

Ba'athis and Kurds

"Black are his colors, black pavilion,
His spear, his shield, his horse, his armor, plumes,
And jetty feathers menace death and hell--
Without respect of sex, degree or age,
He razeth all his foes with fire and sword.
-- Christopher Marlowe, **Tamburlaine the Great, Part One** (IV,i)

"Each era is different. Everything changes. But Saddam Hussein is worse than Tamburlaine of 600 years ago."

-- Abd-al-Qader Abdullah Askari of Goktapa, site of chemical weapons attack, May 3, 1988.

It is a land of spring flowers and waving fields of wheat, of rushing streams and sudden perilous gorges, of hidden caves and barren rock faces. Above all, it is a land where the rhythm of life is defined by the relationship between the people and the mountains. One range after another, the peaks stretch in all directions as far as the eye can travel, the highest of them capped year-round by snow. "Level the mounts," so the old saying goes, "and in a day the Kurds would be no more."

The Kurds have inhabited these mountains for thousands of years. "The territories designated since the 12th Century as Kurdistan," says one scholar, "were inhabited since the most distant antiquity and constitute one of the very first settlements of human civilization. Jarmo, in the valley of Chamchamal, at present in Iraq, is the most ancient village of the Middle East. Here, four thousand years before our era, man already cultivated diverse grains (wheat, barley, lentils, peas, etc.), plucked fruits (olives, almonds, pistachios, figs), raised sheep and goats."[1](#)

Yet for all their antiquity, the Kurds have never been able to form an independent political entity of their own in modern times. From the 16th to the early 20th centuries, their territories formed part of the Ottoman and Persian empires. With the collapse of the Ottoman empire after World War One, the Kurds were to be granted their independence under the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres. But that promise evaporated as the nationalist movement of Kamal Ataturk seized control of the Kurdish lands in eastern Turkey and the Kurds saw their mountain homeland divided once more among four newly created states--Turkey, Syria, Iraq and the Soviet Union, and one ancient land--Iran, or Persia as it was then known.

Each of these states has balked at assimilating its Kurdish minority, and each of the Kurdish groups has rebelled against the authority of its new central government. Of these traditions of rebellion, none has been more persistent than that of the Iraqi Kurds.[2](#) There are larger Kurdish populations--some ten to fifteen million Kurds live in Turkey and seven million in Iran, compared to just four million in Iraq.[3](#) Yet a number of factors set the Iraqi Kurds apart from their neighbors. They were proportionately the largest ethnic minority in the region, at least until the 1980s, accounting for fully 23 percent of the total Iraqi population.[4](#) The proportion of Kurds in Turkey may now be fractionally higher, but this is not a consequence of normal demographic trends. The relative decline of the Iraqi Kurdish population is a political matter. Hundreds of thousands have fled into exile; tens of thousands more have been killed, above all in 1988, in the course of the six-and-a-half month long campaign of extermination known as Anfal.

The Iraqi Kurds have also been the victims of an accident of geography, for vast oil reserves were discovered in the 20th century on the fringes of their ancestral lands. The Kurds have repeatedly challenged the government in Baghdad for control of these areas--especially the ethnically mixed city of Kirkuk. And it is this contest for natural resources and power, as much as any consideration of ideology or deep-rooted ethnic animus, which underlies the brutal treatment of the Kurds by the ruling Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party.

Since the 1920s, the Iraqi Kurds have staged one revolt after another against the central authorities. Most of these rebellions had their nerve center in a remote area of northeastern Iraq called the Barzan valley, which lies close to the Iranian and Turkish borders on the banks of the Greater Zab river. From the early 1940s to the mid-1970s, the idea of Kurdish rebellion was inseparable from the name of a charismatic tribal leader from that valley, Mullah Mustafa Barzani.

Barzani's only real success came in 1946, when Iraqi and Iranian Kurds joined forces to found the Mahabad Republic. But the Mahabad experiment lasted only a year before it was crushed, and Barzani fled to the Soviet Union with several thousand fighters in a celebrated "long march."[5](#) After the overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy in 1958, the Kurds encountered a familiar pattern under each of the regimes that followed: first a period of negotiations that invariably failed to satisfy Kurdish demands for autonomy, and then, when the talks broke down, renewed outbreaks of violence.[6](#) Rural villages were bombed and burned and Kurdish fighters hunted down relentlessly. The name that they adopted expressed accurately the condition of their existence. They called themselves *peshmerga*--"those who face death."

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In 1988, during the final six months of Iraq's eight-year long war with Iran, something terrible occurred in the mountains of northern Iraq. At least metaphorically, the regime of Saddam Hussein did "level the mounts," in the sense of razing thousands of villages, destroying the traditional rural economy and infrastructure of Iraqi Kurdistan and killing many tens of thousands of its inhabitants.

The outside world has long known of two isolated episodes of abuse of the Iraqi Kurds in 1988. In both instances, it was the proximity of the victims to international borders, and thus to the foreign media, that accounted for the news leaking out. In the first, the March 16 poison gas attack on the Kurdish city of Halabja, near the border with Iran, the Iranian authorities made it their business to show off the site to the international press within a few days of the bombing. Even so, the illusion has long persisted, fostered initially by reports from the U.S. intelligence community, which "tilted" strongly toward Baghdad during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War, that both sides were responsible for the chemical attack on Halabja.[7](#) This is false: The testimony of survivors establishes beyond reasonable doubt that Halabja was an Iraqi action, launched in response to the brief capture of the city by Iraqi *peshmerga* assisted by Iranian Revolutionary Guards (*pasdaran*). The thousands who died, virtually all of them civilians, were victims of the Iraqi regime.[8](#)

The second well-publicized event was the mass exodus of at least 65,000, and perhaps as many as 80,000, Iraqi Kurdish refugees from the northern mountains of the Badinan area into the Turkish borderlands, during the final days of August.[9](#) The reason for their flight was later conclusively demonstrated to have been a further series of chemical weapons attacks by the Iraqi armed forces.[10](#) Since World War One, the use of poison gas in warfare has been regarded as a special kind of abomination. Chemical weapons were banned by the Geneva Protocol of 1925, to which Iraq is a party, and many countries subsequently destroyed their stockpiles. While Iraq, and to a lesser extent Iran, had broken the battlefield taboo on many occasions since 1983, the Halabja and Badinan attacks marked a new level of inhumanity, as the first documented instances of a government employing chemical weapons against its own civilian population.

Yet Halabja and Badinan are merely two pieces in a much larger jigsaw puzzle, and they formed part of a concerted offensive against the Kurds that lasted from March 1987 until May 1989. In the judgment of Middle East Watch, the Iraqi campaign against the Kurds during that period amounted to genocide, under the terms of the Genocide Convention.[11](#)

Middle East Watch has reached this conclusion after over eighteen months of research. Our methodology has had three distinct and complementary elements. The first was an extensive series of field interviews with Kurdish survivors. Between April and September 1992, Middle East Watch researchers interviewed in depth some 300 people in Iraqi Kurdistan and spoke to hundreds of others about their experiences. Most had been directly affected by the violence; many had lost members of their immediate families. In March and April 1993, an additional fifty interviews sought to deal with the questions that remained unanswered.

