



REPORT ON A VISIT TO THE KURDISH CONTROLLED AREA OF IRAQ, MAY 15-21, 1992.

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My visit was for the purpose of observing the Kurdish election, scheduled (after previous postponements) for Sunday, May 17th, and actually held on Tuesday, May 19th. My invitation had come from both major Kurdish leaders: Mr. Jalal Talabani, whom I have met on several occasions, in London and in Washington, over a period of some years, and Mr. Massud Barzani, whom I had not met in person but with whom, as with Mr. Talabani, I had held extensive correspondence over those years. This was my first visit to the area.

I had hoped to have some good conversations with both leaders during my visit but, quite naturally, this was impeded by the very fact that they were having an election. I had a short meeting with Mr. Talabani, May 16th, mostly in company with other visitors, and other private meetings we planned kept getting postponed as one thing or another related to the election got in the way. Several planned meetings with Mr. Barzani also kept getting postponed, and I came away still without ever having met him, though I had a couple of good meetings with his spokesman, Mr. Hishyar Zibari, whom I already knew. It was important to be there for the election. It will be important also to be there again soon, not for an election, and to have the conversations that the election precluded.

1. THE ELECTION ITSELF.

I took part in the observer team led by Mr. Michael Meadowcroft of the London-based Electoral Reform Consultancy Services (6 Chancel Street, Blackfriars, London SE1 0UU), an outreach of the Electoral Reform Society. I leave it to Mr. Meadowcroft himself to issue the group report on the election (I left even my own raw notes, on many yellow-pad pages, with Michael, and haven't access to them just now), but will add here my own impressions.

I went, as observer, to seven voting stations, all in the vicinity of Aqra in the Dahuk province: Sharman (station 40), Rovia (36), Bardarash (30), Kirdesin (29), Dinarttha (27), Bejel (28) and Aqra itself (26). I travelled in a car provided by the Kurdish Front, with a driver and translator. Like all the cars provided by the Front, this one was actually supplied by a party, in this case the KDP (Kurdish Democratic Party) of Mr. Barzani, as was rather to be expected in a predominantly KDP area of the country. I had actually been assigned, by Mr. Meadowcroft, to observe the election at only four stations: besides Aqra itself, Sarsank (station 22), Ziraf (41) and Shiladzeh (42, in the neighborhood of Amadiyah), but while these had looked close enough on a map, it became clear that the day would be wasted travelling between them if I were to attempt it in the extremely bad state of the roads. My visits to the other six stations I actually saw were a substitute for this. Since

it was not possible, in any case, for the available number of observers to get to all voting stations in the country, this had the practical effect of adding to the randomness of the observer effort. There was duplication in the case of Bardarash and perhaps one other of the stations I visited, as they were seen also by another of the official observers, a young British woman, who was also at the Aqra station when I returned there in the wee hours of the next morning during the counting. After spending about three-quarters of an hour to an hour at each of my election stations during the day, and then stopped for a hour's rest, I had been back to the Sharman station and to Zoria, where I saw the closing of the polls, opening of the ballot boxes and start of the count at midnight, and then returned to Aqra for the rest of the counting process.

The International Human Rights Law Group, based in New York, conducted an independent observer mission, with five participants, which paralleled the work of forty six of us (I have heard that number but cannot independently confirm it) who worked together under Michael Meadowcroft's direction.

Of the honesty and integrity of the election, I can give a very strong confirmation. Everything was untried, and highly improvisatory. No one else in this region has even attempted so free and democratic an election before.

The outstanding failing was with election secrecy, which of course raises the question of freedom of choice. An election held under the aegis of Saddam Hussein in which others knew for whom one had voted would be anything but free. In this election, though, there had been such free exchange throughout the time of the campaign, and people had become so uninhibited about proclaiming their divergent choices, that in practice no sense of intimidation or of need for concealment was felt. For a considerable time before the election, signs, party colors and slogans, pictures of the candidates, banners etc. had been exhibited all over the area -- for a longer time, by far, than I was in the country. There had been no significant defacing of these banners or party symbols, and they were not confined to particular areas where one party dominated: signs of all the parties could be seen in all parts. Rallies were held frequently for all these parties, often simultaneously in close proximity to each other. Despite the fact that all adult males in the country are armed, good nature prevailed, and there were no significant number of incidents pitting supporters of one party against others. Right up to the day of the election, I was myself hearing from party workers of a variety of parties that the election, just the fact of holding it, would be a triumph for the Kurds, and that it hardly mattered who won: the Kurds would win in any case. That provides the context of the flagrantly non-secret voting on election day.

My first experience of it was in Sharman, where I found voters came to a table where election officials were already accustomed to awaiting their question as to how to proceed. The two ballots had places to mark a preference in a way that did not require either reading or writing. One had the color symbols for the six parties -- KDP (Kurdish Democratic Party), PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan), KPDP (Kurdish Popular Democratic Party), Socialist, Communist and Islamic. The other had photographs of the four candidates for "Leader:" Barzani, Talabani, the Socialist and the Islamic Party chiefs. The Judge in charge of the polls and his officials all explained, in face of my questions about secrecy and how to guarantee it, that these were very simple, mostly illiterate country people, who wanted and would demand "help." This was clearly the rather general case. If anyone did

want to keep his ballot secret this was respected, and clearly not with the marking down of his (her) action that would be done under circumstances of a dictator's election, but it seemed to occur seldom.

