9), pp.1-2; and Kissinger (1999), pp. 592-93.

⁹³⁵ Kissinger (1999), p.593.

receive the most serious attention at the highest levels of the United States Government because of the importance we attach to them.

On the proposed visit, Kissinger suggested Barzani send an emissary in secret instead:

I am convinced that secrecy has been of paramount importance in maintaining our ability to do what we have done; it is only for this reason—plus our concern for your personal safety—that I hesitate to suggest a personal meeting here with you.⁹³⁶

The fact that Kissinger responded positively to Barzani's request to send an emissary suggested his belief that the Shah had been dissuaded from dropping the Kurds. This message was passed to Barzani on February 22.⁹³⁷

It is also clear Barzani had no knowledge of the Shah's intentions. In late February, he sent the Shah a message asking for more sophisticated weaponry and increased Iranian military support. According to the Shah, Barzani complained, "it was becoming impossible ... to carry on fighting under [the] existing circumstances" and asked to declare independence, as Cyprus had recently. Given the Shah's existing uncertainty, Barzani's request for increased aid and permission to declare independence was discomforting. This led the Shah to begin questioning how he could increase his military commitment to the Kurds without the conflict turning into a regional war with Iraq. It seems Barzani's request pushed the Shah toward his breaking point. But it was a meeting the Shah had on March 2 with Ashraf Marwan, a key advisor of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Gamal Abd al-Nasser's son-in-law, that sealed the Kurds' fate. According to U.S. officials in Tehran, during the meeting:

Marwan repeated the message that [he] had received through others, i.e. that Saddam Hussein was ready to pull Iraq out of the Soviet orbit if Iran would remove the military pressure which was forcing Iraq into the arms of the Soviets. Marwan expressed the view that it was almost certain that Saddam would pull away from the Soviets as promised.

⁹³⁶ White House, Kissinger to Barzani, February 20, 1975 (GFL/KSF/Box20/Kurds-2/20/75-2/12/76), p.1.

⁹³⁷ Kissinger to Barzani, February 20, 1975, *Op.Cit.*, p.1.

Therefore, the Kurds' failure to launch a winter counteroffensive, Barzani's demand for better weapons, and his desire to declare independence, when coupled with high-level assurances of Saddam's desire to seek a compromise, led the Shah to decide to cut a deal with the Iraqis and abandon the Kurds.⁹³⁸

The next day the Shah flew to Algiers, Algeria, for the OPEC meeting. Over the course of two days of intensive negotiations with Saddam Hussein, he would determine the fate of the Kurds. The Shah described the negotiations in a message to Kissinger on March 10:

Regarding the Kurds, I got two promises from Saddam: the first, that Barzani and his people would have one week to decide whether they wanted to stay in Iraq or withdraw without bloodshed into Iran where they would find a haven and a decent life. They will be given until the end of the month [on the Iranian calendar March 20 is the end of the month] for their withdrawal.... The second promise was that the security services of the two countries would work together, briefing each other on which Kurds were good and which were bad (read communist). This will, I hope, prevent the establishment of a communist Kurdish community in Barzani's territory.⁹³⁹

The terms of the agreement were simple:

- 1) Demarcation of the river frontier according to the thalweg or median line;
- 2) Demarcation of land frontiers on basis of the 1913 Constantinople Protocol and minutes of 1914 Frontier Demarcation Commission;
- 3) Strict and effective control along borders to end all subversive infiltration from either side; and
- 4) The above three arrangements are indivisible elements of a comprehensive settlement.

In addition, both parties agreed to remain in constant contact with Algerian leader Houari Boumédiène while the accord was implemented and that the foreign ministers would meet to establish a commission to implement the agreement.⁹⁴⁰

⁹³⁸ Tehran 2237 to State, "Iranian/Iraqi Agreement," March 10, 1975 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1975), p.1.

⁹³⁹ Ibid., p.2.

⁹⁴⁰ Baghdad 248 to State, "Iraqi-Iranian Agreement," March 8, 1975 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1975), p.1.

As it turned out, on March 5, the day before the agreement was announced, the Shah contacted General Nassiri and ordered him to tell Barzani that Iran would cease its support immediately, likely as a measure of good faith. When Nassiri visited Barzani, who was in Tehran at the time, he said, “in bluntest imaginable terms:”

(a) [the] border was being closed to all ... movement, (b) [the] Kurds could expect no more assistance from Iran, (c) Barzani should settle with Iraq on whatever terms he could get, and (d) Pesh Merga units would be allowed to take refuge in Iran only in small groups and only if they surrendered their arms to [the] Iranian army.

While Barzani “acted stoically” to Nassiri’s remarks, the unfortunate reality was that the Kurdish War was finished.⁹⁴¹ According to David Korn, the Iraq desk officer at the time, Helms was at the Tehran airport on March 7 when the Shah arrived back from Algiers. “He found the Shah’s aides as uninformed, and as puzzled, as he was.” At this point, the Shah also told Helms, “the cutoff of Iranian assistance to Barzani’s Kurdish insurrection would also entail terminating all American assistance.”⁹⁴² The next afternoon, the Shah dictated a message for Helms to pass to Kissinger outlining the reasons for his decision.⁹⁴³

Reactions among U.S. officials to the accord were mixed. Certainly there were those, like Helms and Lowrie, who hailed the agreement as a step toward achieving regional stability.⁹⁴⁴ Kissinger, however, did not share in their jubilation. Upon learning of the deal, Kissinger was furious at the Shah, who had ignored his advice and led him to believe the deal was on hold. Further, he could not conceive how the accord was a good deal. Why would the Shah so carelessly trade a valuable coercive asset, like the Kurds, for a modest border concession on the Shatt al-Arab—a deal that the development of Iran’s Gulf ports would render useless? In response,

⁹⁴¹ Beirut 3252 to State, “Kurdish/Iranian Relations,” March 15, 1975 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1975), p.1; and *Pike Report*, p.213.