The second dimension of Middle East Watch's Iraqi Kurdistan project was a series of forensic examinations of mass gravesites, under the supervision of the distinguished forensic anthropologist Dr. Clyde Collins Snow. Dr. Snow's first preliminary trip, to the Erbil and Suleimaniyeh areas, was in December 1991. On two

subsequent visits, Dr. Snow's team exhumed a number of graves, in particular a site containing the bodies of twenty-six men and teenage boys executed by the Iraqi Army in late August 1988 on the outskirts of the village of Koreme, in the Badinan area.¹²

The third, and most ambitious, strand in our research has been the study of captured Iraqi intelligence archives. During 1991 and early 1992, through a variety of sources, Middle East Watch had assembled a modest file of official Iraqi documents that described aspects of the regime's policy toward the Kurds. For the most part, these had been seized from Iraqi government buildings during the aborted Kurdish uprising of March 1991. Then, in May 1992, Middle East Watch secured permission to examine and analyse 847 boxes of Iraqi government materials that had been captured during the *intifada* by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), one of the two main parties in Iraqi Kurdistan. Through an arrangement between the PUK and the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the documents became Congressional Records of the Committee.¹³ Analysis of the documents began on October 22, 1992, and in many cases it has been possible to match documentary evidence about specific villages or campaigns with testimonial material from the same locations.

As Raul Hilberg notes in his history of the Holocaust, "There are not many ways in which a modern society can, in short order, kill a large number of people living in its midst. This is an efficiency problem of the greatest dimensions..."¹⁴ The trove of captured documents demonstrates in astonishing breadth and detail how the Iraqi state bureaucracy organized the Kurdish genocide. Some of these documents were seized during the uprising by the citizens of the Kurdish city of Suleimaniyeh and later stuffed haphazardly into stout plastic flour sacks. Others, piled first into tea boxes and then wrapped in sacks stamped "PUK Shaqlawa," were taken from the offices of Iraq's General Security Directorate (*Mudiriyat al-Amn al-Ameh*), commonly known as *Amn*, in Erbil and the northern resort town of Shaqlawa.¹⁵ The contents of these boxes are often charred as a result of the March 1991 fighting, in which many government buildings were torched. Some are wrinkled, partly shredded and almost illegible after prolonged exposure to moisture. The documents are crammed into bulging ring-back letter files or bound together loosely with staples, string, laces or pins. Hand-written ledgers are covered with flowered wallpaper, kept clean with sheets of transparent plastic. Sometimes their Arabic titles are lettered in ornate psychedelic script with a variety of colored felt-tip pens, by bored or whimsical clerks with the right security clearance. One police binder is neatly bound in Christmas wrapping paper from Great Britain that shows a red-breasted robin singing cheerfully among sprigs of holly.

Between them, the documents show in compelling detail how the Iraqi security bureaucracy tackled the "efficiency problem" of razing thousands of Kurdish villages from the map and murdering tens of thousands of their inhabitants. There are smoking guns here, in the form of signed government decrees ordering summary mass execution. Yet equally telling in their own way are the thousands upon thousands of pages of field intelligence notes, scribbled annotations of telephone conversations, minutes of meetings, arrest warrants, deportation orders, notes on the burning of a particular village, casualty lists from chemical attacks, lists of the family members of "saboteurs," phone surveillance logs, food ration restrictions, interrogation statements and salutes to victorious military units. Between them these are, so to speak, the innumerable tiny pixels that together make up the picture of the Kurdish genocide.

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For those who survived the slaughter, the experience can be summed up in a single word: *al-Anfal*. The word is religious in origin; it is the name of the eighth *sura*, or chapter, of the Koran. According to the Iraqi writer Kanan Makiya, whose May 1992 article in *Harper's Magazine* was the first written journalistic treatment of the Anfal campaign, the eighth *sura* is "the seventy-five-verse revelation that came to the Prophet Mohammed in the wake of the first great battle of the new Muslim faith at Badr (A.D. 624). It was in the village of Badr, located in what is now the Saudi province of Hejaz, that a group of Muslims numbering 319 routed nearly 1,000 Meccan unbelievers. The battle was seen by the first Muslims as vindication of their new faith; the victory, the result of a direct intervention by God."¹⁶

In this *sura*, the Arabic word 'al-Anfal' means 'spoils,' as in the spoils of battle. It begins, "They will question thee concerning the spoils. Say: 'The spoils belong to God and the Messenger; so fear you God, and set things right between you, and obey you God and his Messenger, if you are believers.'"

The *sura* continues with the revelation of God's will to the angels:

"I am with you; so confirm the believers. I shall cast into the unbelievers' hearts terror; so smite above the necks, and smite every finger of them!" That, because they had made a breach with God and with His Messenger; and whosoever makes a breach with God and with His Messenger, surely God is terrible in His retribution. That for you; therefore taste it; and that the chastisement of the Fire is for the unbelievers."[17](#)

Although Saddam Hussein has often chosen in recent years to wrap his campaigns in religious language and iconography, Ba'athist Iraq is a militantly secular state. The victims of the 1988 Anfal campaign, the Kurds of northern Iraq, are for the most part Sunni Muslims. During Anfal, every mosque in the Kurdish villages that were targeted for destruction was flattened by the Iraqi Army Corps of Engineers, using bulldozers and dynamite.

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Kurdish Autonomy and Arabization

Yet for all its horror, it would be wrong to say that Anfal was entirely unprecedented, for terrible atrocities had been visited on the Kurds by the Ba'ath Party on many occasions in the past. Ironically, when Iraqi Kurds are asked if they can recall a period of stable peace, they speak first of the early years of the second Ba'ath Party regime, after the coup of July 1968. The radical pan-Arabist ideology on which the party had been founded was hostile to the non-Arab Kurds, who are culturally and linguistically related to the Persians. Yet the new Iraqi regime made a priority of achieving a durable settlement with the Kurds.

The Ba'ath was not lacking in pragmatism. The party was weak when it came to office, and it had no desire to contend with a troublesome insurgency. Pan-Arabist rhetoric was therefore played down after 1968, in favor of a new effort to forge a single unified Iraqi identity, one in which the Kurds would be accepted as partners--if not exactly equal ones. The modern nation-state of Iraq had been an artificial creation of the League of Nations in the 1920s, when the former southern *vilayat* of the Ottoman Empire were subdivided into mandate territories administered by Britain and France. Iraq's boundaries, incorporating the *vilayet* of Mosul, reflected British interest in achieving control over that region's known oil resources.