I was scandalized at the sight of all this, and explained at length how the secrecy could be preserved, and why it should be. Officials -- not especially sophisticated people, and also certainly not stupid people -- explained their acceptance of the principle and their feeling that the practicalities were against it. They went so far as to set up a second room next door to the one on which the voting was being done, in which people could do their voting in secret, but it was clear to me that this was going to last no longer than the time I spent on the premises. It was clear enough to me, also, that this was in no way an intimidation situation -- I saw PUK supporters explaining to people how to mark their ballots KDP and Massud, and KDP supporters helping people vote PUK -- that I was at pains not to humiliate or demean these people. Instead I took a different tack. Each of the six parties had an official observer at the polls. I found occasion to speak to each one privately, explained the whole theory of the secret ballot and how easy it was to skew an election where the balloting was non-secret, and then put the question directly whether the party observer found that people were free to vote for his party and whether the system of voting was entirely fair to his party. In every case I had a positive answer. As the day went on, I did this at every polling station I visited, and never got an objection to the manner of voting or any complaint of unfairness.

At my second polling station, Zoria, I found the Judge (the only woman I found in an official position at any station) was herself the one sitting at the table, showing people how to vote for their choice and actually marking the ballots for them. This reduced my zeal for establishing the secret ballot to despair. It was impossible even to engage the Judge in discussion of this without holding up the whole process. Here, as at three of the other polling stations I visited, the decision had been made to let all the women vote first, while the men waited outside. I found I couldn't simply bring everything to a halt, found also that there was no sign of lack of freedom. One woman, informed that she had to dip her finger in the marking ink to show that she had voted, wanted to know: which finger for Jalal Talabani. It was common for people, women more than men, to come to the station (it was, in every case I saw, a schoolhouse) wearing the colors of their party, and in fact all parties were represented in this way each place I went. So I resigned myself to the open ballot as fact, and asked my questions, privately, of each of the party observers, with the same very open and positive result as at Sharman.

To my surprise, at my third station, Bardarash, the secrecy was maintained in a quite exemplary way. The problem, I felt, had to do in most places I went with the way the furnishings were arranged, that made no real provision for secrecy. There were, for instance, no curtained booths, or anything equivalent. This was so at Bardarash as much as anywhere. But someone in the organizing of this station had sufficient understanding of the secrecy and its importance that all voters were strongly encouraged to take their ballots aside and mark them secretly, and fold them before bringing them to the ballot box. People here were quite capable of following these instructions, and were, I expect, a good indication that people at any of these stations could have been instructed as well. I thought at the time that this was a result of greater sophistication in a more urbanized center. (Bardarash is no metropolis, but is more thickly settled, and a bit industrial.) On that basis, I expected to find good observation of secrecy at Aqra, the largest

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center I visited, but I was mistaken: at Aqra the voting was as out in the open as at any of the centers I had seen apart from Bardarash.

My experience of this is paralleled by any of the other observers I spoke with, both of the Meadowcroft and of the Human Rights Law Group, and both with regard to the lack of secrecy, and to the judgment that freedom had not been curtailed. I am sure that, for any subsequent Kurdish election, there needs to be a) a massive education program about the value of the secret ballot beforehand, and b) careful preparation of the voting stations to provide for it. However, I do not believe that this election was made unfree by the lack of secrecy.

On the morning after the election, I heard the results of the voting in six local stations, five of which were among those I had observed myself. I quote them here with the understanding that they show people's freedom to vote as they chose. Others might interpret these results otherwise:

Vote for Parliament (by Party Lists, not individual candidates):

|                  | <u>KDP</u> | <u>PUK</u> | <u>KPDP</u> | <u>Communist</u> | <u>Socialist</u> | <u>Islamic</u> |
|------------------|------------|------------|-------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|
| <u>Sharman</u>   | 4330       | 80         | 17          | 6                | 10               | 15             |
| <u>Bardarash</u> | 3285       | 295        | 192         | 2                | 27               | 108            |
| <u>Bejel</u>     | 3210       | 186        | 25          | 8                | 10               | 32             |
| <u>Ziraf</u>     | 821        | 63         | 99          | 5                | 8                | 17             |
| <u>Dinartha</u>  | 4141       | 151        | 95          | 8                | 7                | 98             |
| <u>Kirdesin</u>  | 2360       | 1022       | 32          | 1                | 11               | 26             |

Vote for Leader:

|                  | <u>Barzani</u> | <u>Talabani</u> | <u>Mahmoud</u> | <u>Othman</u> |
|------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------|
| <u>Sharman</u>   | 4366           | 101             | 0              | 20            |
| <u>Bardarash</u> | 3422           | 374             | 20             | 94            |
| <u>Bejel</u>     | 3239           | 195             | 4              | 23            |
| <u>Ziraf</u>     | 876            | 113             | 7              | 14            |
| <u>Dinartha</u>  | 4186           | 261             | 2              | 53            |
| <u>Kirdesin</u>  | 2392           | 1058            | 4              | 24            |

Of these, only Ziraf was not one of those I observed. The whole area is well known as predominantly KDP (as other areas are predominantly PUK). Bardarash,

where I had found, by exception, close observance of the secrecy of the ballot, did not differ from the prevailing pattern of the other stations nearly so much as did Kirdesin, where the voting was done as much out in the open as anywhere else. The numbers of votes that dissent from the predominant KDP sentiment is significant enough anywhere to argue, in my own opinion, strongly against the idea that anyone was not free to vote personal choice, granted that this was known to be mainly an election between two main parties and that the Communists and Socialists were going nowhere under current circumstances. KPDP and the Islamic Party had their pockets of relative strength, where people appear to have felt quite free to vote for them.

A note on the Communist vote: the Communists appear to be primarily a Christian party in this region. The Christian minority, estimated to be about 5% in the Kurdish region as in Iraq as a whole, was guaranteed five set-aside seats in the Kurdish Parliament elected that day, in addition to the 100 seats elected by the general ballot. The only station with a Christian population, where I saw the separate ballot and ballot-box available for this minority vote, was Aqra, for which I did not get any record of the results. Members of the Christian minority, identified so by their ID cards, had the choice of using either the general ballot for choosing among the six parties, or a separate ballot listing four parties. Of these, only the Assyrian Democratic Movement was a separate party, and a member party of the Kurdish Front in its own right. The other three parties on the minority ballot were affiliates: two of the main parties (KDP and PUK), and the other of the Communists. It was rather expected that most of the Communist vote, such as it was, would be cast on this minority ballot.