⁹⁴² David Korn, “The Last Years of Mullah Mustafa Barzani,” *Middle East Quarterly*, 1/2 (1994), pp. 12-27. Available online: <http://www.meforum.org/220/the-last-years-of-mustafa-barzani>.

⁹⁴³ “Iranian/Iraqi Agreement,” March 10, 1975, *Op.Cit.*, p.2.

⁹⁴⁴ Tehran 2254 to State, “Iraqi-Iranian Agreement,” March 10, 1975 (GFL, Presidential Country Files for Middle East and South Asia, Box 14, Iran-State Department Telegrams: SECSTATE – EXDIS [1]), p.1. For Lowrie’s reaction, see Baghdad 248 to State, “Iraqi-Iranian Agreement,” March 8, 1975 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1975), p.1.

Kissinger sent the Shah a “frosty telegram,” questioning both the benefits of the agreement and Iraq’s sincerity. The telegram stated:

With respect to the Kurdish question, there is little I can add to what I have already said to you personally during our recent meeting. This is obviously a matter for Your Majesty to decide in the best interests of your nation. Our policy remains as always to support Iran as a close and staunch friend of the United States. I will, of course, follow with great interest the evolution of Iraqi-Iranian relations and of Iraqi policy in your area generally and toward the Soviet Union in particular.⁹⁴⁵

Kissinger’s anger was justified. He had spent a great deal of time, money, and effort during the past three years to help the Kurds keep the Iraqi regime destabilized and prevent the Soviets from cultivating a strong regional ally. To Kissinger, the Shah’s abandonment of the Kurds was a clear mistake.

The Israelis were equally stunned by the Shah’s decision. As Parsi observed, “the agreement took Israel ... by complete surprise. The Shah neither consulted nor informed his Israeli and American allies about the negotiations with the Iraqis, nor did he indicate that the collaboration with the Kurds was in jeopardy.”⁹⁴⁶ According to Randal, the Algiers Accord came as a shock to the Israeli military officers stationed in Kurdistan, including Zuri Sagy. “Two and a half battalions of Iranian artillery and antiaircraft guns and their troops, stationed in Iraq, were abruptly ordered back across the frontier,” explaining to their Kurdish and Israeli allies that the sudden move was a “routine troop rotation.” The Mossad team realized what had happened immediately, and fled across the border, lest the Iraqis catch them.⁹⁴⁷ After a decade of unbending support to the Kurdish cause, this was a miserable way to end a highly productive relationship.

As part of the agreement, the Iraqis had promised the Shah to give Barzani until March 20 to accept refuge in Iran or face military action, but the regime reneged on its promise. The day after the accord was announced, Iraq threw the full weight of its army against the Kurds, who were still reeling from the betrayal.

⁹⁴⁵ Kissinger (1999), p.594.

⁹⁴⁶ Parsi (2008), p.55.

⁹⁴⁷ Randal (1997), p.199.

According to Helms, Iraq's offensive put the entire Algiers Accord in jeopardy and shocked the Shah; Saddam had "immediately [violated] the letter and spirit of their Algiers agreement by ordering an all-out attack on the Kurds on all fronts."⁹⁴⁸ In dire straits, Barzani sent Kissinger a heartbreaking letter on March 10, describing the tragedy unfolding in northern Iraq:

Our hearts bleed to see that an immediate by-product of [Iran and Iraq's] agreement is the destruction of our defenseless people in an unprecedented manner as Iran closed its border and stopped help to us completely and while the Iraqis began the biggest offensive they have ever launched and which is now being continued. Our movement and people are being destroyed in an unbelievable way with silence from everyone.

Citing a moral and political responsibility, Barzani begged Kissinger to "take action" to stop the Iraqi offensive, help open a way for talks with the regime to negotiate a face-saving solution, and use his personal influence with the Shah "to help [the Kurds] in these historically tragic and sad moments." Barzani concluded by saying he was "anxiously waiting [Kissinger's] quick response and action and [was] certain that the United States [would] not remain indifferent during these critical and trying times." When Helms passed Barzani's letter to Kissinger, he added:

Since the Iranians clearly have blood on their hands, and we to a lesser extent on ours, an obviously distressed and disconsolate Barzani, it may be desirable for you to send him some kind of comforting message, otherwise, and maybe anyway, we will get a batch of unpleasant publicity which we may be able to avoid.

To avoid the publicity, Helms recommended continuing the subsidy at the present rate in exchange for the Kurds providing continued intelligence on "the Kurdish as well as the Iraqi situation."⁹⁴⁹

On March 13, the Shah managed to convince Baghdad to halt its offensive and allow him time to confer with Barzani. According to Korn, when the two met the Shah explained his concern about being drawn deeper into war with Iraq and had no choice but to conclude an agreement with Iraq. However, the Shah said he saw the agreement as "temporary" and was not convinced Iraq would respect it. In the

⁹⁴⁸ Tehran 2351 to State, "Iran/Iraq Relations," March 13, 1975 (NARA/AAD/RG59/CFPF/ET/1975), p.1.