It was oil that proved to be the Achilles' heel of the autonomy package that was offered to the Kurds by Saddam Hussein, the Revolutionary Command Council member in charge of Kurdish affairs. On paper the Manifesto of March 11, 1970 was promising. It recognized the legitimacy of Kurdish nationalism and guaranteed Kurdish participation in government and Kurdish language-teaching in schools.[18](#) But it reserved judgment on the territorial extent of "Kurdistan," pending a new census. Such a census would surely have shown a solid Kurdish majority in the city of Kirkuk and the surrounding oilfields, as well as in the secondary oil-bearing area of Khanaqin, south of the city of Suleimaniyeh. But no census was scheduled until 1977, by which time the autonomy deal was dead.[19](#)

As before, Kurdish ideals were hostage to larger political forces. In April 1972, the Ba'ath regime signed a 15-year friendship treaty with the Soviet Union; two months later it nationalized the Iraq Petroleum Company; and with the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war, Iraq's oil revenues soared tenfold.[20](#) In June of that year, with Ba'ath-Kurdish relations already souring, the legendary guerrilla leader Mullah Mustafa Barzani laid formal claim to the Kirkuk oilfields. Baghdad interpreted this as a virtual declaration of war, and in March 1974 unilaterally decreed an autonomy statute.

The new statute was a far cry from the 1970 Manifesto, and its definition of the Kurdish autonomous area explicitly excluded the oil-rich areas of Kirkuk, Khanaqin and Jabal Sinjar. In tandem with the 1970-1974 autonomy process, the Iraqi regime carried out a comprehensive administrative reform, in which the country's sixteen provinces, or governorates, were renamed and in some cases had their boundaries altered. The old province of Kirkuk was split up into two. The area around the city itself was now to be named al-Ta'mim ("nationalization") and its boundaries redrawn to give an Arab majority. A new, smaller province, to be known as Salah al Din, included the city of Tikrit and the nearby village of al-Ouja, Saddam Hussein's birthplace. Clearly the parallel between Saddam and the legendary mediaeval warrior, known in the West as Saladin, was anything but accidental (although, ironically, Saladin was himself a Kurd, and like many of his

kin had initially hired himself out to Arab armies).²¹ Baghdad gave the Kurds two weeks to accept its terms²²; Barzani responded with a renewal of his dormant armed revolt.

In the belief that they have no lasting friends, Kurdish leaders have long made alliances of convenience with outsiders, and Barzani assumed that foreign support would allow his fight to prosper. Horrified by Iraq's new alignment with the Soviet Union, the Israeli government and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency trained senior KDP leaders and kept Barzani generously supplied with intelligence and arms, including heavy weaponry. The Shah of Iran, meanwhile, provided an indispensable rearguard territory as well as logistical support.

With this help, the *peshmerga* resisted the Iraqi assault for a year, although more than a hundred thousand refugees fled to Iran and the Kurdish towns of Zakho and Qala Dizeh were heavily damaged by aerial bombing.

But Barzani grossly overestimated the commitment of outsiders to his cause. In March 1975, the Shah and Saddam Hussein signed the Algiers Agreement, which surprised most observers by putting an end--at least for the time being--to the long-standing quarrel between the two countries. Iraq granted Iran shared access to the disputed Shatt al-Arab waterway; as a quid pro quo, the Shah abruptly withdrew his military and logistical support from the Iraqi Kurds. Within a week, Barzani's revolt had collapsed. Its leader, a broken man, was soon dead. "Covert action should not be confused with missionary work," was Dr. Henry Kissinger's famous remark on the affair.

In the eyes of the Ba'ath Party, Barzani's collaboration with Iran, the United States and Israel marked the Kurds down as Fifth Columnists. "Those who have sold themselves to the foreigner will not escape punishment," said Saddam Hussein, who at this point was deputy chairman of Iraq's Revolutionary Command Council, and the official responsible for internal security matters.²³ That attitude colored Ba'ath dealings with the Kurds for the next two decades. Its culmination was the campaign known as Anfal.

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With the collapse of the Barzani Revolution, as Kurds call it, the Iraqi regime shifted its anti-Kurdish activities into a higher gear. The traditional concerns of counterinsurgency planners now gave way to the more ambitious goal of physically redrawing the map of northern Iraq. This meant removing rebellious Kurds from their ancestral lands and resettling them in new areas under the strict military control of the Baghdad authorities.

In 1975 the Iraqi government embarked on a sweeping campaign to "Arabize" the areas that had been excluded from Kurdistan under the offer of autonomy--an effort that had first begun in 1963. Hundreds of Kurdish villages were destroyed during the mid-1970s in the northern governorates of Nineveh and Dohuk, and about 150 more in the governorate of Diyala, the southernmost spur of Iraqi Kurdistan, where there were also significant oil deposits.²⁴ Restrictions were imposed, and maintained over the years that followed, on the employment and residence of Kurds in the Kirkuk area.²⁵ Arab tribespeople from southern Iraq were enticed to move to the north with government benefits and offers of housing. Uprooted Kurdish farmers were sent to new homes in rudimentary government-controlled camps along the main highways.

Some were forcibly relocated to the flat and desolate landscapes of southern Iraq, including thousands of refugees from the Barzani tribal areas who returned from Iran in late 1975 under a general amnesty. Once moved, they had no hope of resuming their traditional farming activities: "The houses that the government had allocated for the Kurds in those areas were about one kilometer away from each other," recalled one returning refugee. "They told me I should stay there and become a farmer, but we could not farm there: it was all desert."²⁶ In November 1975, an Iraqi official acknowledged that some 50,000 Kurds had been deported to the southern districts of Nasiriya and Diwaniya, although the true figure was almost certainly higher.²⁷

This reference to "houses" is a little misleading, for the new quarters were primitive in the extreme. The relocated Kurds were simply driven south in convoys of trucks, dumped in the middle of nowhere and left to their own resources. "This is to prevent you from going to Mustafa [Barzani] or Iran," one villager remembers being told by a soldier.²⁸ Many people died of heat and starvation; the remainder survived at first

in "shades"--crude shelters fashioned from branches and thatch, or rugs strung on a framework of poles. In time they managed to build mud houses with the money that the men earned as day-laborers in the nearest town.

In 1977-1978, under the terms of the 1975 Algiers Agreement, Iraq began to clear a *cordon sanitaire* along its northern borders. At first, a former Iraqi military officer told Middle East Watch, this no-man's land extended five kilometers (3.1 miles) into Iraq; later, it was extended to ten kilometers, then to fifteen, and finally to thirty (18.6 miles). The governorate of Suleimaniyeh, which shares a long mountainous border with Iran, was the worst affected, and estimates of the number of villages destroyed during this first wave of border clearances run as high as 500, the great majority of them in Sulemaniyeh.²⁹ Again, official Iraqi statements convey some minimal sense of the numbers involved: the Ba'ath Party newspaper *Al-Thawra* admitted that 28,000 families (as many as 200,000 people) had been deported from the border zone in just two months during the summer of 1978.³⁰ Deportees say that they were given five days to gather up their possessions and leave their homes; when that deadline had expired the army demolition crews moved in.

This was no haphazard operation. A new bureaucratic infrastructure was set up in August 1979 to handle these forced mass relocations, in the form of the Revolutionary Command Council's Committee for Northern Affairs, headed by Saddam Hussein. (Reportedly, a "Special Investigation Committee" (*Hay'at al-tahqiq al-khaseh*) was also set up at this time, charged with identifying potential *peshmerga* and authorized to order the death penalty without consulting Baghdad.)³¹

Saddam Hussein's committee now began systematically to redraw the map of Iraqi Kurdistan, and the border clearances of the late 1970's marked the first large-scale introduction of the *mujamma'a*, or "complex" system of Kurdish resettlement camps.³² The *mujamma'at* (plural) were crudely built collective villages, located near large towns or along the main highways in areas controlled by the Iraqi Army. Sometimes the Kurds received some nominal compensation for their confiscated lands, although the amounts offered were usually derisory. They could also apply for loans from the government's Real Estate Bank in order to build a home in the complexes; but they were forbidden to return to their ancestral lands.