The other issue that raised concern about the integrity of the vote was the indelible ink used to mark the right forefinger of each person who voted and so prevent double voting. On Saturday, May 16, the day before the election was to have taken place, there was a panic among the parties about the indelibility of the ink (supplied by Germany, so that one would have expected the most eminent of chemical pedigrees). The election was postponed by two days for that reason (I come away with a bit of skepticism on whether that was really the full explanation of this case of cold feet on the election eve), and a better, more reliably indelible ink obtained and distributed to all the voting stations. I won't attempt to pontificate on the chemistry of the two inks. What I did observe was the effect. On the day following the election I did see a few -- very few -- reasonably clean fingers of people who had voted. I was told of an alcohol-base cleaning agent, available locally, that could accomplish this with a lot of hard scrubbing. However, I found that no one had managed to clean out the inner rim of the fingernail, and that for most people, even though they had scrubbed enough to clean off the skin surface, the whole surface of the fingernail was still deeply purple from the ink.

Judging this on the basis of the sort of people who were voting, the good will, good nature and pride in the accomplishment of holding a free election, and the general lack of sophistication of most of this public, I come away convinced that there will not have been any significant or organized amount of double or multiple voting, though there could have been individual instances. I know that, in the uncertainty of the period before the result of the election was announced, accusations of double voting flew about rather freely. I truly do not believe there is any substance to them, based on this experience and what I heard reported by others of the official observers.

What really stood out, though, as the characteristic of this election was the tremendous enthusiasm with which it was carried out. I don't have the figures for the percentage of qualified voters who exercised their right, and I know there were places where, for lack of sufficient polling places, people did not get in to vote before the midnight closing of the polls (I've heard this of the Northernmost town of Sakho, and of several places in Sulaimaniyah). This did not happen in the area where I was observing. In fact, everywhere I saw, practically everyone had voted by early evening, and the officials and party observers sat by and talked about the election until midnight, when they would be able to close the polls and open the boxes for the count.

One of the questions our observer survey was asked to answer was how long it took each person to get to vote once they arrived at the station. The answer varied very widely, because of the improvisatory character of this election, some handling it very swiftly, others keeping people hours in lines. But it didn't really matter, for the reason that, at every station, practically everyone was out at the polling station by six or seven o'clock in the morning, for an eight o'clock opening, and then stayed all day. It became a day-long celebration of the great event, tremendously festive and the source of enormous pride. I found myself in need of words to respond to people's elation at holding this election. I had been advised to greet people with the Arabic "As-salaam," which was always taken in good part, and rely on my translator from there on if the person had no English or French. I asked for the Kurdish word for "Congratulations," and when I got it kept wishing people "Perisgit" for the rest of the day.

A young man I had met in Sulaimaniyah the day before the actual election had expressed the spirit of this in a way that really impressed me. Like many others, he had wanted to know what Americans thought of the Kurds, of their plight, of their political aspirations. He did not want to see other peoples, like ourselves, think of the Kurds only in terms of their being poor suffering people, victims, helpless, please send some food. Instead, he wanted outside peoples like ourselves to understand that they were a people with political needs, demands that they had considered carefully and with realistic restraint, which they felt deserved attention. His feeling was that the holding of the first genuinely free, democratic election ever seen in his region should profoundly change the way the Kurds of Iraq would be seen by the outside world: not as the victim people to be pitied but as the people who had accomplished this tremendously positive thing, had chosen, democratically, their own future, and given an example of freedom to their neighbors, in Iraq and other surrounding countries, which they truly wished these neighbors would be able to follow. These people, so desperately persecuted and hunted down just a year ago, have deserved the world's respect for this great accomplishment.

## 2. THE SITUATION OF THE KURDS IN IRAQ.

### A. SECURITY.

I hope it is well enough established, by now, that what the Kurds have faced from the Iraqi government of President Saddam Hussein in recent years has been literally a genocide. The evidence for this is in the Iraqi records, written and on audio and video tapes, that were found last year in Iraqi police and army buildings when the Kurds rebelled -- some of those records brought to

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the United States just at the time of this election last month, and in the careful researches of Peter Galbraith, of Kanan Makiyah, of such agencies as Middle East Watch and others. I can only marginally confirm what they have found.

I did not get to the famous town of Halabjah, scene of the most publicized poison gas attack made by Iraqi forces in 1988. I did see, however, the devastated villages all over the countryside, some of the four thousand destroyed by the Hussein regime since 1975, and particularly since 1987. A belt of these stretching North from the region of Sulaimaniyah practically up to the resort towns of Salah-ud Din and Shaqlawa, were subjected to heavy aerial bombardment and gas attacks during 1988, subsequent to the more famous Halabjah attack. I have seen and have photographs of both an unexploded napalm bomb and the cannister of a gas bomb (with its Russian labelling) in the destroyed town of Hiran, have met there the villagers who are now returning and starting life over again in tents and makeshift shelters built on the ruins of their former homes, including a number of old men whose sight has been permanently impaired by the gas attack. I have seen the evidence of a massacre carried out by Iraqi forces just last year, during the suppression of the Kurdish uprising, at Atrush (half way between Dahuk and Aqra), where people were simply forced into a bulldozed pit, their bodies dynamited and bulldozed over.

What is seen is not simply the suppression of a rebellion last year, but evidence of consistent genocidal attack over a period of years -- what Saddam Hussein, with simply blasphemous reference to a Koranic passage, referred to as "Al-Anfal." In the major cities -- I was in Sakho and Dahuk, Shaqlawa and Salah-ud-Din, and down to Sulaimaniyah, but never got into Arbil -- one finds major destruction everywhere, lack of services and drastic lack of supplies such as food, medicine or fuel.