⁹⁴⁹ Helms to Kissinger via Scowcroft, March 10, 1975 (CIA/FOIA/Helms), pp.1-2.

meantime, all aid would be terminated but the border would remain open for another thirty days, during which any Kurds who wanted to come across would be welcome. When Dr. Othman tried to argue against the decision, the shah cut him off: “I am telling you my decision. There is nothing to discuss.” This was a *fait accompli*.⁹⁵⁰

The CIA was quick to disassociate itself with the Kurdish tragedy, with Colby seizing upon Barzani’s letter to justify cutting off support for the Kurds. According to Kissinger, Colby wrote:

Because American policy had been to channel aid through Iran ... any direct aid to the Kurds now that resistance was crumbling would be even less defensible than it had been in the past. [I doubt] the Shah—having ended his own aid to Barzani—would be willing to continue to serve as a conduit for American funds.

From his own intelligence reports, Colby knew the Kurds were finished and was buying time by suggesting Barzani’s proposal needed to be “studied,” knowing that would take time and by then it would be too late.⁹⁵¹

One discrepancy about the end of the Kurdish War is whether Kissinger ever responded to Barzani’s plea. Kissinger states in his memoir that he “did not reply ... to [Barzani’s] desperate pleas for help because there was nothing [he] could say.”⁹⁵² Similarly, the *Pike Report* cites a CIA cable, stating, “no reply has been received from Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to the message from Barzani.” The report indicates Barzani sent two further messages underscoring “the seriousness of the Kurds situation, the acute anxiety of their leaders and their emotional appeal that the USG use its influence with Iran to get an extension of the cease fire.”⁹⁵³ Given this, it is accepted that Kissinger’s lack of response was both callous and uncaring.⁹⁵⁴

⁹⁵⁰ Korn (2008).

⁹⁵¹ Kissinger (1999), p.595.

⁹⁵² Ibid., p.596.

⁹⁵³ *Pike Report*, p.216.

⁹⁵⁴ Safire (1976), p.26; and Randal (1997), p.166.

But Kissinger did, in fact, respond to Barzani. On March 15, he sent Helms a message that was passed to Barzani's CIA liaison on March 17.⁹⁵⁵ The message read:

We appreciate the deep concern which prompted ... Barzani's message to Secretary Kissinger. We can understand that the difficult decisions which the Kurdish people now face are a cause of deep anguish for them. We have great admiration for the courage and dignity with which those people have confronted many trials, and our prayers are with them. We will be talking with our Iranian friends and will be in contact with the General later.

Though the letter avoided offers of further aid, Kissinger's instructions to Helms reflect great concern about how to handle the fallout, particularly if Barzani was to make the betrayal public. He stated:

On the one hand ... there would seem to be some responsibility not to cut them off suddenly and completely. You should find a tactful way to mention the problem both the Iranian and U.S. Governments will face in the U.S. and elsewhere if there is a massacre and Barzani charges that he has been let down. The plight of the Kurds could arouse deep humanitarian concern. On the other, it would create an impossible situation if we were to be working at cross purposes with Iran.⁹⁵⁶

Kissinger also ordered Helms to determine how Iran would handle its relationship with the Kurds. Finally, he approved the continuation of Barzani's monthly subsidy; "a pitiful Band-Aid considering the tragedy about to descend on the Kurds."⁹⁵⁷

With the Shah having cut him off and the U.S. indicating that it also could not continue the operation, Barzani returned to Kurdistan on March 18 and informed his top military commanders that he could no longer go on fighting:

It was a hopeless situation, but if anyone wanted to take up the battle in his place, Barzani said, he would give that man his full moral support. The offer, however, seemed more pro forma than real. To those who heard him, it was clear that Barzani was saying 'this is the end, we must stop now.' So when he canvassed the room, the

⁹⁵⁵ White House, Situation Room to Kissinger via Borg/Adams/Rodman, March 19, 1975 (GFL, Documents from the National Security Advisor: Trip Briefing Books and Cables for Henry Kissinger, December 2008 Opening, Box 6, 2/10-18/75 Middle East and Europe – 2/5-22/75 London and Middle East), p.1.

⁹⁵⁶ Kissinger to Helms via Scowcroft, March 15, 1975 (GFL, Documents from the National Security Advisor: Trip Briefing Books and Cables for Henry Kissinger, December 2008 Opening, Box 6, 2/10-18/75 Middle East and Europe – 2/5-22/75 London and Middle East), pp.1-2.

⁹⁵⁷ Kissinger (1999), p.596.

commanders agreed that without an open border through which to receive arms and supplies, it would be impossible to continue....