After the start of the war with Iran, which began with the Iraqi invasion of September 22, 1980, Baghdad's campaign against the Kurds faltered. Army garrisons in Iraqi Kurdistan were progressively abandoned or reduced, their troops transferred to the Iranian front; into the vacuum moved the resurgent *peshmerga*. Villages in the north began to offer refuge to large numbers of Kurdish draft dodgers and army deserters. Increasing stretches of the countryside effectively became liberated territory.

In these early years of the Iran-Iraq war, it was the KDP--now commanded by Mullah Mustafa Barzani's sons, the half-brothers Mas'oud and Idris--that was the main object of Baghdad's attention.³³ Since 1975, the KDP had been based at Karaj, outside Teheran. The Iraqi regime's hostility only grew when it learned that the Kurdish group was now allying itself quite as readily with Iran's new clerical rulers as it had with the Shah.

The villagers who had been removed from the Barzan valley in 1975 spent nearly five years in their new quarters in the southern governorate of Diwaniya. But in 1980 army trucks, East German-supplied IFAs, rolled up outside their desert encampment and told them they were to be relocated again. For most, the new destination was Qushtapa, a new resettlement complex a half-hour drive to the south of the Kurdish city of Erbil. Some were taken to Baharka, north of Erbil, and others to the *mujamma'at* of Diyana and Harir, some way to the northeast. There was no permanent housing in these complexes, nothing but tents, but the villagers were relieved at first to be breathing the air of Kurdistan once more.

But in the last week of July 1983, the residents of Qushtapa became aware of unusual military movements. Fighter planes screamed overhead, making for the Iranian border. Troop convoys could be seen on the paved highway that bisected the camp, headed in the same direction. Listening to Teheran radio, the Barzanis learned that the strategic border garrison town of Haj Omran had fallen to an Iranian assault. What they did not know at first was that the KDP had effectively acted as scouts and guides for the Iranian forces.

The reprisals began in the early hours of July 30. "We were all asleep when the soldiers surrounded the complex at 3:00 a.m.," said one Barzani woman who was living in Qushtapa at the time.³⁴ "Then, before dawn, as people were getting dressed and getting ready to go to work, all the soldiers at once charged through the complex. They captured the men walking on the street and even took an old man who was

mentally deranged and was usually left tied up. They took the religious man who went to the mosque to call for prayers. They were breaking down doors and entering the houses searching for our men. They looked inside the chicken coops, water tanks, refrigerators, everywhere, and took all the men over the age of thirteen. The women cried and clutched the Koran and begged the soldiers not to take their men away."

"I tried to hold on to my youngest son, who was small and very sick," added another of the "Barzani widows," as the women are now known. "I pleaded with them, 'You took the other three, please let me have this one.' They just told me, 'If you say anything else, we'll shoot you,' and then hit me in the chest with a rifle butt. They took the boy. He was in the fifth grade."

Between five and eight thousand Barzani men from Qushtapa and other other camps were loaded into large buses and driven off toward the south. They have never been seen again, and to this day the widows show visitors to the Qushtapa camp framed photographs of their husbands, sons and brothers, begging for information about their fate.³⁵ For almost a year after the raid the Qushtapa camp was sealed. Electrical power was cut off; the women were not allowed to leave, even to shop, and townspeople of Erbil smuggled in food secretly at night. "Now that your men are gone, why don't you come and stay with us?" one woman who remained behind recalls being taunted by *Amn* agents.

In a 1983 speech, President Saddam Hussein left little doubt what had happened to the Barzanis. "They betrayed the country and they betrayed the covenant," he said, "and we meted out a stern punishment to them and they went to hell."³⁶ The seizure and presumed mass killing of the Barzani men was the direct precursor of what would be repeated on a much larger scale five years later, during the campaign known as Anfal.

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Exploiting Kurdish Divisions

The Barzani half-brothers' KDP, however, was not the only source of *peshmerga* resistance to the regime. Divisions within the Kurdish movement had deep roots, which were as much historical and tribal as doctrinal. The Barzan Valley's claim to leadership of the movement had long been couched in religious and mystical terms. This uncompromising attitude made the Barzanis bitter enemies among a number of neighboring tribes such as the Surchi and Zebari.³⁷ Mullah Mustafa Barzani's charismatic, not to say high-handed, style of leadership had also produced a steady stream of rivals within his party. And after the debacle of 1975 these conflicts erupted into the open.

The power of the Barzani half-brothers--or the "offspring of treason," as the Ba'ath regime now took to calling them--was quickly challenged by Jalal Talabani. Formerly a lieutenant of the elder Barzani and a member of the KDP politburo, Talabani had long been critical of the "feudal" style of the tribally-based organization and now proposed to supplant it with a secular leftist movement rooted among urban intellectuals. In 1976, Talabani made the break formal with the creation of his Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and two years later open warfare broke out between the two rival groups. The bitter schism would plague them until the final two years of the Iran-Iraq War.

Other groups complicated the picture still further. In 1979 another of Mullah Mustafa's former senior aides, Mahmoud Osman, joined forces with a breakaway group of *peshmerga* from the PUK to form the Kurdistan Socialist Party. In the same year, the Iraqi Communist Party also took up arms against the Baghdad regime and set up its headquarters to the north of the city of Suleimaniyeh, in the same valley as the PUK.³⁸ A clear geographical division quickly emerged. The KDP remained the dominant force in the mountain areas of Badinan in the far north, while the PUK held sway to the east and south of the Greater Zab river. (Other, smaller groups operated locally under suffrance of the two main *peshmerga* organizations.) This divide was linguistic as well as cultural: to the north and west of the river, the principal Kurdish dialect is Kurmanji; to the south, it is Sorani.³⁹

Hampered in its ability to solve the Kurdish problem by force, the Iraqi regime leavened its repressive policies with a calculated attempt at divide-and-rule. This in turn had two dimensions: first, to play on the acrimonious divisions between the leading Kurdish parties; and second, to recruit as many Kurds as possible into tribally-based pro-government paramilitary groups.

Baghdad's best opportunity to drive a wedge between the KDP and the PUK came with what was, on the face of it, a menacing development in the Iran-Iraq War. Talabani had bitterly opposed the Barzanis' decision to facilitate Iran's Haj Omran offensive in July 1983, and in September of that year he grew even more alarmed when further Iranian attacks penetrated the border area around the town of Penjwin--uncomfortably close to the PUK's own strongholds in Suleimaniyeh governorate.⁴⁰ Talabani vowed that his troops would fight side-by-side with the Ba'ath Party to expel the invaders from Iraqi soil. Seizing the opportunity, Saddam Hussein offered the PUK leader a renewed commitment to Kurdish autonomy, hoping to win his seasoned guerrilla army permanently over to Baghdad's side. Almost a decade later, one member of the PUK team that negotiated with the Iraqi regime recalled clearly the words of Tariq Aziz, a member of the Revolutionary Command Council and later Iraq's Foreign Minister. "He told us, 'If you help us, we will never forget it. But if you oppose us, we will never forget it. And after the [Iran-Iraq] war is over, we will destroy you and all your villages completely.'"⁴¹ It was not an empty threat.