The area is threatened with a renewed genocide if the Iraqi Army were to reenter it. The voting station I visited at Bardarash happened to be the closest one to Iraqi Army lines -- it is just West-Northwest of Mosul. Iraqi artillery can be seen clearly, aimed at the town, along a ridge less than two kilometers away, have shelled it periodically, and shelling had been threatened for the election day if people should have the temerity to come out and vote, as it had been threatened too for some of the more southerly towns below Sulaimaniyah. That the Iraqi Army did not fulfill those threats appeared to be due more to the more than normally frequent overflights by American military aircraft flying from Turkey than to any other reason. The presence of some United Nations agencies in the Kurdish controlled area, even though they and their UN Guard are not there for the military protection of the Kurds, is also some further tenuous protection for them from the armies of the Baghdad regime.

These few forms of protection are up for reconsideration at regular intervals, even the ability of the UN and U.S. to provide such protection subject to the nervous second thoughts of the Turkish government, which has good reason to be apprehensive about the intentions of at least a fringe element of Turkish Kurds (the PKK), though not of the Kurds of Iraq.

Rehabilitation efforts by the UNHCR have been artificially limited to an effort to restore the status quo ante of March 1991, as if that were normal or civilized times in Iraqi Kurdistan. March 1991, on the contrary, was a time in which most Iraqi villages were already destroyed by the deliberate genocidal

campaign of the Iraqi government, the population already reduced largely to refugees, the fields made unavailable for agriculture by land-mines, and the whole society already reduced to chaos and despair. It was for this reason that the population simply took to the mountains and fled across the borders into Turkey and Iran last year at the approach of the Iraqi Army. Everyone had plenty of experience of what the advent of that army meant for them, and knows that nothing has changed in the intentions of the Iraqi government since then. Withdrawal of the slender protection afforded by the international community, specifically by the U.S., with its coalition allies, and the UN agencies, would inevitably mean renewed genocide. The central question is whether the U.S. government is prepared to stand by and let this happen again, and while it is painful for us in the United States to hear it stated so plainly, the answer to that question is truly not clear to the Kurdish population of Northern Iraq or to their leaders.

What seems to be more telling an argument for continued U.S. (and UN) vigilance against any such renewed genocide is the certainty that, at the first hint of renewed military activity against them by the government of Iraq, the whole population would immediately renew its flight across the Turkish and Iranian borders. This is well enough understood in Turkey, which does not want to see any such development. We can be sure that it would be even more embarrassing for the U.S. than it was last year, and that our European allies would be even less patient with our failure to prevent it than they were last time. They, of course, have not been distinguishing themselves in Yugoslavia, but they would still have strong reproaches if the U.S. were to allow so preventable a tragedy as renewed genocide of the Iraqi Kurds.

Also of concern is the internal security situation, with every adult male carrying automatic weapons, divided up into multiple independent militias under the rather delicate umbrella of the Kurdish Front. The election experience itself has been extraordinary under this as well as several other aspects, in the amount of good will and peace among the many factions it has shown, and the widespread expression of support for unity among all the Kurds.

The election was in fact a referendum on the outstanding question set before Kurdish policy planners: should the Kurds be working for an accommodation with the Baghdad regime or not? The first attempts at such an accommodation were made last year by Mr. Talabani when, at great risk to himself, he made the trip to Baghdad, had the famous and embarrassing kissing scene with Saddam Hussein, but came away convinced that there was nothing to be accomplished by such efforts. Mr. Barzani, initially even more skeptical than Talabani of anything that might be offered or promised from Baghdad, nevertheless got drawn more and more into an effort to bring about such an accommodation, simply out of his still greater skepticism over whether the United States would do anything to prevent a genocide. These various parties, with their militias, are all the result of the fragmentation of the Kurdish movement after the debacle of 1975, and they were shooting at each other within fairly recent memory. The formation, early in 1988, of the Kurdish Front was a great accomplishment, and that unity is threatened now for the first time by this policy difference, which is basically about how to fathom the intentions of the United States. The voters' answer can best be interpreted as saying that accommodation with Baghdad should not be sought. The election does not, in fact, remove or settle the question, which remains acute and demands the cooperative, not disunited, response of both major party leaders, as they well know.



Under these circumstances, with the laborious unity and peace of these party factions and their distinct militias so threatened by that intractable question, it is especially necessary that there be a coherent governing authority, both a Parliament and an Executive, to which all these militias can be accountable. This is the major practical result of the election, to provide the Kurds with a Parliament. Much remains obscure in the very evenly balanced outcome of the contest between the two main parties. I've seen too many contradictory reports and assessments to have confidence in predictions before I have the opportunity to go back and speak with the leaders again. That the separate-ballot election for "Leader" -- a role defined neither as President nor Prime Minister, and carrying a kind of authority whose accountability to the elected Parliament is likewise undefined -- was inconclusive, neither main party leader receiving the required 51%, is to my mind a fortunate result. I get the impression that Mr. Barzani would like to have a run-off, and that Mr. Talabani and the other parties would prefer to leave the "Leader" role moot, and have instead an executive chosen by, answerable to and dismissable by the Parliament. I don't know how that argument will come out. I've seen one report (Jim Muir, writing in Middle East International) that said the parties would let this election's results stand only for four months (to October) rather than the intended three years. I would find that unfortunate.

It was so clear to me that this was not the same as an election in Indiana, in which you can choose one leader over another and toss the other one into unelected obscurity, that I wrote to both leaders a couple of months back urging them to recognize that their leadership was very localized in its bases, and that they could not afford to elevate one and demean the other, that the unity of the Kurds depends on their mutual respect and cooperation.

#### B. ECONOMIC.

The Iraqi Kurds live in oppressive isolation, an effect of the application of the United Nations sanctions against Iraq to their now autonomous area in a way that affects them much more drastically than it does the rest of Iraq itself. I see this as an unplanned part of the sanctions campaign.