Following this, Barzani and his family fled to Iran, where he was treated inhospitably for the next four years. In July 1975, Barzani was diagnosed with lung cancer and required medical treatment in the United States. After considerable lobbying, Kissinger reluctantly, agreed to allow Barzani into the country, where he succumbed to cancer on March 1, 1979.⁹⁵⁸

The tragic story of the Kurds does not live and die with one man. On March 23, 1975, well over 100,000 Kurdish fighters and their families crossed the border into Iran, joining the thousands of refugees already in camps, while others accepted the regime's "generous payments" for surrendering their weapons. The aftermath of the war was a bitter period for those who stayed behind as the regime imposed its harsh authoritarian rule on Kurdistan, creating a security zone 30 kilometers wide along the Iranian and Turkish borders. According to McDowell, this involved razing as many as 1,400 villages by 1978 and the internment of at least 600,000 Kurds in resettlement camps.⁹⁵⁹ But the worst fate was left for the villagers of Barzani's hometown, Barzan. After its capture in 1975, the villagers were transported to an internment camp. In July 1983, when Kurdish rebels assisted the Iranians in capturing Haji Omran during the Iran-Iraq war, Iraqi forces rounded up 8,000 males, both young and old, who were then paraded through Baghdad. This was the last time they would be seen. For his part, Saddam openly acknowledged the slaughter: "They betrayed the country ... and we meted out a stern punishment to them and they went to hell."⁹⁶⁰

Conclusion

In the period between the Arab-Israeli war in October 1973 and the end of the Kurdish War in March 1975 it is clear that Henry Kissinger was the driving force

⁹⁵⁸ Korn (2008).

⁹⁵⁹ McDowell (1996), pp.338-39.

⁹⁶⁰ Lawrence (2008), p.31.

of U.S. policy toward Iraq.⁹⁶¹ His dominance of the decision-making process meant that his personal views often overwhelmed a well-informed analysis based on a variety of opinions. In these circumstances, Kissinger's personal policy often clashed with the State Department's, which resulted in missed opportunities. For instance, following the October War, Iraq appeared to be tacking toward the West when it improved relations with Britain, France, Iran, and West Germany and made overt gestures aimed at improving in relations with America. And yet Kissinger ignored these signs and urged the Shah to attack Iraq so he could secure an Israeli withdrawal from Syria. While this made tactical sense in terms of the Arab-Israeli conflict, it forfeited any chance the U.S. had at improving relations with Iraq and draw it away from the Soviets. This was a clear missed opportunity. Worse, Kissinger's actions contributed to the renewal of the Kurdish War in March 1974, which forced the Iraqi regime to turn to the Soviets for arms resupply. Arguably, a case can be made that had Iran not attacked Iraq, the regime might not have taken as strong a stance on the Kurds, who Baghdad viewed as Tehran and Tel Aviv's proxies.

When the war resumed in March 1974, Kissinger increased U.S. support for the Kurds, approved humanitarian assistance for Kurdish refugees, and worked with the Israelis to transfer the Kurds with enough weaponry to keep the Iraqi army locked in a stalemate. Kissinger also cautioned Barzani against declaring autonomy because he believed it could create problems with America's allies and could provoke an Iraqi offensive. Unfortunately, Barzani ignored Kissinger's advice, declared autonomy, and, as predicted, the regime launched a major offensive. This account contrasts with the *Pike Report's* claim that the U.S. had prodded Barzani into rejecting the regime's autonomy offer.⁹⁶²

Kissinger's reaction to the tragic way in which the Kurdish War came to an end underscored just how involved he was to the operation. It is clear Kissinger saw the Kurdish operation as a valuable means of advancing U.S. Middle Eastern strategy. After all the Kurdish operation managed to tie down Iraq's army during the

⁹⁶¹ Interview with Brent Scowcroft, June 29, 2011.

⁹⁶² *Pike Report*, p.197.

October War, preventing the formation of a strong Iraqi government, and proved valuable in drawing the Iraqis away from the Israeli-Syrian front, thereby contributing to the May 1974 disengagement agreement. But Kissinger's actions also suggest he felt a genuine obligation to help the Kurds defend themselves. After all, he consistently ignored the CIA's warnings about the scale of the operation, approved considerable amounts of humanitarian aid, and went out of his way to provide the Kurds with advanced weaponry. Taken together, the Kurds had proven to be a valuable ally in advancing U.S. interests in the region. Given this, Kissinger's anger upon learning the Shah's had ignored this advice and reached agreement with Saddam Hussein is understandable. Unfortunately, the decision was presented to the U.S. as a *fait accompli*.

In the end, the U.S. policy toward Iraq during the Kurdish War can best be explained by Cold War considerations. The Nixon-Ford administration both saw the operation as a viable means of destabilizing what appeared to be a Soviet ally: Iraq. There is, however, no question that the Kurdish War in 1974-75 took on Cold War dimensions. The U.S. was arming and supporting the Kurds, while the Soviet Union was doing the same with the Iraqis. As Scowcroft recalled in a 2011 interview, "unfortunately the Kurds are pawns in great power politics ... as they have been for a long time," and like all pawns, they were expendable.⁹⁶³

⁹⁶³ Interview with Brent Scowcroft, June 27, 2011.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown that U.S. relations with Iraq between 1958 and 1975 are worthy of more consistent attention from Cold War scholars. Most have seen Iraq's revolution as a significant Cold War event but neglected large parts of the ensuing decade and a half.⁹⁶⁴ To date, only Peter Hahn has provided a detailed—though limited—account of U.S.-Iraqi relations during the Cold War.⁹⁶⁵ However, it is now clear that much of the 1958-75 period has Cold War relevance. Most notably, the lack of scholarship on the Kennedy administration's support for the first Ba'th regime during its war with the Kurds in 1963 stands out as an overlooked case, as does the Johnson administration's support for the anti-communist Arif regimes during the mid-1960s. Furthermore, the Nixon administration's support for the Kurds has only recently been recognized as an important Cold War conflict.⁹⁶⁶ Given the limited historiography in this field, this thesis clearly advances scholarship on both Iraq's role in the Cold War and the study of U.S.-Iraqi relations.