The negotiations dragged on inconclusively for more than a year before they finally broke down in January 1985. While there were a number of reasons for the collapse of the talks, none was more important than Talabani's reported reiteration of Mullah Mustafa Barzani's unacceptable demand that the Kirkuk and Khanaqin regions, with their oilfields, be considered part of Kurdistan.⁴² But although Saddam Hussein failed to cement a lasting alliance with Talabani, he could take satisfaction in the fact that the PUK-KDP rift was now deeper and more bitter than ever.

Tribal loyalties in much of Iraqi Kurdistan have loosened somewhat during the modern era. Where they remain strong, however, they have offered fertile soil for successive regimes to recruit militias in the drive to undermine Kurdish solidarity. Known officially under Saddam Hussein as the Command of the National Defense Battalions (*Qiyadet Jahafel al-Difa' al-Watani*), these paramilitary bands have long been derided by other Kurds as *jahsh*, or "donkey foals."⁴³

The *jahsh* have existed in some form since at least the early 1960s, but their role has been expanded several times since. In principle, each tribal group was supposed to produce its contingent of *jahsh* as a demonstration of loyalty to the regime; each unit's commander enjoyed the title of *mustashar* (consultant or advisor). If tribal leaders did not agree to cooperate in forming *jahsh* units, then *Amn* threats would often be persuasive.⁴⁴

The ordinary *jahsh* came under the operational command of military intelligence (*Istikhbarat*) in the final stages of the Iran-Iraq War and during the Anfal campaign. But there were also two élite forces of pro-government Kurds. The *Quwat al-Taware'* (Emergency Forces) carried out intelligence and counter-terrorism activities in the cities under the control of the Ba'ath Party. The *Mafarez Khaseh*, meanwhile, or "special units" of Kurdish agents, were formed by hard-core collaborators and were an official part of *Amn*. All of these groups were heavily indoctrinated by the regime against their fellow Kurds. In an introductory seminar, one former *jahsh* commander recalled, military intelligence officers told the assembled *mustashars* that the *peshmerga* were neither Kurds nor Iraqis; under Islamic law, they were "infidels and shall be treated as such."⁴⁵

The duties of the rank-and-file *jahsh* were broadly akin to those of similar militias in other parts of the world.⁴⁶ Poorly equipped with light weapons, they maintained road blocks, patrolled the countryside, did advance scouting work for the regular army, searched villages for army deserters and draft dodgers, and handed over suspected *peshmerga* to the authorities. For obvious reasons the regime never fully trusted the *jahsh's* loyalties. Even though *jahsh* members were largely recruited from complexes, towns and villages under government control (Zakho, for instance, is said to have had as many as 5,000 *jahsh*), their units were frequently rotated to prevent local sympathies from developing. *Mustashars* knew that the regime was wary of any illicit contacts they might have with *peshmerga* commanders in the vicinity, and *Amn* files that Middle East Watch has examined contain extensive surveillance dossiers on *jahsh* leaders.

The early years of the war against Iran made it apparent that Kurdish conscripts made reluctant soldiers, and on a number of occasions groups of Kurds were released from military service and inducted into the *jahsh* instead. If an adult male Kurd had connections to his local *mustashar*, he would pull every possible string to evade military service and serve in the *jahsh* instead.

Many of the *mustashars* found their new role appealing. Some were nobodies, elevated by the government to positions of real power. Others were traditional tribal leaders who discovered that the rich opportunities for graft as a *mustashar* more than made up for their declining influence among the local Kurds. In addition to his fixed salary, the *mustashar* was entitled to a small monthly cash payment for each man nominally under his command. Yet it was a common practice for many of these men--even the vast majority in some cases--to avoid active duty. On paper, the regime had, at the peak of their numbers, 250,000 Kurdish foot-soldiers at its disposal; in practice, only a fraction of that number genuinely bore arms. In exchange for a signed *jahsh* ID that would protect them from military service, these Kurdish men were quite content for the *mustashar* to pocket their salary as well as his own. At 85 dinars (\$255) a month for each paper soldier, it was easy for a canny *mustashar* to amass a fortune. The brothers Omar and Hussein Surchi, for example, parlayed their earnings into a contracting and construction business that made them the richest men in Kurdistan.

While the government was prepared to tolerate practices like this for the sake of a *mustashar's* fealty, it acted ruthlessly toward any show of independence. Several witnesses told Middle East Watch the story of a *mustashar* named Ja'far Mustafa, who was executed in 1986 for insubordination. The man was reportedly a fervent partisan of the Ba'ath regime, but would only agree to head up a *jahsh* contingent on condition that he be allowed to remain in his home area in the northern mountains of Badinan. In 1986 the order came through for Ja'far Mustafa's transfer, and he refused to move. During the standoff his defiance of Saddam Hussein was the talk of Iraqi Kurdistan. But after a week he was executed in Baghdad, and his body then returned from the capital to his home, near the northern town of Mangesh, where it was publicly hanged for the second time. The two villages that he owned--Besifki and Dergijneek--were burned to the ground some time later.[47](#)

* * *

1985-1987: Open War

After the collapse of the Ba'ath-PUK talks in January 1985, the Iraqi regime found its control of Kurdistan eroding once more. The war with Iran, calculated to bring a swift victory, was dragging on interminably with heavy casualties on both sides. Although the government had built a chain of small forts and larger fortresses throughout the Kurdish countryside, it was simply not feasible to keep large numbers of troops pinned down there. Several dozen Kurdish settlements, mainly in PUK-controlled areas near the Iranian border, were burned in piecemeal fashion in the mid-1980s, and their inhabitants resettled in *mujamma'at*. But hundreds of other ancient villages--perhaps as many as 2,000--tried to integrate the counterinsurgency war into the rhythms of their daily lives. In the process, their communities were transformed.

The biggest threat to civilian morale came from shelling. The Iraqi Army had divided up Kurdistan according to a grid pattern and placed heavy artillery at regular intervals with a range of up to twenty-five miles. The guns pounded around the clock, and it was impossible to predict which targets would be hit on any given day. Routine farm work became a potentially lethal game of chance; sleep patterns were disrupted; the constant uncertainty shredded everyone's nerves.

Helicopters regularly dropped troops and *jahsh* into the villages to search for draft dodgers, deserters and suspected *peshmerga*. A steady stream of captured Kurds were taken away and executed. Others died in the frequent attacks by Soviet-supplied government MIGs and Sukhoi fighter-bombers.