This shows itself most conspicuously in drastic shortages of food, fuel and medicines. I didn't see starvation, but great scarcity and expense. Gasoline, for the rather few vehicles on the road -- as guests of the Kurdish Front, we foreign observers were provided with every bit of transportation the parties could manage -- came from jerry cans at crossroads, managed by the militias. This picture results from the internal blockade maintained against the Kurdish area since last October by the Iraqi government, which allows none of the humanitarian aid permitted to come into Iraq under the UN sanctions to get into the Kurdish controlled area. Local production, of food or fuel, within the Kurdish area is simply impossible, because of the mining of the agricultural areas of the countryside at the time of the destruction of nearly all the villages. Whatever comes into the area is mainly the result of creative smuggling. The UN agencies and the coalition forces have made some provision, but under economic strains which will be described.

This area actually has ample resources. It came as a surprise to me to find that there is oil in many parts of it, as I had always thought of the oil areas as only around Mosul and Kirkuk. I am told there is uranium in recoverable

quantities, and that the area is rich in iron deposits. Agriculturally, the Kurdish area could easily be more than self-sufficient if the urgent problem of land-mine removal could once be addressed. In fact, the Kurdish area was so much the bread-basket of Iraq, as well as the fruit and vegetable garden, that the genocidal policy of the Ansar, destruction of villages, depopulation and mining of the countryside, could only be carried out by virtue of the ample agricultural credits afforded to Iraq over those years by the United States.

For this reason, it is especially regrettable that the UNHCR, on the premise that it is its task only to restore the area to its status of March 1991, when most of this destruction and refugee-creation had already happened, is now in the process of closing down its operation in the area, leaving its remaining tasks to UNICEF, which will have no brief to address these problems.

In the meantime, all the work of UN agencies, and of any other international agencies that operate in the Kurdish area under any sort of agreement with the government in Baghdad, is impeded by the requirement that any money they spend be exchanged at the official Iraqi rate for their actually non-convertible currency, \$3.00 to the Dinar. The Dinar is not worth that.

It surprised me, just after my return from Iraq, to find criticism spread out in the New York Times (the Youssef M. Ibrahim article of Wednesday, May 27, '92, titled "Fake-Money Flood Is Aimed At Crippling Iraq's Economy"), claiming that the United States was mounting a counterfeit Dinar campaign to destabilize Iraq. Whether or not any such effort is being made, what I saw in the Kurdish area speaks of a much different economic inadequacy of the Iraqi currency.

The normal currency for all transactions in the Kurdish Controlled Area is the Iraqi Dinar, but used at its international value rather than at the artificial rate claimed by Baghdad. I saw the Dinar being exchanged normally at 13 to the dollar. I've seen 15, I've seen 19. The Ibrahim article speaks of a range within Baghdad-controlled Iraq between 16 and 21 to the dollar, which is different from what I have seen. The currency in use in the Kurdish area is not the large-denomination 50- and 100-Dinar bills that Ibrahim speaks of as widely counterfeited. Instead, you see everywhere 5-Dinar bills, great stacks of them for relatively small amounts of money, heavily used and crumpled, not at all what you would see in a counterfeiting operation.

Taking the conservative rate of 13 Dinars to the dollar, which is still the common one, it follows that of every dollar spent, by the UN or other agencies working through Baghdad and on its economic terms in their relief efforts for the Kurdish area, exchanging their dollars at the rate of 3 to the Dinar, only 2.54 cents goes to the relief effort in the Kurdish North. The other 97.46% of everything spent goes directly to Saddam Hussein. This differential is, of course, even more extreme if one of the several higher rates for the actual relation of the Dinar to the dollar is taken. This means that there are in fact two major obstacles to the provision of humanitarian aid to the Kurdish area: one is the blockade of all food, fuel and medicine, or of any sort of supply, that Baghdad has maintained against the Kurdish area since October, in defiance of UN resolutions. The other is this enormous disparity between the official and the actual valuation of the Dinar, which results in diverting almost the whole value of whatever is spent for the Kurds by the international community to the Baghdad regime itself. This hardly seems sensible or necessary.

The crazy difference between the Iraqi government's official rate for the Dinar and its actual value raises another enormous anomaly, and that is the Turkish trade with Iraq.

It surprised me, again, to see newspaper accounts of what appear to be calculated Pentagon leaks, describing sanction violations across the Jordanian border -- is this some effort to embarrass Jordan in particular? -- and mentioning how even a small traffic in a few luxury items can enable Saddam Hussein to curry favor with his inner circle of Revolutionary Guards and thus solidify his regime. What I actually saw at the Turkish border was a very heavy traffic in trucks, from the Habur crossing between Silopi and Sakho down the rather short distance to Mosul.

The Turkish government has argued that these trucks carry only humanitarian shipments of food and medicine, which are allowed under the UN sanctions. When the traffic first got under way, some months ago, some Kurds in the towns through which it passed took offense that no such supplies were being provided to them, while the Baghdad regime was (quite illegally) boycotting any shipments to them of relief that came in through Baghdad. Consequently, people began picketing and trying to hold up the Turkish trucks. The Turkish government responded instantly with a threat to close the border if there were interference with the truck traffic, and the leadership of the Kurdish Front had the discretion to prevent any further interference, declaring that it was right for humanitarian aid to be sent to the suffering Arab citizens of Iraq, even though the Kurds themselves were so conspicuously excluded.

In fact, there is no check on what materials go to Mosul in those trucks. It can be anything from food and medicine to luxury items to electronic gear to whatever. The truck drivers have taken to carrying any cargo they can get free of charge, since their profit does not depend on charges for what they bring in, but the profit instead on the diesel fuel they bring out.