The central argument put forward in this thesis is that between Iraq's revolution and the end of the Kurdish War, the driving force behind U.S. policy toward Iraq was Cold War strategy. Consistently, U.S. decisions and actions were based on the denial of Soviet Union influence over Iraq and the region. This is illustrated in the Eisenhower administration's collaboration with Nasser to prevent the communists from coming to power during the 1958-59 period; the Kennedy administration's support of the first Ba'th regime during its brutal war against the Soviet-backed Kurds in 1963; the Johnson administration's bolstering of and friendly relations toward the anti-communist, Arab nationalist Arif brothers; and the Nixon administration's support for the Kurds to undermine the second Ba'th

⁹⁶⁴ On Iraq's Revolution, see Ashton (1993), pp.59-89; Blackwell (1999), pp.1-18; Fain (2008), pp.96-105; Painter (2010), pp.486-507; Little (2004), pp.694-98; and Hahn (2012), p.40.

⁹⁶⁵ See Hahn (2012), pp.38-62; Meho and Nehme (1995), pp.50-54; Gunter (1999), pp.427-37; Little (2004), pp.694-98; and Little (2010), p.63-98.

⁹⁶⁶ Little (2010), p.63-98

regime after it appeared to pull Iraq into the Soviet orbit. Therefore, whenever a regime in Baghdad appeared to display pro-communist behavior, the U.S. took measures to counter this threat, often relying on covert action. Likewise, if the Iraqi regime was viewed as potentially anti-communist, the U.S. adopted a policy of engagement, cultivated friendly relations, and sought to prevent communist forces from gaining influence. In each instance, the primary motivation for American policies and actions was Iraq's perceived role in the Cold War.

Not surprisingly, the Eisenhower administration's reaction to Iraq's revolution was driven by its concern that the Iraqi Communist Party could seize control of Iraq. This thesis showed that the Eisenhower administration saw events in Iraq during 1958-59 as part of its Cold War competition with Moscow and premised its decisions on the need to block perceived Soviet advances. This led the Eisenhower administration to consider working with Nasser to limit any communist advance. But America's actions were not a decisive factor in preventing a communist takeover, and actually complicated matters. By working with Nasser, the U.S. unintentionally forced Qasim to rely more on the communists for support. However, when the communists eventually overplayed their hand during the Kirkuk rising in July 1959, Qasim was convinced to turn to Iraq's military for support. At this point, it is clear the U.S. and Britain did not share, as Blackwell claimed, a "common perception" of the communist threat.⁹⁶⁷ The Special Committee on Iraq's records make clear that the U.S. was fearful of Qasim's relationship with the communists, whereas the British viewed Qasim as an alternative to Nasser and tried to support him. This was particularly evident when the British warned Qasim of the Rashid Ali plot in late 1958. Britain's flirtation with Qasim backfired when Iraq threatened Kuwait in 1961. This thesis also shows that claims of American involvement in the Ba'th Party's assassination attempt against Qasim in October 1959 cannot be substantiated from the primary evidence.⁹⁶⁸

When the Kennedy administration came to office, it did not feel Iraq deserved the same level of scrutiny accorded by the Eisenhower administration, and

⁹⁶⁷ Blackwell (1999), p.1.

⁹⁶⁸ Morris (2003), p.A29; Sale (2003); and Citano (2006), pp.255-60.

disbanded the SCI. This was a mistake. During 1961-62 Iraq precipitated a range of crises involving Kuwait: the outbreak of the Kurdish War, the expropriation of the IPC's concessionary holding, and the downgrading of U.S.-Iraqi diplomatic relations.

This thesis clarified a number of claims made about the CIA's operations in Iraq during 1961-62. For instance, it has been suggested that the CIA urged the Kurds to rebel against Baghdad during this time,⁹⁶⁹ but this thesis shows that U.S. diplomats and intelligence officers in the field had warned Washington of an impending war and were ignored. Further, evidence from Soviet archives suggests the Soviets might have urged Barzani to fight.⁹⁷⁰ It has also been claimed that the CIA tried to "incapacitate" Qasim in 1961-62 by mailing him a poisoned handkerchief,⁹⁷¹ but this thesis suggests Colonel al-Mahdawi, the pro-communist head of the People's Court, would have been a more likely intended recipient. Finally, it has widely believed that the CIA was behind the Ba'thist coup that overthrew Qasim in February 1963.⁹⁷² While this thesis has further substantiated claims that the CIA was plotting against Qasim during the 1962-63 period, the CIA was also engaged in a major operation to obtain intelligence on Soviet weaponry. Furthermore, a high-level CIA official based in Iran at the time the Ba'th Party seized power the CIA's plans to overthrow Qasim had not yet been finalized.

After years of frustration with the Qasim regime, the U.S. viewed the Ba'thist coup as a welcome surprise. Some have argued the CIA provided the Ba'th with lists of communists, who were arrested and in many cases killed.⁹⁷³ While the existence of lists is documented, U.S. officials at the time suggested the Ba'th had previously determined the identity of ICP members and their supporters. Given this, it is possible to conclude the Ba'th Party did not need lists provided by the CIA, since they already knew their targets. Nevertheless, during the first Ba'th regime, Iraq became a Cold War battleground. With the Ba'thist campaign against the communists underway, the Soviet Union retaliated by supporting the Kurds publicly,

⁹⁶⁹ Little (2010), p.68.