Since the time of the first Ba'ath regime in 1963, Kurdish villagers had learned to protect themselves against aerial attack by building primitive shelters outside their homes. Now the pace of shelter construction accelerated, their design becoming more elaborate. Many were virtual underground rooms, high enough to stand up in, covered with wooden planks or corrugated iron sheeting and layers of dirt, stones and branches. The more sophisticated had twisting entrance tunnels to protect the occupants against shrapnel and blast. Many whole villages moved into nearby caves and rock overhangs and came to lead a virtual nocturnal existence, emerging to tend their animals and fields only when darkness fell.

Hamlets of three or four houses and small towns of three or four thousand people practiced an enforced self-sufficiency. Many villages elected their own five-person councils (*majlis al-sha'ab* in Arabic, or *anjuman* in Kurdish). As the government withdrew its rudimentary public services from rural areas, *peshmerga* teachers arrived to staff the abandoned schools and itinerant *peshmerga* paramedics tried to make up for the clinics

that had been closed. In most cases, the villages had never had electricity or piped water, and in this sense the regime's ability to inflict additional hardship was limited. As before, the Kurds drew their water from rivers, springs and underground streams,[48](#) and the more prosperous took their electrical power from private generators. Commerce depended on smuggling. Knowing every goat-path in the surrounding hills, the villagers learned to evade the government road-blocks that tried to enforce a blockade on foodstuffs to *peshmerga*-controlled areas. Only women were allowed past these checkpoints. Sometimes younger boys could slip through with the help of a bribe, but it was a risky business, and some were arrested and disappeared on suspicion of aiding the *peshmerga*.

By now the practical distinction between *peshmerga* and ordinary civilians had blurred. In principle at least, active *peshmerga* received a salary from the organization to which they belonged and served duty rotas of 15-20 days at a time, with equal spells at home to work their lands. But many of the military-age men (and even some of the women) were also armed and organized into a so-called Civil Defense Force (*hezi bergri milli* or *hezi peshjiri*), whose main task was to defend their villages and hold off the army until *peshmerga* reinforcements could arrive. Light arms could be bought without much difficulty from the *jahsh* and it was common for households to have more than one weapon.

The *peshmerga*, meanwhile, tried to keep the regime off balance with their mixture of fixed and mobile forces. Hundreds of the smallest guerrilla units, or *mafrazeh*, roamed the countryside. In mountainous areas, a *mafrazeh* could be as small as five men; in the villages, fifteen was the minimum number needed for successful defense. Above the *mafrazeh* was the *kird*, and above the *kird* the *teep*, which the Kurds thought of as their equivalent of an army division.[49](#)

By the beginning of 1987, the only parts of Iraqi Kurdistan over which Baghdad exercised effective control were the cities, larger towns, complexes and paved highways. Authority over the rural areas was roughly divided between the KDP in the north and the PUK in the south. While the regime had long vilified the KDP as the "offspring of treason," it now saw ominous signs that the PUK, too, was acting as the military and political surrogate of a foreign power with which Iraq was at war. Talabani's group would henceforth be known officially as *Umala Iran*--"agents of Iran"--a term reportedly coined by Saddam Hussein himself.[50](#)

Insulting though it may have been, the phrase was grounded in fact, for since the latter part of 1986 Iranian-PUK collaboration had been a reality. While the KDP had long enjoyed access to Iranian sanctuaries, the PUK now felt that it had no alternative but to do likewise. In landlocked Kurdistan, the struggle could never succeed without help from a friendly neighbor. "There was no way for food and supplies to reach us, no help for our wounded, no roads out of the territory that we had liberated," claimed Naywshirwan Mustafa Amin, who was deputy commander of the PUK at the time. "Iran was our window to the world."

In October 1986, the PUK and the Iranian government concluded a sweeping accord on economic, political and military cooperation. Both parties agreed that they would press the fight against the Iraqi regime until Saddam Hussein was toppled, and both promised to make no unilateral deals with Baghdad.[51](#) If either party faced a serious military threat, the other would open a second front to relieve the pressure; Iran agreed to provide the PUK with arms, financial support and medical aid, while forswearing the right to impose an Islamic regime in Baghdad.[52](#) The results of the accord were apparent almost at once, on October 10, when a group of Iranian Revolutionary Guards, or *pasdaran* accompanied by Kurdish *peshmerga*, struck at the Kirkuk oilfields, deep inside Iraqi territory. At the same time, to Baghdad's evident fury, the Iranians brokered a unity agreement between the PUK and the KDP, putting an end to their longstanding rivalry.

The Teheran accords brought a radical shift in the attitude of the Iraqi regime. Despite having the upper hand in the war against Iran, the security situation within its own borders had slipped badly. Since the resumption of the war with the PUK in 1985, Kurdish affairs had been overseen by Muhammad Hamza al-Zubeidi, head of the Northern Bureau of the Ba'ath Party Organization. After a full-scale security review of the region, al-Zubeidi had reportedly been ordered to bring the situation under control within six months; when that period elapsed there was a six-month extension. But still the situation continued to deteriorate, and in early 1987 Baghdad decided on harsher measures. From now on, all those who still lived and farmed in the Kurdish mountains would be considered as active enemies of the state by virtue of nothing more than their ethnicity and their physical presence in their ancestral homeland.

1 P.J. Braidwood, *Prehistoric Investigation in Iraqi Kurdistan* (Chicago, 1960).

2 The definitive work on the Kurds is Martin Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (London: Zed Books, 1992). For a general historical and cultural overview, see Mehrdad R. Izady, *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook* (Washington, D.C.: Crane Russak, 1992). A useful brief summary is David McDowall, "The Kurdish question: a historical review," in Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl, eds., *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), especially pp.24-30.

3 Izady, op cit, p.117, gives the following figures: Turkey 13.65 million, Iran 6.6 million, Iraq 4.4 million.

4 According to Izady, loc cit, Kurds made up fully 25 percent of the Iraqi population in 1980, compared to 21.3 percent in Turkey. By 1990, he estimated the figures were 23.5 percent and 24.1 percent respectively. Other estimates are much lower, putting the Kurds at only 16 or 17 percent of the Iraqi population.

5 The Kurds, however, unlike other national liberation movements, were never able to count on consistent Soviet support.

6 Since the revolution of July 14, 1958, there have been four regimes in Baghdad: the military government of Abd al-Karim Qasem and the "Free Officers" (1958-1963); the first regime of the Ba'ath Arab Socialist Party (February-November 1963); the governments of the Arif brothers and Abd al-Rahman al-Bazzaz (1963-1968); and the second Ba'ath regime (1968 to the present). Saddam Hussein, one of the leaders of the July 1968 coup, has been President of Iraq since 1979. The best general work on the period is Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1990). Other useful studies include Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985) and CARDRI (Committee against Repression and for Democratic Rights in Iraq), *Saddam's Iraq: Revolution or Reaction?* (London: Zed Books, 1986).