Every truck has large rectangular oil tanks slung under the bodies and suspended on both sides. The tanks are made as large as possible, and that means they actually project some eight inches or so being the outer perimeter of the truck -- a dangerous way to carry oil, and I am told by Kurdish informants that accidents are common. The truck drivers fill these supplementary tanks with diesel fuel right at the filling stations in Mosul, and the normal price is 70 fils per liter. That is 7% of a Dinar, and if one takes the official Iraqi rate of \$3.00 to the Dinar literally that sounds like a reasonable price, 21 cents, for a liter of diesel fuel at a producing center. Since the Dinar is not worth that, though, the Turkish truck drivers are only paying, at the common rate of 13 Dinars to the dollar (being in the business, they can doubtless get a better rate than that), \$0.0054 for the liter. On the Turkish side of the border, they sell that diesel fuel for a normal price of 4,500 Turkish Lira, or \$0.75, for a profit of 139 times the price they paid in Iraq. In other words, the Iraqi government, through the fiction of its official exchange rate, is providing this windfall for Turkish entrepreneur in exchange for whatever goods the Turks may bring them.

On the day I was leaving Iraq, in company with Netherlands observers Pieter Muller and Ruud Hoff, we passed the waiting line of these trucks, trying to get through customs to the Turkish side, outside Sakho. There was a double line of trucks on one side of the road, bumper to bumper, a third line, less closely packed together, on the other side, and a substantial number of other trucks out in the

center of the road; in other words, the equivalent of three full lines of trucks bumper to bumper. This stretched for a full 8 km, or 5 miles, that afternoon of May 21st. (Photographs enclosed.)

The Kurdish Front, having given its prudent support to this bit of Turkish enterprise, has begun charging a toll of 400 Iraqi Dinars per truck. At the rather conservative rate of 13 Dinars to the dollar, which is what that is worth to them, this amounts to a modest \$30.76 a truck. But it is the only regular tax income that the Front receives.

### C. POLITICAL.

I should explain somewhat my own relation to the Kurds. It goes back to the early 1970s, when I worked in London with Richard Hauser, who had been consulted by Mustafa Barzani about questions of political and social strategy during the time of the earlier Kurdish rebellion, after Saddam Hussein had simply reneged on the autonomy agreement negotiated in 1970. The elder Barzani so valued Richard Hauser's advice that he took the lease on the house next door to ours in London as headquarters for the European activities of the KDP, so as to be in more constant touch. For a good part of that time, Mustafa Barzani's representative in London, heading that office at 18 Ponsonby Place, was Sami Abdul Rahman, who broke away after the 1975 defeat of the Kurds to set up his KPDP. (I had a good conversation with Sami during my stay in Iraq, and have always valued his intelligence and decency.)

I was conversant with these consultations, and took part in establishing a British-Kurdish Friendship Society, bringing Kurdish students to British universities, etc., right up to 1981, when I returned from Britain to the U.S., and for a few years lost contact with the Kurds. This was corrected around Christmas time of 1987, when Kenneth Lee, the British Quaker who had taken the lead in forming the Friendship Society years before, visited me for some days in Boston. When he commented that, with the winding down of the Iran-Iraq war, the Kurds had a moment of opportunity to bring their situation before the eyes of the international community, and ought to unify their various factions so as to make a plan, my response was that it wouldn't work that way. Someone would have to come up with a plan so sensible and so attractive that the different factions would unite around it. We speculated on this for a day or so, and Kenneth got on the phone to put me back in contact with the Kurdish leadership. The outcome of that was that I quickly put a paper before both Mr. Barzani and Mr. Talabani that seems to have coincided with other thinking that they were doing at the time of the early formation of the Kurdish Front.

My own thesis of that time was that the Iranian and Iraqi governments would be utterly unable to come to the treaty arrangement that both would need without the active prodding and pushing of the international community -- the U.S. and European powers, the UN machinery and whatever other help could be got. That made it a time for the Kurds to appeal, for their rights, to these outside powers. But they had to be realistic, and recognize that no one was going to help them upset any international boundaries. Any proposal to become independent, or to join with

the Kurds of other countries, would be kiss of death, and would cost them any prospect of international support. It would be hard enough for the American and European powers to direct any help to the Kurds even without that, given the solidarity of the Arab countries and their influence in any UN deliberations over other Third World countries.

Hence I recommended that the Iraqi Kurds, renouncing any intention of independence, concentrate on three priorities: 1) the preservation of their human rights, in the face of the persecution and depopulation and destruction of villages they were suffering from the Iraqi regime; 2) their cultural rights, such as the use of their language, the teaching of their history and traditions; and 3) the greatest possible freedom of communication with the Kurdish communities of the other countries with Kurdish populations. If the focus were clearly enough on these, I argued, they could hope for some help from the international community.

Others were doubtless thinking on similar lines at that time, and the policies around which the Kurdish Front was formed in 1988 approximated parts of that program. Even at that time, Mr. Talabani was arguing that the Front did not look for the break-up of the Iraqi state, but rather that the best guarantee of safety for the Kurds of Iraq would be a democratic Iraq, and that the same held for the Kurdish communities of the other countries. The third on my list of priorities, the communication among the Kurdish communities of the different countries, he found too ambitious at that time, and thought the various governments would be too much alarmed by it, although he emphasized the work that Iranian Kurdish leaders had done in reconciling the various factions of Iraqi Kurds, and the work he had done himself in reconciling factions among the Kurds in Iran.

It is out of this context that I have maintained close contact with the Kurdish leadership since that time, always as an advocate of such policies, which were very congenial to them. The collaboration of the leaders in the Kurdish Front went along very cordially until after the rising of March 1991, into which they felt themselves led by American appeals for the people of Iraq to rise up against Saddam Hussein. The subsequent divisive question of whether they should put their reliance on accommodation with Saddam Hussein, whom they both knew they could not trust, or on the protection of the U.S.-led coalition against his renewed genocidal attack, in which both knew they could place no real confidence, has been the first really corroding challenge to their unity in the Kurdish Front. Both are now thoroughly aware of the need for their continuing cooperation to the unity of the Kurds, but deeply apprehensive at what are in fact very subtle differences of emphasis in their analysis of how the Kurds can respond to this dilemma.