⁹⁷⁰ Zubok (1994), pp.28-29

⁹⁷¹ *Church Report*, p.181; Morris (2003), p.A29; and Little (2004), p.694.

⁹⁷² Morris (2003), p.A29; Sale (2003); Little (2004), p.696; and Citano (2006), pp.255-60.

⁹⁷³ Morris (2003), p.A29; Sale (2003); Little (2004), p.696; and Citano (2006), pp.255-60.

accusing the regime of genocide at the UN, and even sponsoring a coup attempt. Correspondingly, the Kennedy administration urged its Arab allies to undermine this Soviet charge at the UN, approved a \$55 million arms deal with Iraq in August 1963, and initiated a secret effort to bring about a ceasefire. But in the end, disputes within the regime over the question of unification with Syria and the disastrous conduct of the war escalated to violence in November 1963, leading the military to seize power just days before Kennedy's assassination. In light of these events, Iraq's significance as a Cold War battleground has clearly been overlooked in the historiography of the Cold War during this period.

During the Johnson years, U.S. policy toward Iraq was once again at odds with its closest regional allies, Britain, Iran, and Israel. The reason for this stemmed from the perception each of these states had of Iraq. From the U.S. perspective, as long as the new regime in Baghdad was anti-communist, it could accept Nasser having a high degree of influence or even unification with Egypt. For Britain, as in 1958-59, its focus was not on the Cold War but its rivalry with Nasser. Throughout the 1960s, Britain struggled with the challenge posed by local nationalists to its global empire, especially in the Gulf, and many in London believed Nasser was to blame. With the coming to power of a pro-Nasser regime in Baghdad and subsequent unification talks, the British viewed Iraq as a potential threat to their strategic position in the Gulf. The Israelis and Iranians shared Britain's unease about Nasser's growing influence in Baghdad, though for separate reasons. The Israelis were concerned about Iraq's role in the Arab-Israeli conflict and wanted to tie down the Iraqi army inside the country. They also did not want Nasser to gain access to Iraq's considerable oil wealth. Likewise, the Shah loathed Nasser and was distrustful of his intention to establish himself on Iran's Western border. For these reasons, Britain, Israel, and Iran found common cause in seeking to undermine the new regime by supporting the Kurds. While Britain's efforts during this period are not well documented in secondary sources, Iranian and Israeli support for the Kurds are.⁹⁷⁴ Despite claims that the CIA encouraged Iran and Israel to support the

⁹⁷⁴ Randal (1997), pp.189-94; and Parsi (2007), pp.52-53.

Kurds,⁹⁷⁵ there is no evidence to support this conclusion.⁹⁷⁶ Instead this thesis makes clear that the Johnson administration managed to achieve friendly relations with Iraq between 1966 and 1967, culminating in the visit of five Iraqi generals to the White House in January 1967. Unfortunately, the outbreak of the Six Day War destroyed whatever progress had been achieved, leading Iraq to sever diplomatic relations with the United States.

After being expelled from Iraq, America's policy toward the region was further complicated when Britain announced in January 1968 its intention to withdraw from the Gulf region. Fearing this would upset the regional balance of power and potentially provide the Soviet Union with an avenue to expand its influence, the Johnson administration adopted a policy that sought to buildup Iran and Saudi Arabia as the region's 'twin pillars' of power. When the Ba'th Party came to power again in July 1968, it posed different challenges to the U.S. than the first Ba'th regime. Despite Hahn's claim that the U.S. initially viewed the second Ba'th regime favourably,⁹⁷⁷ the overthrow of Arif's moderate, anti-communist regime was a clear loss in terms of America's Cold War strategy and threatened its interests in Iraq, the Gulf, and the Cold War. Indeed, the Ba'th Party's radical policies toward Israel, its desire to renew the Kurdish War, and its swift tack toward the Soviet Union for military and economic assistance, convinced the Johnson administration it had become a vehicle for Soviet encroachment on Iraq's sovereignty. Once again, the Cold War became a dominant factor in U.S. decision-making toward Iraq.

During the Nixon administration, U.S. policy toward Iraq underwent a major shift. At the start of his term, Nixon avoided involving the White House in regional policies and preferred to focus on more significant matters, like extricating the U.S. from Vietnam, the opening to China, and achieving détente with the Soviet Union. The Gulf was not a priority until the end of Nixon's first term.⁹⁷⁸ Instead, the Nixon administration was inclined to leave Gulf matters to Iran, as happened following Iraq's killing of nine Jews in January 1969, when the Shah provoked the 1969 Shatt

⁹⁷⁵ Little (2010), pp.71-72.

⁹⁷⁶ Alvandi (2011), H-Diplo, p.3.

⁹⁷⁷ Hahn (2012), p.53.

⁹⁷⁸ Fain (2008), pp.187-88; Little (2010), pp.74-75; and Hahn (2012), pp.54-60.

crisis, urged the Kurds to resume the Kurdish War, and tried to overthrow the Iraqi regime in January 1970. As Alvandi has observed, the Nixon administration was happy to encourage the Shah's aggressive actions against Iraq.⁹⁷⁹ Yet the Shah was outraged in March 1970 when his Kurdish allies agreed to a ceasefire with the Ba'thist regime. In the aftermath, Iran and Israel tried to convince the U.S. that the March Accord was a Soviet plot to gain influence over Iraq, but the Nixon administration dismissed their efforts as manipulative and pointed to Iraq's repressive campaign against the communists between March 1970 and September 1971. However, the Nixon administration's views on Iraq and the Gulf changed with the British withdrawal in December 1971. Soon thereafter the U.S. learned Iraq had signed a secret arms deal with the Soviet Union in November 1971 and then ceased its repression of the communists. But the major turning point for the U.S. was the signing of the Soviet-Iraqi Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in April 1972, which effectively aligned Iraq with the Soviet Union in the Cold War.