7 Books on the Iran-Iraq War have routinely echoed the unsubstantiated report that both sides had used chemical weapons in Halabja. This notion originated in a study for the U.S. Army War College: Stephen C. Pelletiere, Douglas V. Johnson II and Leif R. Rosenberger, *Iraqi Power and U.S. Security in the Middle East* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1990). It is repeated in a later book by Pelletiere, a former U.S. intelligence officer, *The Iran-Iraq War: Chaos in a Vacuum* (New York: Praeger, 1992). This strongly pro-Iraqi work comments, "On May 23 (sic), in fighting over the town, gas was used by both sides. As a result scores (sic) of Iraqi Kurdish civilians were killed. It is now fairly certain that Iranian gas killed the Kurds." (pp.136-137)

The supposed factual basis for this conclusion is that the Halabja victims had blue lips, characteristic of the effects of cyanide gas--which Iraq was not believed to possess. Cyanide gas, a metabolic poison, would indeed produce blue lips, but they are far from being a specific indicator of its use. Nerve agents, which are acetylcholinesterase inhibitors that cause respiratory paralysis, would also turn victims' lips blue. Middle East Watch interview with Dr. Howard Hu, Harvard School of Public Health, May 13, 1993. On Iraq's proven use of nerve agents against the Kurds during Anfal, see below footnote 10.

8 The Kurdish researcher Shorsh Resool, author of a study of the destruction of Kurdish villages (*Destruction of a Nation*, privately published, April, 1990), has assembled a list of the names of some 3,200 people who died in the Halabja attack. More impressionistic estimates have ranged as high as 7,000 (see below p.108).

9 The most frequently cited figure of 65,000 derives from Peter W. Galbraith and Christopher Van Hollen, Jr., "Chemical Weapons Use in Kurdistan: Iraq's Final Offensive," staff report to the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, September 21, 1988. Tens of thousands also sought refuge in Iran, either fleeing directly from Iraq or else after passing through Turkey.

10 See Galbraith and Van Hollen, op cit. The February 1989 report by Physicians for Human Rights, "Winds of Death: Iraq's Use of Poison Gas Against its Kurdish Population," concluded that the injuries of refugees examined in Turkey were consistent with exposure to sulfur mustard (yperite). However, PHR noted, "Eyewitness accounts of deaths beginning within minutes of exposure...cannot be explained by mustard gas alone." The mystery was laid to rest in April 1993, when research on soil samples from the village of

Birjinni, the site of a 1988 chemical weapons attack, showed the presence of trace elements of the nerve agent GB, also known as Sarin. See PHR-Human Rights Watch, "Scientific First: Soil Samples Taken from Bomb Craters in Northern Iraq Reveal Nerve Gas--Even Four Years Later," April 29, 1993.

11 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 78 UNTS 277, approved by General Assembly resolution 2670 on December 9, 1948, entered into force January 12, 1951. The convention defines genocide as "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such." For a general discussion of the issues, as well as a series of case studies, see Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), and Helen Fein, ed., *Genocide Watch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

12 The findings of these missions are contained in two Middle East Watch-Physicians for Human Rights reports: *Unquiet Graves: The Search for the Disappeared in Iraqi Kurdistan*, February 1992, and *The Anfal Campaign in Iraqi Kurdistan: The Destruction of Koreme*, January 1993.

13 While the U.S. Defense Department has helped to expedite the research of the documents by assigning technical staff to the Iraqi Kurdistan project, Middle East Watch and the PUK jointly retain full control over the archive.

14 Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985), p.8.

15 *Amn*, whose technical functions are roughly equivalent to those of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, originated in the mid-1960s in a secret unit of the Ba'ath Party known as *al-Jihaz al-Khas*, the "special apparatus." Its code name was *Jihaz Haneen*, the "instrument of yearning." Saddam Hussein personally supervised the restructuring of the secret police that gave *Amn* its present name and functions in 1973. See Samir al-Khalil, op. cit., pp.5-6, 12-13. (Al-Khalil was the pseudonym formerly adopted by the Iraqi writer Kanan Makiya.)

16 The Iraqi regime may have selected this *sura* to legitimize its war on the Kurds by invoking a battle between two regular armies, and against a numerically stronger adversary. Makiya's article, "The Anfal: Uncovering an Iraqi campaign to exterminate the Kurds," (*Harper's Magazine*, May 1992, pp.53-61), is an extract from his book, *Cruelty and Silence: War, Tyranny, Uprising and the Arab World* (New York: Norton, 1993). Makiya's visit to northern Iraq also formed the basis for a report by the British film-maker Gwynne Roberts, "Saddam's Killing Fields," broadcast on BBC TV in January 1992 and PBS *Frontline*, March 31, 1992.

Two other overviews of the Anfal campaign have been published: Raymond Bonner, "Always Remember," (*The New Yorker*, September 28, 1992, pp.46-51, 54-58 and 63-65); and Judith Miller, "Iraq Accused: A Case of Genocide," (*The New York Times Magazine*), January 3, 1993, pp.12-17, 28, 31-33, 36). Miller's article deals in some detail with the progress of Middle East Watch's Iraqi Kurdistan documents project.

17 A.J. Arberry (trans.), *The Koran Interpreted* (New York: Collier Books, Macmillan Publishing Co., 1955), p.198.

18 Indeed, the July 1970 Provisional Constitution stated that "The People of Iraq is formed of two principal nationalities, the Arab nationality and the Kurdish nationality. This Constitution shall recognize the national rights of the Kurdish people and the legitimate rights of all minorities within the unity of Iraq." The Iraqi government's view of the autonomy issue is set forth in *Settlement of the Kurdish Problem in Iraq* (Baghdad: Ath-Thawra Publications, c.1974).

19 Again, interestingly, it was a census that defined the geographical extent of the 1988 Anfal operation. See below pp. 84-90. See also the comments of Ali Hassan al-Majid on the size of the Arab population in Kurdistan, appendix A, p.353.

20 According to Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett (op cit p.172), Iraqi oil revenues, a mere \$575 million in 1972, rose to \$1.84 billion in 1973 and \$5.7 billion in 1974.

21 The Israeli scholar Amatzia Baram, in his fascinating book *Culture, History and Ideology in the Formation of Ba'thist Iraq, 1968-89* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), pp.61-62, shows how much of this administrative reform illustrated the party's desire to relate Iraq's modern history to the glories of antiquity. Most strikingly, the province of Diwaniya was renamed Qadissiya--after the decisive battle between the Arab and Persian armies in A.D. 635. The Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988, it should be noted, was officially referred to as "Saddam's Qadissiyah."

22 This was, as McDowall (*op cit*) puts it, "autonomy by ultimatum."

23 Speech of September 24, 1973, in Saddam Husain, *On Current Events in Iraq* (London: Longman, 1977), pp.17-18, cited in al-Khalil, *Republic of Fear*. There is also some evidence that the Ba'ath Party harbored a general racial hostility against the Kurds for their kinship with the Persians. According to al-Khalil, for example (*op cit* p.17), the Iraqi government publishing house Dar al-Hurriyya circulated a pamphlet in 1981 entitled *Three Whom God Should Not Have Created: Persians, Jews and Flies* and written by Saddam Hussein's father-in-law, Khairallah Tulfah, a former governor of Baghdad. According to Tulfah, Persians are "animals God created in the shape of humans"; Jews are a "mixture of the dirt and leftovers of diverse peoples"; and flies are a trifling creation "whom we do not understand God's purpose in creating."