In the context of the election, both leaders emphasize strongly that they are not seeking, or constituting by their action in holding the election, an independent Kurdish state, that they look for the implementation of the autonomy agreement that was already accepted by the Iraqi government (in effect, by Saddam Hussein, who had negotiated it himself) in 1970.

A key to their political position is the withdrawal by the Iraqi government of its administrative jurisdiction over the Kurdish Controlled Area last October, at the same time as it began the total boycott of supplies to the area. The Kurds are likely to classify this, first, as an economic problem, since it meant that the Baghdad government ceased payment of all civil service salaries in the Kurdish area. This is burdensome to the Kurdish Front, as they have had no revenues from

which to make up those salaries (at least until the beginning of the Turkish truck traffic to Mosul, on which they now collect a tax). But the far more important aspect of Hussein's action is that he effectively abandoned jurisdiction over the area. Civil service workers were instructed simply to leave, and move to areas under Baghdad government control. Most of them were, of course, Kurdish themselves, and stayed where they were.

When one speaks of autonomy, of course, there is a question about what powers are exercised by the autonomous regime and which stay with the central government. The most obvious answer is that central government is responsible, at the least, for defense and foreign policy. But those are precisely the things that the Kurds can least afford to permit to the government in Baghdad. It is not a question here merely of the military suppression, last year, of a rebellion in the Kurdish area, after which a reconciliation and restoration of central authority is to be sought. Long before last year's rebellion the Baghdad government's policy toward the Kurds was actively genocidal, to some extent ever since 1975, but most decidedly from late 1987 right up to the time of the invasion of Kuwait and the interdiction of Iraq by international society. There was destruction of Kurdish villages right through July of 1990. Even the substantial city of Rawanduz had already been informed that it was slated for outright destruction, and its public services had been cut off. The Kurds can only conclude that, if the Iraqi Army were again admitted into their area, the genocide would commence again at once. Hence the Iraqi government can have no part in their defense. As for foreign policy, the only outstanding issue of foreign policy for the Iraqi Kurds is to be protected from the depredations of their own central government.

The adherence to the state of Iraq, then, behind the protestations of simple autonomy, can only be to an Iraq of the future, of hope, a democratic or at least civilized Iraq which is yet to be created. I hear very responsible American voices arguing that this can only be a fiction, that once the Kurds have their autonomy and their own Parliament it is only a matter of time before they assert their independence, that there is no going back from the point they have reached. I truly question that conclusion, and credit the Kurds with meaning what they have been saying. The evidence for that is their consistently keeping lines of communication open with the rest of the Iraqi opposition, Arab Shiite and Sunni. This effort has persisted in the face of the demonstrated weakness of that opposition, which has been battered by the continuous brutality of Saddam Hussein's regime and has had much of its best leadership destroyed. The three-day conference of some 200 Iraqis, Arab and Kurdish, in Vienna from June 17 to 19 is a new indication of the Kurdish leadership's lasting commitment to this democratic Iraq of the future. The very fact that surrounding regimes, in Iran, Saudi Arabia and Syria, were thoroughly alarmed by this meeting is itself a powerful sign that this is in fact the independent Iraqi leadership that is needed, as the redoubtable Iraqi Shiite and courageous advocate of freedom, Kanaan Makiya, was quoted as observing (N.Y. Time, June 19, '92).

Among the more encouraging signs of this realistic policy (the slogan: "Realism, not Maximalism," even printed in English on banners, was one of the more frequently seen and popular during the election campaign) is the close liaison which both main Iraqi Kurdish parties are now maintaining, apparently with some American encouragement, with the Turkish government in Ankara. Turkey, of course, has great difficulty in dealing with Kurdish questions because of the terrorism of the PKK in their own country, and the lesser degree of realism among the Turkish Kurds.

The most discouraging of the signs surrounding the Kurdish election was the lack of response from surrounding Arab governments or Arab population. Among the election observers, only one outstanding Iraqi Shiite represented any part of the Arab world. The Iraqi Kurds have worked so hard and so sincerely to reassure Arab neighbors, Iraqi and other, and to appeal for their sympathetic hearing, that they can only regret this unresponsiveness, and continue to maintain their own openness. That the Iraqi Arab opposition held its press conference in Arbil the evening of May 20, in support of the election, and that they took part in organizing the Vienna meeting, is among the more heartening developments in the wake of the election.

It is too easy for Americans to presume that Kurds are necessarily separatist, so that any encouragement to them will mean the inevitable dissolution of Iraq and ascendancy of Iran, and that the Iraqi Shiites are necessarily wild-eyed fundamentalists such as we have seen emerge in Iran, who will inevitably set up an Islamic Republic of an unacceptable sort if given the chance. The Kurds have been consistent since the 1988 founding of the Front in seeking a role in a pluralist and democratic Iraq. The Iraqi Shiites demonstrated, through eight frightful years of the war with Iran, their distaste for fundamentalism of the Iranian sort and their preference for the Arab society of Iraq over the Shiite ~~by~~ Farsi society of Iran.

Iraq, since its creation in the 1920s, has had its population 55% Arab Shiite, 25% Kurd, 15% Arab Sunni, and another 5% Christian and other minorities. Throughout that time it has been governed exclusively by the 15% Arab Sunni. That cannot be done in any other way than through a dictatorship, and this has been the case throughout this history. The common American supposition from this is that the Iraqis must inevitably have a dictatorship if the country is not to dissolve into its constituent parts. This is a wholly unproven supposition, as there is so deep an aspiration and commitment to a pluralist and democratic society to be found in each of the communities. The Arab Sunni fraction is least confident of this, since they expect that the period of their dictatorial domination would be followed by the dictatorial domination of themselves by some other group; but even they are now growing a younger leadership which understands that, in the democratic society offered by the other opposition groups, they can have equality.

### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS.

#### A. SHORT TERM.

The immediate concerns to be addressed are for the security and relief of the area. The more political concerns can be relegated to a longer-term consideration.

The United States can scarcely afford the international opprobrium that would result from its standing by and permitting renewed genocide in the Kurdish area. Some people in American government seem still inclined to kid themselves that this is not the actual prospect. Their self-deception could have the very dangerous result of delaying any renewed rescue operation when the situation arises again. The British and others of our allies will surely not sanction any further American standing around on one foot, but will, as they did in 1991, precipitate an international rescue mission, to our American embarrassment.

Meanwhile, if further murderous incursions of the Iraqi government forces are not prevented beforehand, the Turks will face another massive influx of refugees, as disastrous as last year's, and it cannot be the interest of the United States to permit that, as it would fray the alliance with a power of great regional importance to our country.

In this context, I take it that the United States will in fact come to the rescue of the Kurdish population if another crisis arises, and might just as well make that clear beforehand. Some real clarity in American policy would in fact have many positive effects. The critical abrasion to the unity of the Kurdish Front in pursuit of their very restrained and realistic goals would be healed by it. In return for guarantees of some measure of security from further massive attack, the Kurdish leadership could be expected to give substantial guarantees to the U.S. and Turkish governments of their sincerity in pursuing these moderate goals: of their non-secessionist stance toward Iraq, of their readiness to share with the Arab opposition in Iraq in building a democratic future, of their rejection of the separatist goals and terrorism of the PKK.

For the relief of the critical supply and economic problems of the Kurdish Controlled Area, the most practical course would be to separate the Kurdish area off from the sanctions program against Iraq.

This is a question of United Nations as well as United States policy, and the U.S. would have a most influential voice if this initiative were proposed in the Security Council. U.S. and UN officials might well wish, first, to demand from Saddam Hussein that he lift the internal blockade against the Kurdish area. It is unlikely that he would comply, and this, combined with his abdication, since last October, of administrative jurisdiction over the area, would be reason for treating the Kurdish area as a separate unit with regard to international relief efforts, without accepting any permanent political separation of it from Iraq. Such a separation, for relief purposes only, would mean:

- i) lifting the economic sanctions from this area, permitting the importation of materials needed for the economic rehabilitation and the export of agricultural and mineral products;

- ii) separating the relief efforts of UN agencies and other international organisations from their link to the artificial official rate of exchange of the Iraqi Dinar.

Such a program, linking guarantees of the non-separatist character of Kurdish developments to economic recovery, would constitute the strongest imaginable incentive to the opposition in the Arab sections of Iraqi society to change their situation, and the most appalling spectacle for the remaining supporters of the Hussein dictatorship. The Kurds, throughout this election period, have been remarkably free of resentments or animus toward the Arabs of Iraq, and have seen their election as a sign of what the other peoples of Iraq can have for themselves too. Even through the efforts during this last year to come to some accommodation with the Baghdad regime, one of the most tangible real obstacles for the Kurds has been their recognition that Saddam Hussein was demanding, as part of the price for any deal he might make with the Kurds, that they betray



the hopes of the rest of the Iraqi opposition. This they have been unwilling to do. For this Iraqi opposition, and for the politically dispossessed publics of the other Iraqi communities, to see real international help for the building of a free and prosperous Kurdish area, in the context of continuing and even enhanced Kurdish openness toward the Arab society of Iraq would be the true incentive to building an alternative Iraqi future.

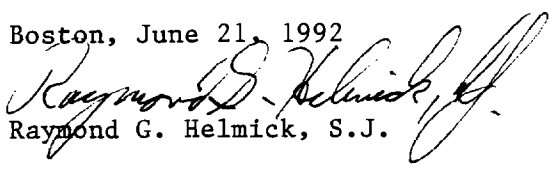
B. LONG TERM.

I hear many of those who are concerned about the safety of the Kurds arguing that these short-term efforts must be given urgency and absolute priority. I am convinced, however, that while the immediate needs can and likely will be decided on the basis of sentiment -- rescue of the Kurds from further genocide attempts and the relief of their most immediate economic needs -- there has to be consideration of long-term policy if anything genuine is to be hoped for the Kurds. Sentiment will not determine these things, in which there are real reasons for great anxiety on the part of Turkey, the Arab countries, Iran and the United States itself. There has to be some understanding of what the options are for each of these countries, what the prospects for long-term regional development, and of all these countries the most important may well be Turkey.

I had already, before my visit to Kurdish Iraq, written a paper on this topic, "Turkey's Kurdish Problem," which I submitted to the First European Conference on Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution, held at Antalya in Turkey, April 24-27, 1992. (I had planned to join that conference if the Kurdish election had been held, as was earlier planned, on April 30th, but was disinclined to make the trip twice.) This paper puts the problems of Turkey in dealing with the new international consciousness of the Kurds since last year's rebellion, with maps appearing in the world's media that show a "Kurdistan" including a large swath of Turkish territory, with the PKK terrorist movement inside Turkey itself and anxieties about Kurdish separatism as a kind of terra incognita -- all acute problems for Turkey at present -- in the context of Turkey's long-term development in relation both to Europe and the West and to the Middle Eastern region.

Rather than try to recapitulate the ideas of that rather careful paper, on which I have begun approaching Turkish government, I think it better simply to refer to it here and enclose it with this paper. Its conclusions and recommendations are to Turkey, but I would hope it provides some widening of context in which to think through American policy toward the region as well. My feeling is that I should have some discussions with Turkish officials and experts before trying to rehash it in American terms.

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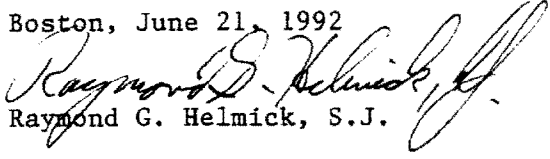
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