There is considerable disagreement among scholars as to why Nixon agreed to support the Kurds during his visit to Iran in May 1972, with the majority arguing it was in response to the Soviet-Iraqi treaty,⁹⁸⁰ while a minority believe the Shah had overinflated the Soviet threat and manipulated the U.S. into building up Iran as the regional policeman.⁹⁸¹ Considering this scholarly debate, what is peculiar is there is no official record of Nixon agreeing to support the Kurds during his visit to Tehran. Instead, the record shows Kissinger expressed concern about the Soviet-Iraqi relationship and agreed with the Shah that something needed to be done.⁹⁸² The only official record of Nixon agreeing to the Kurdish operation was Kissinger's memorandum to the 40 Committee's principals on August 1, 1972. The debate aside, Nixon's approval of the Kurdish operation was premised on five factors: 1) concerns about the rapid improvement in Soviet-Iraq relations after the British withdrawal;

⁹⁷⁹ Alvandi (2012), pp.337-72.

⁹⁸⁰ Vanly (1978), p.169; Pelletiere (1984), p.167; Marr (1985), pp.232-34; Prados (1986), pp.313-315, 323; Ranelagh (1987), pp.607-608; Meho and Nehme (1995), pp.50-54; Gunter (1999), pp.427-37; Pollack (2002), p.176; Sluglett (2003), p.159; Daugherty (2004), p.175; McDowell (2004), pp.330-31; Prados (2006), pp.361; Tripp (2007), p.203; Parsi (2008), pp.53-54; Gause (2008), p.35; Little (2010), pp.74-75; and Hahn (2012), p.58.

⁹⁸¹ Randal (1999), p.150; Fain (2008), pp.193-94; and Alvandi (2012), p.363-64.

⁹⁸² Alam (1991), p.225.

2) Iraq's enhanced importance after the departure of Soviet personnel from Egypt in July 1972; 3) a desire to build up the Shah of Iran as a regional power to prevent Soviet encroachment on the region; 4) U.S. concerns about Iraq's nationalization of the IPC in June 1972; and 5) a recognition that the Kurds could be a useful coercive tool to undermine the pro-Soviet Ba'thist regime. Clearly, Nixon's decision to support the Kurds was not based on a naïve acceptance of the Shah's manipulation but a realistic analysis of a sequence of events suggesting Iraq was drifting toward the Soviet orbit. Indeed, as Kissinger told Iraq's Foreign Minister in December 1975, the U.S. began the Kurdish operation because it "thought [Iraq was] a Soviet satellite."⁹⁸³ The Cold War was clearly the common denominator.

Following the approval of the Kurdish operation, U.S. policy toward Iraq was bifurcated. On the one hand, in August 1972 the State Department sent diplomats to Baghdad with orders to improve U.S.-Iraqi relations, while on the other, the White House sought to undermine the Iraqi regime using the Kurdish operation. In the period leading up to the October War, U.S.-Iraqi relations underwent a significant thaw. This was because Saddam Hussein won a power struggle within the regime and moved to bring Iraq out of isolation. He settled Iraq's longstanding dispute with the IPC and stabilized Iraqi politics by forming a National Front government with the communists, while improving relations with France to offset Western concerns. He also told journalists he was interested in improving U.S.-Iraqi relations and then awarded U.S. firms lucrative contracts, but the White House responded to Iraq's gestures by increasing its support for the Kurds. Even during October 1973, when Iraq resumed diplomatic relations with Britain, Iran, and West Germany, awarded further contracts to U.S. firms in the middle of the war, and refused to participate in the Saudi-led oil embargo, the U.S. continued to increase its support for the Kurds. The October War seems to have convinced Kissinger of the value of the Kurds, whom he believed had prevented the Iraqi army from playing a significant role in the conflict. This was evident when Kissinger urged Iran to initiate hostilities in December 1973 and February 1974, in order to force Iraq to withdraw its forces

⁹⁸³ DoS, Memorandum of Conversation, Kissinger and Hammadi, December 17, 1975 (FRUS/1969-76/XXVII/doc.302), p.817.

from Syria. While this tactic helped Kissinger secure Israel's disengagement from Syria, it also contributed to the resumption of the Kurdish War.