24 A helpful guide to the scale of these village clearances is Resool, *Destruction of a Nation*, *op.cit.* Resool's figures, which Middle East Watch regards as highly reliable, list 369 villages destroyed or depopulated in the northern part of Iraqi Kurdistan, and another 154 in Diyala governorate.

25 For example, a directive from the headquarters of the General Security Directorate (*Amn*), dated May 4, 1985 and coded K3/34478, expresses concerns about Kurdish migration to the city of Kirkuk. The document orders that no changes of residence in the governorate of Al-Ta'mim (Kirkuk) will be allowed "until the Northern Affairs Committee [of the Revolutionary Command Council and security circles have given their opinion. This is in order to carry out a secret investigation of the person and the reasons for his taking up residence in the above-mentioned governorate."

26 Middle East Watch interview, Qushtapa complex, May 3, 1992.

27 Reported in *The Times* (London), November 27, 1975, as cited in Martin van Bruinessen, "The Kurds Between Iran and Iraq," *Middle East Report*, July-August 1986, p.27.

28 Middle East Watch interview, Qushtapa complex, May 4, 1992.

29 Resool (*op cit*) gives the following figures: 336 villages destroyed in Suleimaniyeh (26 in 1977 and 310 in 1978); 120 in Erbil governorate (79 in 1977 and 41 in 1978); and the remainder scattered in the governorates of Dohuk and Diyala. Additional testimony gathered by Middle East Watch speaks of 124 villages destroyed around the town of Qala Dizah; and of 260-265 villages destroyed in the entire governorate of Sulemainiyeh.

30 *Al-Thawra*, September 18, 1978, cited in Van Bruinessen, *op cit* p.24.

31 The Northern Affairs Committee is the source of numerous Iraqi government documents that Middle East Watch has examined. It is also referred to (as the "Higher Committee for Northern Affairs") by al-Khalil, in *Republic of Fear*, p.24. The Kirkuk-based Special Investigations Committee, according to a former Iraqi military intelligence officer interviewed by Middle East Watch, consisted of four members--one each from the Ba'ath Party, the General Security Directorate (*Amn*), Military Intelligence (*Istikhbarat*) and the foreign intelligence organization (*Mukhabarat*).

32 Other resettlement camps--*Urdugakan* in Kurdish, or *Mu'askarat* in Arabic, had been built during the 1975 Arabization campaign to house newly arrived Sunni Arabs from the south. This was especially true of areas on the plain north of Dohuk that was formerly occupied by the Kurdish Sleivani tribe.

33 Idris died of a heart attack in 1987; Mas'oud Barzani remains the supreme leader of the KDP.

34 Middle East Watch interview, Qushtapa, May 4, 1992.

35 There is some evidence that the Barzani men were kept alive in captivity for at least a year before eventually being killed. One *Mukhabarat* file contains a sequence of thirty-nine presidential decrees issued in 1983, numbered 998 to 1036, listing individuals who have been sentenced to death in "cases of a special nature." Later correspondence is appended, and one handwritten comment asks "Are any of the above-mentioned persons who have been sentenced to death in our custody?" The reply, also handwritten and dated April 9, 1985, says "None of the above-mentioned persons who have been sentenced to death are in our custody, *with the exception of the Barzani group who were living in our area prior to their detention.*" [emphasis added]

According to a surviving Barzani tribesman interviewed by Middle East Watch in Salah al-Din on March 18, 1993, some of the Barzani women and children were again rounded up by government officials in 1986, trucked to the Turkish border and ordered to leave the country. After remaining on the border for some time, they returned to Qushtapa and it appears that no further action was taken against them. A series of proposed measures against the surviving Barzanis, including stripping them of their Iraqi citizenship, are detailed in *Istikhbarat* correspondence from January 1986, reporting a ruling by the Northern Affairs Committee of the Revolutionary Command Council. NAC letter no.6740, classified "confidential and personal" and dated January 16, 1986.

36 *Al-Iraq*, September 13, 1983.

37 See, for example, Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, pages 28, 231-232.

38 For general background, see Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, pp.187-190, and Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, pp.31-32 and 34-36. The picture was further complicated by the presence in these areas of a number of smaller groups, including Iranian organizations such as the KDP-Iran and Komala, who were conducting guerrilla war against the regime in Teheran from Iraqi soil.

39 Kurdish is a member of the Iranian language group, and has many dialects in addition to Sorani and Kurmanji. See Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, pp.21-22, citing D.N. MacKenzie, "The Origins of Kurdish," *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 1961, pp.68-86.

40 By now Iraq had used chemical weapons a number of times against Iranian troops, but it is probable that the Penjwin offensive marked their first use on Iraqi soil. See Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War, Volume II: The Iran-Iraq War* (London and Boulder: Mansell-Westview, 1990), p.514, and generally pp.506-518.

41 Middle East Watch interview with Naywshirwan Mustafa Amin, Washington, D.C., May 2, 1993.

42 Marr, *op cit*, p.307.

43 The epithet is in such common everyday use that it has lost much of its pejorative force in the process. In the Kurmanji-speaking areas of the north, the Kurdish paramilitaries are also referred to as *chatta*--brigands or bandits.

44 One former *mustashar* described a 1987 conversation with the head of *Amn* in Suleimaniyeh, a colonel by the name of Khalaf. "He told me that I must carry a gun for the government. He pressured me to join. He told me, 'You did not participate in the [Iran-Iraq] war; you must now become a *mustashar*.' He then told me, 'If you don't join, your identification card may be revoked.'" The later implications of this threat turned out to be very grave, since during Anfal the correct identification card could be a matter of life or death. Middle East Watch interview, Suleimaniyeh, May 12, 1992.

45 In general, Islamic law does not apply in Iraq, a secular state--although some elements of Islamic law have been incorporated into areas such as family law. However, like the Anfal operation itself, this was an entirely characteristic attempt by the Ba'ath regime to legitimize its campaigns by wrapping them in the language of religion.

46 There are obvious parallels, for example, with Guatemala and Peru. See Americas Watch, *Civil Patrols in Guatemala*, (August 1986) and *Peru Under Fire: Human Rights Since the Return of Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

47 According to a dossier of destroyed villages compiled by the Kurdistan Reconstruction and Development Society (KURDS), Upper and Lower Besifki were destroyed in 1987 and Dergijneek in 1988. Both were in the *nahya* of Al-Doski.

48 Some villages had developed relatively sophisticated water-supply and irrigation systems, channeling rivers to their homes through mud-brick covered trenches called *karez*.

49 Middle East Watch interview with Naywshirwan Mustafa Amin, Washington, D.C., May 2, 1993.

50 The tendency to describe the regime's opponents with insulting epithets was very common. One 17-year-old who was executed by the regime was described in an official *Amn* document, ordering the Suleimaniyeh morgue to dispose of his body, as a "fire-worshipper"--a derogatory reference to the ancient Iranian religion of Zoroastrianism.

51 This was another in the long line of broken promises to the Kurds, who were certainly not consulted in July 1988 when Teheran accepted the UN ceasefire resolution in the middle of the Anfal campaign.

52 Middle East Watch interview with Naywshirwan Mustafa Amin, Washington D.C., May 2, 1993.