When the Kurdish War resumed in March 1974, it again took on Cold War characteristics. With the U.S., Iran, and Israel supporting the Kurds and the Soviet Union backing Baghdad, Iraq once again became a Cold War battleground. The U.S. responded to the war by increasing its military and financial aid to the Kurds. Significantly, in contrast to the *Pike Report's* claims,⁹⁸⁴ the U.S. also provided \$1 million in refugee relief. Also the *Pike Report* claimed the U.S. had prodded Barzani into rejecting Baghdad's autonomy law,⁹⁸⁵ when in fact, the Nixon administration had warned Barzani against declaring autonomy because it could provoke the Iraqi regime into attacking. What the authors of the *Pike Report* did not know was that Barzani and the Kurds could never have accepted Baghdad's watered-down autonomy law, because it excluded longstanding principal demands, like a proportional share of oil revenue, and it allowed the regime to veto any Kurdish legislation. The resumption of the war forced Iraq to improve relations with the Soviet Union to obtain both arms resupply and military advisors. This had a significant impact on the war's outcome, since with Soviet assistance the Iraqi army for the first time managed to take and hold key areas in Kurdistan. As the war escalated throughout the fall of 1974, Iran's support for the Kurds became more overt: it shelled Iraqi forces regularly and its military forces participated in battles (dressed in Kurdish garb), culminating in the shooting down of two Iraqi jets in December. Despite this, Iraq managed to take and hold ground throughout the winter of 1974-75. Fearing the Kurds' defeat, Kissinger and the Israelis sought to provide the Kurds with \$28 million worth of arms, hoping to hold off the Iraqis. Unfortunately, Kissinger's efforts were fruitless.

Despite the widely held view that the U.S. sold the Kurds out in March 1975,⁹⁸⁶ the decision was presented to Kissinger as a *fait accompli*. While Kissinger

⁹⁸⁴ *Pike Report*, pp.216-17.

⁹⁸⁵ *Pike Report*, p.197.

⁹⁸⁶ Vanly (1978), p.169; Pelletiere (1984), pp.167-68; Marr (1985), p.234; Ranelagh (1987), pp.607-608; Bulloch and Morris (1992), p.136-41; Meho and Nehme (1995), p.53-54; Randal (1997), pp.145-51; Gunter (1999), pp.428; Daugherty (2004), pp.174-76; and Prados (2004), pp.393-94.

had known the Shah was considering abandoning the Kurds, he believed he had talked him out of it. This was evident in his letter to Barzani in February 1975, where he agreed to meet with a Kurdish emissary. Nevertheless, Kissinger saw the Kurdish operation as a valuable means of advancing U.S. Middle Eastern strategy. After all, the Kurds had tied down Iraq's army during the October War, allowed Kissinger to secure Israel's disengagement from Syria, and prevented the formation of a strong Iraqi government. In the end, Kissinger's frustration upon learning the Shah had ignored his advice and had reached agreement with Saddam Hussein in Algiers, is explained by his belief that the Kurds were the ultimate Cold War card, to be used to advance U.S. interests, while denying the Soviet Union a strong base of influence. Once again, Cold War considerations were the driving motivation behind U.S. policy toward Iraq in this period.

This thesis shows that both the *Pike Report* and William Safire's highly critical articles have had a distorting effect on the historiographical discourse on the Kurdish War.⁹⁸⁷ Certainly the Kurdish operation was a "cynical enterprise,"⁹⁸⁸ after all, it advanced America's Cold War interests at the expense of the Kurds. However, both the *Pike Report* and Safire's articles do not represent an objective assessment of the Ford administration's handling of the Kurdish operation. This thesis shows that the *Pike Report* ignored inconvenient truths;⁹⁸⁹ manipulated evidence;⁹⁹⁰ misattributed quotes;⁹⁹¹ falsely accused the U.S. of not providing the Kurds with humanitarian assistance;⁹⁹² and finally, claimed Kissinger had not responded to Barzani's tragic plea,⁹⁹³ when in fact he had.⁹⁹⁴ As Gerald Haines argued, the *Pike Report* was purposely designed to expose the CIA as a "rogue elephant" and scale back the White House's control over foreign policy.⁹⁹⁵ In other words, this was not

⁹⁸⁷ *Pike Report*, pp.195-98, 211-17; and Safire (1976), p.26.

⁹⁸⁸ *Pike Report*, p.197.

⁹⁸⁹ Scowcroft to Helms, no date, *Op.Cit.*, p.1-4; and *Pike Report*, p.214.

⁹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹¹ "Kurdish/Iranian Relations," March 15, 1975, *Op.Cit.*, p.1; and *Pike Report*, p.213.

⁹⁹² Kissinger to Helms, no date, *Op.Cit.*, p.1; and *Pike Report*, pp.216-17.

⁹⁹³ *Pike Report*, p.216.

⁹⁹⁴ Situation Room to Borg/Adams/Rodman for Kissinger, March 19, 1975, *Op.Cit.*, p.1.

⁹⁹⁵ Haines (1998-99), pp.1-2.

the “textbook case of betrayal and skullduggery” that the *Pike Report* had led many people to believe.⁹⁹⁶

It is now clear that Iraq actually played a greater role in the Cold War in the Middle East than has been previously recognized. On three separate occasions between 1958 and 1975 Iraq became a Cold War battleground: in 1958-59, in 1963 and finally in 1972-75. In each of these instances either the Soviet Union or the U.S. relied on local or regional proxies to achieve their strategic objectives. The Kurds have often fallen victim to these machinations, being built up when it served the superpowers’ designs, only to be dismissed abruptly when no longer needed. In the end, all the decisions and actions taken by each U.S. administration—from Eisenhower to Ford—were designed with one objective in mind: denying the Soviet Union influence over Iraq and a strategic base in the oil-rich Gulf region. All the evidence contained herein proves that the U.S. policy toward Iraq was driven by America’s Cold War strategy. The history of the U.S. policy toward Iraq between 1958 and 1975 was truly a Cold War story.

⁹⁹⁶ Randal (1997), p.147.

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